



**TOPS Working Committee Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, April 3, 2024**

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

**Alternates Present:** Randy Courduff, David Bundrick

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

**Staff Present:** Britt Haley, Lonna Thelen, Eric Becker, Kim King, Anna Bingman, David Deitemeyer

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TOPS Working Committee Chair Bob Falcone brought the meeting to order at 7:30 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 a site visit on Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, for a potential property acquisition. Lonna reminded Committee members that to vote on a property acquisition, they must visit the property.
- Lonna had two grant updates. First, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) had awarded the Department \$2,000,000 in reimbursement for the purchase of Wild Horse Ranch. Second, the Department had received \$250,000 from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife for non-motorized trails in the proposed Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan.
- The Fishers Canyon survey is available online, and the project page is up to date. The first public meeting will be on April 24<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. at Cheyenne Mountain Junior High School.

Kim King, Assistant Director, announced that two Finance Division positions had been filled. Sandy Elliott has been hired in the brand new Tourism and Finance Manager position, and Phillip Belmudez has been hired as an Analyst II. With these two positions filled, there is only one vacancy in the Finance Division, which will hopefully be filled in the coming weeks.

Eric Becker, Park Maintenance and Operations Manager, announced that an offer had been made to hire the final Ranger I for the Urban Trails Ranger Team.

## **Approval of Minutes – March 4, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

**Motion:** To approve the minutes of the March 4, 2024 TOPS Working Committee meeting.

1<sup>st</sup> – Blaze Panariso, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Bob Shafer, Approved, Unanimously.

## **Citizen Discussion**

There was no citizen discussion at this time.

## **Action Items**

**Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan** (Presented by David Deitemeyer, Senior Program Administrator)

David Deitemeyer, Senior Program Administrator, presented the Committee with the Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan. This presentation included goals of the plan; where we are at in the process; the public engagement process; property overview; photos; site assessment – key habitat areas; Master Plan and Appendix table of contents; plan overview; wildlife corridors and trailheads; existing conditions, wildlife corridor, and existing trail network; trailheads; Woodmen Road parking; Chamberlain Trail, Park to Peak Trail, and North-South connector trail; neighborhood connections, trail hubs, and special use areas; multi-use, single-use, and directional trails; single-use hiking trails; multi-use, and mountain bike single-use and directional trails; trail loop options and connections from the North Trailhead; trail loop options and connections from the Quarry Trailhead; trail loop options and connections from the Orchard Valley Trailhead; neighborhood connectivity goals; community vision for adjacent USFS Lands; recommended connectivity plan; integrating an adaptive management approach; adaptive management diagram; resource management; trails and recreation management; neighborhood access and trailhead management; perimeter management; regulation and policy management; implementation priorities and costs; implementation plan; and finally, the recommendation.

[Link to Agenda Packet Here](#)

## **Committee Questions and Comments**

Committee Chair Bob Falcone asked for clarification on the Woodman Road parking, since this was new guidance from City Traffic Engineering following the previous meeting. David Deitemeyer said that during discussions with City Traffic Engineering about potential parking areas, they had made their intention known to remove on-street parking following phase I of the North Trailhead parking. During high visitation times, many users illegally park in the bike lane, which is a safety concern. Mr. Falcone responded that with no on-street parking allowed

on Woodmen, that would certainly put more pressure on the potential trailhead parking to provide adequate parking. David agreed with this statement.

Committee member Jeff Davis asked what the drainage improvements would entail. David Deitemeyer responded that on the south side of the quarry, improvements need to be made to armor the channel and reduce erosion. Additionally, there would need to be an improvement to this area to rectify impacts from both use of the road and the Waldo Canyon Fire. There are also challenges that need to be addressed in the Dry Creek drainage. Remnant ponds at the basin will need mitigation and improvements to meet State dam requirements. Mr. Davis asked if there are any opportunities with the remediation of the quarry to address the issues. David answered that the land that the Department received was already damaged. The remediation being done on the Quarry is on the land still owned by Castle Concrete, which will address the issues identified on that land, but not these drainage issues.

Committee member Bob Shafer asked if the closing of illegal trails is different than the permanent closure of existing trails. David Deitemeyer answered yes, it is. There are currently fourteen miles of trail, which will be reduced to eleven miles. However, the only trails being closed in the recommendation are illegal or social trails. Next, Mr. Shafer asked if there is a provision in any other master plan that provides the flexibility of an adaptive management plan. David said no, not to his knowledge. He added that the request for flexibility really came from public comments during the process. David said that staff would specify temporary closures, while there would be additional public process for permanent closures. Mr. Shafer then asked if this would be a part of all master plans moving forward. David responded that if public comment showed a desire for the flexibility, it certainly could. Finally, Mr. Shafer commented that he believed this would set a precedent for future master plans, though he did note that the potential for additional public process could be a lot of work for staff.

Committee member Hank Scarangella asked, in respect to the decrease from fifty-one spaces to forty-one spaces in the North Trailhead parking area, what the expectation is once on-street parking is eliminated. David Deitemeyer responded that if there is an identified need to increase parking, or the Department has concerns about parking, there would then be discussions with the neighborhood before any changes are made. One recommendation in the Master Plan is to have a check-in with the neighborhood as well. Next, Mr. Scarangella noted that on pages eighty and eighty-one of the master plan, high, medium and low priorities are listed. Mr. Scarangella asked David to explain the overlap. David answered that the overlap represents uncertainty based on funding, and the best approach to show the flexibility of the plan. Committee Chair Bob Falcone commented that the overlapping time frame meant certain priorities could be completed at certain times or based on needs of the master plan.

Committee member Emily Danti remarked that the adaptive management plan could be setting a precedent for the future. She asked if there were any legal repercussions that required adaptive management plans to be retroactive on all open spaces. Trevor Gloss, attorney for the City Attorney's Office, answered that no, this would only affect this master plan.

Committee member Blaze Panariso asked if the public process for permanent trail closures is spelled out clearly in the master plan. David Deitemeyer responded that the process around permanent closures was left broad on purpose, and the process would be determined by leadership. Mr. Panariso urged David and staff to continue to keep the public involved with potential changes to the master plan. Britt Haley, Director, added that the adaptive management idea was left broad to also maximize taxpayer dollars. As an example, she said if unexpected funding were to come to the Department, the adaptive plan would allow staff to capitalize on opportunities they would not normally have with traditional master plans. Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board liaison Greg Thornton commented on the forty-one spaces at the North trailhead and asked how many spaces are there today. David Deitemeyer answered that there are currently eleven marked spaces, with about twenty-one total with overflow. Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board liaison Larry Bogue asked how often capacity is reached at current numbers. David answered that there can be issues at peak times.

Committee member Emily Danti stated that she had a concern that with a reduced number of spaces, there are less safe parking options. Ms. Danti said it was unfortunate that citizens did not seem to have a concern for cyclists who would be affected by on-street parking with a reduced number of spaces in the North trailhead. Committee member Paula Krantz agreed with this statement, stating that the bike lane on Woodmen Road is dangerous for cyclists due to the on-street parking, especially on busy weekends. Ms. Krantz stated that the bike lane is especially dangerous going downhill.

Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board liaison Greg Thornton asked if there is land to accommodate sixty parking spaces. David Deitemeyer responded that there is room, and any improvements would use the roadway footprint that is already at the trailhead. Committee Chair Bob Falcone asked David to confirm the number of spaces. David answered that the recommended plan accounts for a total of forty-one spaces, and any additional spaces would require a public process. However, the Committee can make a change to the recommendation.

Committee Vice Chair Wendy Howe asked how many spots the Orchard Valley Trailhead has. David Deitemeyer answered that sixty spots were proposed in August, though that was scaled back due to neighborhood concerns. Currently, there are thirteen spots. However, adding spaces to the Orchard Valley Trailhead will help with parking efficiency. Committee member Blaze Panariso commented that many mountain bike riders start uphill and end downhill. He

understood the desire of the neighborhood to keep parking to a minimum, but the additional parking further south would alleviate some of the issues that neighbors are concerned about.

Committee member Emily Danti commented that the initial plan had more parking. Her concern is that the public will not be stopped from coming to the open space regardless of parking, so smaller lots are not an ideal situation.

### Citizen Comments

Genevieve Gustafson, citizen, stated that she had always had great respect and support for the Department, but felt that spending \$7,000,000 on a small park is not a good use of funds. Ms. Gustafson insisted that a better use of funds would be to invest in infrastructure. Next, Ms. Gustafson said she felt that regional parks were being exploited and the Department was catering to the mountain biking community. Additionally, she referred to the original Blodgett Master Plan, which depicted the wildfire risks and stated that the area cannot be mitigated to a degree that would make it safe for an influx of people. Ms. Gustafson finished by stating she would begin a campaign to defund the Department if the plan was approved.

Bettina Kennedy, citizen, said that at the March 6<sup>th</sup> TOPS Working Committee meeting, a Tapis Associates employee referenced a flyer in the presentation that had been distributed to the surrounding neighborhood. Ms. Kennedy wanted to set the record straight about the flyer, stating that she was never informed of what information in the flyer was incorrect, as noted in the presentation. Ms. Kennedy said she had tried to speak with the Tapis Associates employee about what information was incorrect but did not receive an answer. Ms. Kennedy stated that nothing was directly quoted from the flyer, and that it had been distributed due to general information about the master plan being unclear. Next, Ms. Kennedy asked why there is a need for a new master plan, with a bike park and massive parking lots. She stated that citizen input was not swayed by the flyer, but rather the flyer brought additional awareness to the plan. Finally, Ms. Kennedy said that the October 17<sup>th</sup> public meeting was the first time that the USFS connections were diagrammed, and that many groups disagreed with what the Department had put forward, and that the options to choose from were already decided by the Department.

Dorothy Macnak, citizen, stated that she had serious concerns about the impacts of the proposed plan on the Big Horn Sheep population in the surrounding area. She informed the Committee that the Big Horn Sheep are a very sensitive species and said increased recreational use in their habitat will have dire consequences. Ms. Macnak added that the closing of preexisting trails can also cause damage to the habitat and Sheep. Ms. Macnak stated that mountain bikers often have an outlaw attitude, and often do not adhere to signage or trail designation separating hikers from bikers. Finally, Ms. Macnak stated that the addition of paragliding takeoff and landing zones will negatively impact the Sheep and their habitat. She

felt that Colorado Parks and Wildlife had not done their professional duty in advocating for the Sheep. She urged the Committee to keep the original master plan.

Renee Bendrick, citizen, stated that she is a resident of Peregrine, and that the surrounding neighborhoods are too small for this plan. She said the plan is too focused on recreation rather than conservation. Ms. Bendrick commented that the proposed bike trails will surround the Big Horn Sheep and damage their habitat. Additionally, Ms. Bendrick said that funding and maintenance would be an issue with the new plan. If the Department is already having a difficult time preventing the creation of illegal trails, Ms. Bendrick insisted that they would have trouble managing this area with such a large master plan. Finally, Ms. Bendrick stated that there have been new issues in the area due to impacts of the Waldo Canyon Fire, including substantial water runoff, which need to take priority. She urged the Committee not to approve the plan.

Conrad Madey, citizen, said he is an employee of SRAM, which is a mountain bike company with a local office in Colorado Springs. Mr. Madey presented a letter of support of the proposed master plan with 153 signatures from his fellow employees. Mr. Madey emphasized that fifty of the employees who signed the letter live directly adjacent to Blodgett Open Space. Mr. Madey stated that SRAM and its employees are passionate about supporting the Department and look for ways to volunteer on various trail projects. He stated that Blodgett is a very unique open space with many opportunities for all types of users. Finally, Mr. Madey stated that properly allocating terrain for both hikers and bikers is beneficial to both groups and will help reduce future conflicts.

Kerrie Waite, citizen, has been a homeowner on the west side of Colorado Springs since 1985, and worked on the original Blodgett Master Plan. When the Waldo Canyon Fire occurred, Ms. Waite said she had to wait in an hour and a half of standstill traffic during the evacuation. Now, she works with United Policy Holders, who helps people through the insurance process after natural disasters and catastrophes. She asked the Committee to consider the importance of a community trying to rebuild. Ms. Waite stated that it is already difficult for homeowners in the area to get insurance, or insurance prices have tripled. Additional density in the area will only continue to make these efforts even more difficult to achieve. Ms. Waite asked how urgent it is to create a mountain bike centric park in such a vulnerable area of the City. She stated that there will be an unequal amount of pressure on this open space versus others. Finally, Ms. Waite asked the Committee to keep in mind the bigger picture for the overall community.

Carol Beckman, citizen, stated that she fully supports the master plan, and urged the Committee to support more parking. Ms. Beckman stated that while she is not a mountain biker, she fully supports the need and use of bike only trails. Ms. Beckman said she understood the concerns of the neighborhood, but Blodgett was purchased with TOPS funds, which are paid for not only by residents all over the City, but visitors as well. The master plan has to serve

the entire City, not just one community. Ms. Beckman was elated to see plenty of multi-use trails in the proposed plan, too. In regard to the Bighorn Sheep, Ms. Beckman stated that the herd is large, and often migrates over to Garden of the Gods, and doesn't seem to be too worried about the people or recreation around them. Finally, Ms. Beckman reminded the Committee that open space is for everyone, not just neighbors.

Ray Reilly, citizen, said he was happy to see that there will no longer be on-street parking on Woodmen Road in the future, and appreciated the downsized parking in the North Trailhead area. He said in the future, the Orchard Valley Trailhead parking would be a better option for possible expansion, or the Quarry lot. Mr. Reilly said that in a previous plan, disallowing dogs had been proposed, though that had not been presented today. He asked that dogs not be excluded from the open space. Finally, Mr. Reilly said to please disallow people to rent paragliding materials.

Cory Sutela, Executive Director for Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates, stated that the proposed plan was the most comprehensive master plan he had seen. He added that the plan provides a great balance between conservation values and recreation desires. Mr. Sutela proposed two small changes to the plan, though. First, he asked to see more specificity around the adaptive management plan. More specifically, he said he would like to see that any permanent trail closures would require a vote of the TOPS Working Committee, and Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board. Second, Mr. Sutela requested that the use of the term "illegal" be reserved for trails constructed after adoption of the master plan is approved. He suggested aligning with the USFS and using the term "undesignated" instead.

Laurie Mehegan, citizen, lives in the Oak Valley neighborhood, and said the neighborhood is often overloaded with cars. She stated that there are 154 homes north of Allegheny Drive, with Centennial Boulevard being the main artery to get to the area. After the Waldo Canyon Fire, she said it is frightening to think of bringing more people into the area. Ms. Mehegan stated that the biggest impacts of the proposed plan will certainly be traffic and parking. Finally, Ms. Mehegan asked to see access from the neighborhoods to the open space, specifically with parallel trails.

Sharon de Halas, citizen, stated that she felt the public process lacked the option to provide input from citizens. She stated that the decision to even make a new master plan was made by the Department without asking citizens if they felt there was a need. At multiple community meetings, Ms. de Halas said that the options presented were already provided by the Department, not chosen by the community. She stated that the meeting at Trace Church was very uncomfortable, as she felt staff were directing the conversation. Ms. de Halas reiterated the earlier concerns about the flyer being discussed at the March 6<sup>th</sup> TOPS Working Committee meeting, and the representative from Tapis Associates not responding or identifying incorrect information. Finally, Ms. De Halas urged the Committee to vote no.

Joe Malonfont, citizen, said he served on the Stakeholder Action Committee (SAC) as a representative of the Colorado Springs Mountain Bike Association (COSMBA), which is dedicated to advancing access for mountain bikers. Mr. Malonfont said that cycling has a unique role in Colorado Springs, and Blodgett is one of the very few places that bikers can find the vertical downhill to progress their skills in Colorado Springs. He stated that COSMBA is a very passionate group, who often volunteer on trail projects. Finally, Mr. Malonfont said that there are 120 members of COSMBA in favor of the proposed master plan.

Matt Hunt, citizen, stated that he was at the meeting to represent the high school mountain biking teams in the area, a few of which he coaches. He said there is a large community of sixty to seventy people, including coaches and athletes, who are very supportive of the plan. Mr. Hunt said he tries to help build confidence in youth riders, while also teaching them to be good trail users. However, more spaces to ride are always needed and Blodgett has very unique challenges that can really help riders grow. Finally, Mr. Hunt stated that he appreciates the connectivity in the plan, as well as the plan overall.

Susan Davies, Executive Director for the Trails and Open Space Coalition, thanked the Committee for their diligence throughout this fifteen month process. Ms. Davies said that many times in the past, citizens have asked for the City not to grow or expand, but that simply isn't an option. While Ms. Davies did have a few concerns about trailheads and parking sizes, she believed that the proposed plan balanced the needs of wildlife, users, and expansion.

### Committee Comments

Committee member Jeff Davis urged citizens to not lose focus on TOPS and the opportunities that become available through the program. However, opportunities have to be for everyone. Mr. Davis said he believed that the adaptive management piece of the plan is a good precedent to set moving forward, but asked staff to continue working towards a balance, including wildlife and fire mitigation. Mr. Davis informed the Committee he had to leave due to a prior scheduling conflict, but approved of and supported the master plan.

Committee member Emily Danti thanked both staff and the citizens for their diligence in this process. She felt the plan was very comprehensive and took into account the general population, while incorporating all values.

Committee Vice Chair Wendy Howe thanked staff, and said she really appreciated the adaptive management aspect of the plan.

Committee member Chelsea Gondeck stated that she believed the plan was made better by all of the diverse citizen input.

Committee member Hank Scarangella stated that he was a liaison to this plan and had been involved in many other master plan processes throughout his time on the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board, and felt that this was a very comprehensive plan.

Committee member Blaze Panariso said he believed this master plan process created one of the most complete master plans that the Department has ever had. He thanked David Deitemeyer for his incredible work and stated that he had raised the bar on master planning.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone informed the citizens that the Committee had received every single email and comment submitted to the Department or included in the plan. Mr. Falcone thanked everyone for their input and participation. Mr. Falcone stated that he was a firefighter for many years, so he understood the concerns of citizens regarding increased fire danger. However, Mr. Falcone said that the USFS has been working to mitigate the property. For those citizens who felt like the Department did not offer enough opportunities for input, Mr. Falcone listed the various times the Blodgett Open Space master plan process was featured on various news channels and in printed news.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone asked if any of the Committee members wanted to make any changes to the proposed motion. Committee member Emily Danti suggested that the parking in the North Trailhead parking area be increased from forty-one spaces to fifty-one spaces within the adaptive management process. The consensus of the Committee was in agreement with this suggestion. Next, Committee member Chelsea Gondeck suggested amending the language of illegal trails to non-designated. However, after a quick polling, there was no consensus on this amendment.

**Motion: To approve and adopt the Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan as presented, with a modification to allow up to 51 parking spaces at the North Trailhead, where a maximum of 41 spaces were presented.**

1<sup>st</sup> – Blaze Panariso, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Wendy Howe, Approved, Unanimously (8 to 0).

## **Presentations**

**Property Acquisition** (Presented by Lonna Thelen, Design and Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager, and David Deitemeyer, Senior Program Administrator)

Lonna Thelen, Design and Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager, and David Deitemeyer, Senior Program Administrator, presented the Committee with a presentation on a potential property acquisition. This presentation on a potential property acquisition at 1680 South 26<sup>th</sup> Street included a map of where the property is located; details about the property;

opportunities and information about the residence on the property; photos of the residence; and finally, the tentative schedule for acquisition.

[Link to Agenda Packet Here](#)

### **Citizen Discussion**

There was no additional citizen discussion at this time.

**Motion to Adjourn: Motion to adjourn the TOPS Working Committee meeting at 10:47 a.m.**

1<sup>st</sup> – Blaze Panariso, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Emily Danti, Approved, Unanimously.