



**TOPS Working Committee Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 10, 2024**

Members Present: Bob Falcone, Paula Krantz, Wendy Howe, Blaze Panariso, Jeff Davis, Hank Scarangella, Chelsea Gondeck

Members Absent: Bob Shafer

Parks Board Liaisons Present: Larry Bogue

Parks Board Liaisons Absent: Abby Simpson, Greg Thornton

Staff Present: Britt Haley, Lonna Thelen, Eric Becker, Kim King, Anna Bingman, Scott Abbott, Cody Bear-Sutton

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TOPS Working Committee Chair Bob Falcone brought the meeting to order at 7:31 a.m.

Agenda Preview

Committee Chair Bob Falcone announced the agenda for the meeting.

Announcements

Lonna Thelen, Design and Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager, made the following announcements:

- There will be no site tour in January.
- Committee member Ingrid Richter has submitted her resignation from the Committee. With this, Lonna announced she would be interviewing applicants for a regular member to fill Ingrid's vacancy, as well as two alternate positions. The new members will be confirmed at the February Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board meeting.

Anna Bingman, Staff Assistant, displayed the newest poster of the TOPS Open Space series, which highlights Red Rock Canyon Open Space. The poster is available for sale on shopcos.org, with all proceeds going to the TOPS Program.

Eric Becker, Park Maintenance and Operations Manager, announced that Jarod Clayton had been promoted to the Urban Parks Supervisor. Jarod was promoted from his previous position as the Water Conservation Specialist. Eric spoke briefly of Jarod's qualifications, and said he is looking forward to see this new position in action.

Approval of Minutes – December 6, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes of the December 6, 2023 TOPS Working Committee meeting.

1st – Blaze Panariso, 2nd – Jeff Davis, Approved, Unanimously.

Citizen Discussion

Cory Sutela, Executive Director for Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates, expressed support for the Blodgett Master Plan process, and is looking forward to seeing some of the changes staff have made. Next, Mr. Sutela stated that he is working with staff and a stakeholder group on the e-bike policy process.

Action Items

Bluestem Prairie Open Space Project (Presented by Lonna Thelen, Design and Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager)

Lonna Thelen, Design and Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager, presented the Committee with the Bluestem Prairie Open Space drainage mitigation project. This presentation included the site location; existing conditions; the project proposal; review of concerns; a letter of support from the Palmer Land Conservancy; and finally, the motion.

[Link to Agenda Packet Here](#)

Judith Rice-Jones, citizen, asked if Alex Crochet, City Horticulturist, will be involved in the revegetation of the project. Lonna Thelen responded yes, that our staff will work with the consultant, as well as Colorado Springs Utilities, on revegetation.

Motion: Move to approve the City of Colorado Springs Airport’s request for improvements to the drainage infrastructure on the 646.94-acre Bluestem Prairie Open Space TOPS property. The proposed improvements include re-grading the existing channel downstream of the City of Colorado Springs Airport to a full width low slope constructed channel lined with soil riprap and four full width sculpted concrete drop structures vegetated to reduce future erosion potential.

1st – Blaze Panariso, 2nd – Jeff Davis, Approved, Unanimously.

Presentations

Natural Resources Update (Presented by Cody Bear-Sutton, Natural Resource Specialist)

Cody Bear-Sutton, Natural Resource Specialist, presented the Committee with the Natural Resources update. Using a StoryMap, Cody walked the Committee through the efforts of his team, which highlights both wildlife and habitat management in 2023. Cody provided a few examples of how his team come to conclusions about both wildlife and habitat management,

including how his team conducts avian point count surveys. Cody encouraged the Committee to take some time on their own to browse the StoryMaps.

[Link to Agenda Packet Here](#)

Ranger Team Update (Presented by Scott Abbott, Regional Parks Supervisor)

Scott Abbott, Regional Parks Supervisor, presented the Committee with the Ranger Team update. Using a StoryMap, Scott walked the Committee through the past structure of the Ranger Team, before addressing the new structure. Scott was happy to announce that both Ranger Maddy Peddy and Ranger Larry Kitt had been promoted to Senior Rangers and will now both help to oversee the overall Ranger jurisdiction, split between North and South District teams.

[Link to Agenda Packet Here](#)

Comments from the Committee encouraged Scott and his team to make this information available to the public, as it is a much better way to explain the staffing and funding mechanisms for the Department, especially at times when an extension or increase of the TOPS Program is considered.

Citizen Discussion

Judith Rice-Jones, citizen, encouraged the Committee to read former Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Director Nancy Lewis' book, *The Parks of Colorado Springs*. In the book, Nancy Lewis details the challenges and triumphs of the Department. Ms. Rice-Jones also commented that parkland should not be used for detention ponds, as it was with parkland adjacent to Sonderman Park. Ms. Rice-Jones stated that during the extensive rainfall over the summer, that detention pond overflowed and washed out all of the landscaping around it.

Susan Davies, Executive Director for the Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC), agreed with Committee that the StoryMaps are a great way to convey a message in a more manageable format. She asked if the links were available to use as education. Anna Bingman, Staff Assistant, answered that the links are online in the agenda packet. Next, Ms. Davies thanked Cody Bear-Sutton for his presentation, as it helps to remind the public that we share the open spaces with the wildlife. Finally, Ms. Davies said that there had previously been a government sponsored rebate for e-bikes, though with a rise in sales, the rebate has been curtailed for the time being. Ms. Davies said during this time, it is important to support our bike shops, as Colorado Springs is seeing the need for e-bikes.

Motion to Adjourn: Motion to adjourn the TOPS Working Committee meeting at 9:09 a.m.
1st – Blaze Panariso, 2nd – Wendy Howe, Approved, Unanimously.