



**TOPS Working Committee Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 7, 2023**

Members Present: Bob Falcone, Wendy Thomas, Ingrid Richter, Bob Shafer, Paula Krantz, Wendy Howe, Hank Scarangella, Blaze Panariso

Members Absent: Jeff Davis

Alternates Present: Chelsea Gondeck, Ellen Senf

Parks Board Liaisons Present: Larry Bogue, Greg Thornton, Abby Simpson

Staff Present: Britt Haley, Kim King, Eric Becker, Anna White, Cody Bear-Sutton, Emily Duncan

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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

Britt Haley, Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Director, made the following announcements:

- Following the swearing-in of Mayor Yemi, he held a cabinet meeting with all of City leadership. During this meeting, he detailed his plan for his first hundred days in office and his goals. Britt added that he demonstrated a lot of support for Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services. One of Mayor Yemi's goals is to return the Department to pre-recession funding from the general fund.
- Lonna Thelen was selected as the Design and Development Manager. Lonna has been with the City for seventeen years, working for Planning under the Development Review Enterprise. Lonna brings a lot of experience and expertise to the Department, and her start date will be June 27. Britt added that David Deitemeyer, Senior Landscape Architect, was the other finalist for the position, and the decision was difficult. However, Britt is going to work with Lonna and David on potentially elevating David's current role to more encompass everything he does.
- Julie Lafitte has joined the Department as a Program Administrator working on strategic initiatives, such as accreditation, workshops and orientations, and the Park System Master Plan. Julie came from the Mayor's Office most recently, but previously worked for the Department in 2014, when the last Park System Master Plan was completed.
- Gillian Rossi, Senior Park Ranger, and Joshua Joyner, Park Ranger, have both accepted new positions outside of the Department. Gillian accepted the position of Parks Director for the City of Manitou Springs, while Joshua accepted a position as the Assistant Executive Director for the BEAR League in Homewood, California. As sad as it is to lose these two great staff members, Britt commented on how their acceptance of

Director and Assistant Executive Director positions is a true testament to how the TOPS Ranger program prepares and elevates staff to be able to move into such esteemed roles. Britt wished both Gillian and Joshua well in their departure.

- There was significant interest in the Senior Ranger position that will lead the Urban Ranger team of law enforcement rangers. Staff is in the final interview process for the position.
- The City has officially closed on the Wild Horse Ranch property transaction.
- There will be no site visit in June.

Eric Becker, Park Maintenance and Operations Manager, informed the Committee that staff received the greenlight to install signage on the Palmer Mesa Trail as it reopens. Next, Eric commented that due to the excessive amounts of rain, vegetation on trail corridors is growing rapidly. He stated staff is working on mowing these areas ahead of contract mowing beginning in July.

Anna White, Staff Assistant, commented that the July TOPS Working Committee is scheduled for July 5. She asked Committee members to email her if they have conflicts on that meeting date due to the 4th of July holiday, in case the meeting might need to be rescheduled to the following Wednesday, July 12th.

Kim King, Assistant Director, stated that it's summertime and programming is in full swing. Kim also added that leases at the Westside Community Center are being evaluated at Real Estate Services, and will be implemented soon.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone echoed Britt's comments of support for Gillian Rossi and Joshua Joyner, agreeing that the TOPS Ranger program is very successful in elevating the rangers to higher status and that the Department should be very proud of this.

Committee member Bob Shafer asked about the status of the Uncle Wilbur Fountain in Acacia Park, after being struck by lightning and shut down. Kim King responded that the parts to fix the fountain were overnighted, and we will provide a status update as repairs happen.

Committee member Wendy Howe commented that the surveys for feedback on the Blodgett Master Plan are still online, and any other feedback from Committee members can be sent to her.

Approval of Minutes – May 3, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes of the May 3, 2023 TOPS Working Committee meeting.

1st – Wendy Thomas, 2nd – Blaze Panariso, Approved, Unanimously.

Citizen Discussion

Susan Davies, Executive Director for the Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC), commented that the Trust for Public Land had released their annual Park Score report. While Colorado Springs did improve from the previous year, the City was still ranked in the 51st spot. Ms. Davies believed that one of the biggest detriments to the City's score, was due to the per capita spending. Ms. Davies encouraged staff to continue to work diligently to improve the score, while understanding the funding difficulties that the Department also faces. Committee Chair Bob Falcone stated that while he understands Ms. Davies comments, the Park Score does not count acres of open space, port-o-potties, or other elements that can be found in the parks in Colorado Springs, but don't meet the exact requirements in the Park Score. Britt Haley, Director, echoed these statements, saying that the goal is always to have a park within a ten minute walking distance, and the Department does their best, but agreed that some metrics are not counted in the overall score. Next, Ms. Davies asked if it was possible to receive an update on the e-bike policy in the coming months. And finally, she stated that Bike to Work Day is on June 28th and hopes to see many folks out riding that morning.

Cory Sutela, Executive Director for Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates, echoed support for looking at returning funding to pre-recession levels through the general fund. Mr. Sutela also stated that the Blodgett Master Planning meetings have been going well, and his organization is supporting anywhere they can.

Presentations

2024 Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Recommendations (Presented by Kelly Rajab, Analyst II for Finance and Budget)

Kelly Rajab, Analyst II for Finance and Budget, presented the Committee with the 2024 Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Recommendations. This presentation included the budget development timeline; key dates; informing the budget process; assumptions; the TOPS proposed 2024 CIP budget; the TOPS Ordinance; 2022 end-of-year revenue report; TOPS Fund future revenue for 2024 to 2028; the TOPS Fund summary 2022 estimated fund balance; preliminary 2024 revenue; 2024 TOPS positions by TOPS category; TOPS Administration; TOPS Maintenance; TOPS Trails Category; Austin Bluffs/University Park implementation; Blodgett/Pikeview implementation; Chamberlain Trail; Fishers Canyon implementation; Palmer Mesa Trail design and planning; Sand Creek Trail – Airport to Palmer Park; TOPS Parks Category; TOPS Parks proposed 2024 budget; Grey Hawk Park implementation; Jimmy Camp Creek/Corral Bluffs planning; Irrigation renovations for Bricker, Otero and Tomah Parks; TOPS Open Space Category; Stewardship Program – Education; Stewardship Program – Rangers; Stewardship Program – Land Management; Stewardship Program – Resource Management; stewardship funding history; the TOPS Open Space proposed 2024 budget; and finally, the proposed motion.

[Link to Agenda Packet Here](#)

Committee member Blaze Panariso asked if the sales tax being forecasted builds upon itself. Kelly responded that it does not necessarily do that, rather the Budget Office typically assumes 2% sales tax increase, and we adjust according to the real number. Kelly stated that 2% might be a little aggressive for 2024. Blaze then asked about materials and contracts, and if the increase for that is standard at 3%. Kelly stated that the number fluctuates, as last year, the increase was around 5%. Next Mr. Panariso asked about the 60% minimum to be spent from the Open Space category for acquisition, and if it's really more like 45%, since 75% of the 60% must go to acquisition. Britt Haley, Director, said that is the case if you are only hitting the minimum of acquisition. Mr. Panariso asked if trails money could be used to buy an easement or trail corridor, instead of the acquisition money. Kelly responded that this was correct.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone asked if the positions fractionally funded by TOPS are also fractionally funded from other sources, like the general fund or CTF. Kelly responded that this is correct.

Committee member Blaze Panariso asked what amount is in the fund balance. Kelly responded that \$301,527 is in the fund balance.

Committee Vice Chair Wendy Thomas asked if there is a policy on trying to set money in reserve. Kelly responded that 10% of the revenue for the coming year is what we try to keep in the fund balance as a whole. Within the balances of each category, there is plenty of money. Ms. Thomas then asked if money could be borrowed from these balances for things like adding staff to expedite planning, or contracted work. Britt Haley responded that we have done this in the past, and as long as the money can be recalibrated, it's okay. However, Britt stated she would like to stay close to the percentages we have promised to use. Britt did caution that when you expedite planning, you also expedite the need for capital improvements, which can be difficult to find funding for. Committee Chair Bob Falcone said that the percentage is over the life of the tax, but the audit recently done only covers two years. Britt said the program is audited biennially, but it looks at the life of the tax as a whole.

Committee member Blaze Panariso asked if we are currently spending money collected in 2022, or 2023. Kelly answered that 2023 revenue is being spent. Mr. Panariso said he found that having leftover money in the fund balances interesting, when we could be using the money for staff. He stated he would love to see more of that money used for raises and staffing. Mr. Panariso said it's great for our staff to have opportunities elsewhere, like Gillian Rossi and Joshua Joyner, but questioned if they would have stayed if they were being paid more. Britt Haley responded that a lot of what Mr. Panariso is seeing, is salary savings from vacant positions, such as Britt's previous position. In the maintenance category, there are opportunities and Britt has a goal to move people who had been moved into the fund to save their jobs during the recession, back out to regular funding. Britt is hopeful to continue this conversation with Mayor Yemi. However, she cautioned that a drop in sales tax is projected, and we have to be smart with spending.

Committee member Hank Scarangella asked Kelly to discuss why only \$900,000 from the \$2,400,000 in this category is being used. Kelly said part of this is staff capacity, as discussed previously. However, this leaves \$6,000,000 in the Trails category that hasn't been spent. Additionally, money from PPRTA II is not being spent on trail projects that we previously had expected to use. Emily Duncan, Trails Development Coordinator, said there are other opportunities for TOPS trails. Some of the money is designated just for design. There is an unobligated \$4,100,000 ready for project construction when there is capacity. In PPRTA II there is \$5,700,000 for urban trails, and PPRTA III will come up in 2025. It will be a lot of work to get through these funds with current capacity. Britt Haley added that David Deitemeyer is working on the trail implementation at the Open Spaces, and in each request, implementation money was approved. Since David will be occupied with those projects, some other trail projects will have to wait. Britt stated that a supplemental appropriation could always be requested if there is an opportunity for a project.

Committee member Paula Krantz asked if when an open space is acquired, money is budgeted for building trails, but how much does it cost to close social trails, and if that cost is included. Britt Haley replied this would come out of the operating budget, and work is contracted through the Rocky Mountain Field Institute, and internally. The cost is project-based, but less costly than building trails.

Committee member Wendy Thomas asked if any staff are funded out of TOPS Trails. Emily Duncan responded that she is funded from TOPS Administration, and no positions are funded by the Trails category.

Committee member Blaze Panariso asked if it's the idea to have the money ready, waiting for a supplemental appropriation, or be in front of the funding. Britt Haley said it's better to be prudent with the money for opportunities. In the TOPS ordinance, all money can be used on Open Space, technically, but Britt wants to follow the percentages envisioned for the ordinance. When the extension was approved, there was a desire for more flexibility in the percentages.

Committee member Hank Scarangella asked if the ranger portion of the Stewardship category is all salaries. Kelly Rajab responded that there is not necessarily a ranger portion, but the entire category is a mix of salaries and operational dollars. Of the \$1,800,000 in this category, Hank asked for the breakdown of salaries versus operational dollars. Kelly responded that the salaries make up about 78% of the category, with the remaining 22% for operations. Next, Mr. Scarangella thanked Kelly for noting which projects were happening on TOPS acquired properties. He stated the distinction of what is a TOPS property versus what is not, becomes blurrier with the flexibility. He said it will be helpful in the future if the ordinance is questioned for money being used on properties not acquired by TOPS, to have such information available.

Committee member Blaze Panariso said he has a difficult time seeing positions funded throughout different categories, as it doesn't make much sense for an employee to only be able to work on some properties. Mr. Panariso wondered if we could take better care of some parks,

if we did not have to argue about funding. He stated he would love to see that change, and the focus be on the spirit of TOPS rather than arguing about it. Committee Chair Bob Falcone stated he didn't think the general public knows the difference, however there are citizens who get stuck in the minutia of the funding mechanisms. Mr. Panariso said those who get stuck in the arguments about funding, should get involved in workdays so they understand where staff is needed. Committee member Ingrid Richter agreed that while it is frustrating to see how staff is funded, moving staff between funds help to protect staff and cover important tasks.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone said the amount of money available in the Trails category not being spent due to capacity makes him wish there was an opportunity for more staff, but that it should come out of the general fund instead of TOPS. Mr. Falcone said he wished we could improve that spending. Committee member Bob Shafer commented that the message could be sent through the proper channels, like to Parks Board and on to City Council. Committee Vice Chair Wendy Thomas asked if there is a way to convey this desire in a way other than in meeting minutes, like in the motion. Britt Haley said the normal amount is usually fully allocated; this year happened to be different. Britt stated her goal has always been to spend down this money. Additionally, she said once staff is at a higher capacity, she can continue to work on this goal. Britt said she is feeling a lot of support from the new leadership, and adjustments can be made through supplemental appropriations.

Susan Davies, Executive Director for TOSC, thanked Britt Haley for the context behind some of the decisions made. Ms. Davies would like to focus on a few key messages to communicate what the priorities are. Ms. Davies is happy to see improvements to irrigation systems. She stated she would like to see how many areas still need irrigation improvements. Next, Ms. Davies said the total cost to be determined on some projects troubles her, understanding that those numbers can't always be estimated but a guess would be helpful. Additionally, Ms. Davies said she is concerned about the 75% for acquisition and worries we will have to use money for trailheads from the Trails category, rather than actual trails. Ms. Davies said she would like to track some of the changes made in the extension of the ordinance, in case we need to tweak anything.

Cory Sutela, Executive Director for Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates, hoped that the Committee knows that Medicine Wheel is in favor of opening up the categories for maintenance to be done across properties. Mr. Sutela empathized with the conversation about staffing challenges.

David Deitemeyer, Senior Landscape Architect, said that plans for the Fishers Canyon and Blodgett Open Space master planning processes have all come back higher than usual prior to implementation. This is due to inflation and insurance, but also due to some of the requests made by staff for evaluations and surveying. David also added that while staff is over capacity, all of the projects in progress are very complex and important projects.

Motion: Move to recommend to the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board the 2024 TOPS CIP budget as presented.

1st – Blaze Panariso, 2nd – Bob Shafer, Approved, Unanimously.

After comments and discussion on the motion at hand were complete, Kelly continued the presentation, which encompassed the Department's entire proposed 2024 CIP budget outside of TOPS, which was a request from the Committee last month. The remainder of the presentation included 2023 position distribution by fund; Ballfield Fund proposed 2024 CIP budget; Ballfield Fund 2023 fund balance estimate; Ballfield Fund proposed 2024 CIP budget; Skyview Sports Complex turf replacement; Conservation Trust Fund (CTF) proposed 2024 CIP budget; CTF revenue from 2010 to 2022; CTF percent by category; CTF 2023 fund balance estimate; CTF proposed 2024 CIP budget; Grey Hawk Park implementation; Skyview Sports Complex turf replacement; other CTF projects; Parkland Dedication Ordinance (PLDO) proposed 2024 CIP budget; PLDO fund balance by category; PLDO proposed 2024 CIP budget; Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority (PPRTA) proposed 2024 CIP budget; PPRTA II; and finally, other projects considered for 2024 funding.

Vegetation Management at Sondermann Park (Presented by Cody Bear-Sutton, Natural Resources Technician)

Cody Bear-Sutton, Natural Resources Technician, informed the Committee of the vegetation management occurring in Sondermann Park later today, and on July 13. Goats are being released into Sondermann Park, where they will eat weeds. Along with the management of weeds, the manure from the goats will help to fertilize the area. The public is welcome to view the goats, who will be released at 10 a.m.

Citizen Discussion

There was no additional citizen discussion at this time.

Motion to Adjourn: Motion to adjourn the TOPS Working Committee meeting at 10:05 a.m.
1st – Wendy Thomas, 2nd – Blaze Panariso, Approved, Unanimously.