

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ABBREVIATED MINUTES
December 9th, 2010
4:00 – 6:00 pm

Present:	Jenny Tollefson	Adam Liljebld	Absent:
	Jed Little	Mary Manning	Gary Knudsen
	Bob Clark	Tim Aldrich	Maureen Hartman
	Ethel MacDonald	Bert Lindler	
	Jeff Stevens	Beth Hahn, Park Brd Rep	

Also Present: Jackie Corday, Open Space Program Mgr, & Jim Habeck

Discussion of Future Open Space Priorities

The previous week, Jackie had sent the following questions to members as homework:

- 1) Looking at the Cornerstones in the O.S. Plan and 5 types of O.S. targeted for priority and based upon what we've accomplished thus far, **what are your top 3** priorities for land preservation in the future? e.g. types of land, general or specific location, bike/ped trails etc;
- 2) Looking at the list of projects since 2004, what has been your favorite O.S. addition & why; (this was Ethel's suggestion)
- 3) Do you have any suggestions/concerns/comments about how the O.S. program is functioning?

Jed – His thought process included creating 4 categories for all of the previous open space projects: 1) large acreage conservation easements, 2) fill-in properties like on Jumbo, 3) community O.S. – parcels that have lots of public access, and 4) trails/connections. He then thought about how we're doing in each of those categories and concluded we are doing very well in all categories except for community O.S. He then listed his priorities as follows: 1) the North Hills out to the Wye due to the highest risk of development and their high visibility to most everywhere in Missoula, 2) the Clark Fork River corridor – places such as the California Street Bridge island, land adjacent to Tower Street Conservation Area to the east, Monroc, and the meanders through-out the Mullan to Frenchtown area. He pointed to the huge increase in recreational river use these past few years – a trend that will likely continue, 3) the South Hills, which is lacking in community access, and that is what gets voters excited about voting for O.S. bonds, and 4) the Mullan area, especially the Milwaukee RR corridor to expand the trail, as this area continues to grow. His favorite project thus far is the Deschamps ranch conservation easement based upon its beautiful native grasslands.

Ethel – She liked Jed's categories and concurred that the projects that people see and use in their daily lives are so important for maintaining support of open space funding. Bike/ped trails are her highest priority, especially expanding the Milwaukee Trail because of the importance of getting people to ride instead of drive. She added that she was very pleased about Lafray Park since the River Road area needed a public park so much. Her favorite project is the Rimel/Line South Hills conservation easement because it is in everyone's view and it was under potential high development threat.

Jeff – His priorities are: 1) South Hills – he'd really like to see some public access so that residents of the South Hills can enjoy hiking around the hills like Rattlesnake and University residents enjoy, 2) North Hills, for the same reasons Jed spoke about, 3) Clark Fork River corridor, and 4) urban parkland in the most deficient areas like Franklin to the Fort. His favorite project is the Rimel/Line South Hills conservation easement, for the same reasons that Ethel stated.

Mary – She said that in her mind she categorizes things geographically and by land type. Her priorities are: 1) grasslands like those in the North and South Hills because of their high importance to birds and corridors for wildlife and they are underrepresented in regards to protection overall in MT, 2) the Monroc property next to the Clark Fork River just east of the Reserve St bridge because of its great riparian habitat and it's located in an area

that is deficient in parkland, and 3) lands that connect to other public lands for preserving large blocks of habitat and corridors. Her favorite project is McCauley Butte because it is such an iconic land form visible from so many places around Missoula and it would have been such a loss if developed.

Bob – He looked at the open space map to see what areas are really lacking parkland or protected open space and based his priorities upon that: 1) spending the \$385k balance of the 1995 Open Space Bond on buying city parkland where it's needed most in underserved neighborhoods (Jackie responded that she informed Council a couple years ago that it was a high priority to use the funds for parkland in Franklin to the Fort and has been working on trying to make that happen), 2) prime agricultural land that is good for growing food (verses ranchland as we are doing a good job of protecting ranchlands in the North & South Hills), and 3) more trails for biking because that serves so many people and results in less vehicle miles being driven. His favorite project thus far is the Deschamps ranch – he enjoyed being involved from start to finish and was impressed by condition of the land and the wildlife we saw on the fieldtrip.

Adam – His priorities are: 1) the Clark Fork River corridor west of Reserve St, 2) the North Hills for the reasons stated by others, 3) completing the Bicycle Commuter Network to increase non-motorized use, and 4) more parkland in the urban core for parks and community gardens. He agrees with Ethel that it is very important for citizens to have lots of public access in order to keep up support for open space funding. His favorite project is the Spooner Creek conservation easement. It's a really special place and he just loved the land and the what the family was trying to accomplish with permanent protection.

Jenny – Her priorities are: 1) Grass Valley due to the convergence of ag land, grasslands, wetlands, and the woody draws in the clay hills on the north and eastern edges of the valley and is subject to development pressure, 2) the North Hills – filling in the gaps, and 3) Lavalley Creek/Butler Creek Valley as it is a Cornerstone that we haven't been able to protect yet. Her favorite project is the South Hills because it allowed for the continuance of 3 ranching families, preserved many ecological values, and has tremendous scenic value to all of the city.

Bert – His highest priority is continued protection of more lands in the North Hills, a place that he is greatly attached to and has put an enormous amount of volunteer time into improving/protecting for the benefit of the North Hills elk herd. His favorite project is the Deschamps ranch because it is such a large intact parcel that has been so well managed (i.e. not overgrazed and weed controlled).

Beth – For her, ecosystem services, biodiversity, connecting large landscapes are top priorities, but she also realizes that access for passive recreation is important to get support for future funding. Her list is as follows: 1) riparian areas due to the largest diversity of birds, amphibians, & mammals that depend upon them, 2) Butler Creek for the same reasons Jenny mentioned, and 3) connecting the large landscapes for the same reasons as Mary had stated. Her favorite project is the Allied Waste conservation easement in the North Hills.

Tim – His priorities are: 1) agricultural lands because they are so important for so many values, including food, wildlife, clean water, preserving rural character/scenic views, 2) conservation lands such as riparian areas, wildlife habitat and corridors, and 3) trails for linking people to the places they need and want to go to. His favorite project is the Allied Waste conservation easement in the North Hills because of its large size that connected to City Open Space and for the future public access that will be available.

Moe and Gary were not present at the meeting, but they sent Jackie their answers via email:

Moe – Her priorities are: 1) agricultural land because this open space land type is very important to the overall vision, but not always valued for its open space values/character. This land type can offer much to the existing open space system (ecologically and economically) and add diversity to what we already have. Family owned ag lands and lands that can be used for community gardens would be good focus areas, 2) focus on location - keeping our eye focused on areas in the urban boundary that lack enough open space... making sure that open space is near and accessible to all sectors of our community, and 3) parklands in underserved neighborhoods. For my

favorite project, I am choosing one that I have been a part of since I have the background and history, Bonner Hill. Here's why:

- it's a piece of land with multiple natural resource and community values
- It is a part of a larger community/conservation vision for the Milltown Reservoir area.
- It is linked to education and culture. And the acquisition adds recreational opportunities (including a pedestrian trail link)
- It can add to community connection/revitalization in the future for a community that has already gone through too much recent transition (with the mill closing etc...)
- There is much passion in Bonner for maintaining this land as open space.

Gary - General Consideration - He would like to see a program focus being lands lying west of town. This area of the community will doubtlessly be a focal point for future land development and contains important habitat for a number of wildlife species. The general habitats of interest are the riparian areas (including woody draws) and adjoining grasslands, which are essential since these serve as foraging areas for everything from sparrows to raptors. **Specific Areas for Consideration** – He has strong interest in continuing to protect lands in the Grass Valley cornerstone. Bird surveys by Five Valleys Audubon show the area to be of critical importance to a wide range of avian species. He hopes that protection could include the Mastel, Deschamps and Lemm parcels. The Deschamps' property may receive protection as Montana Department of Highways mitigation lands. However, we should monitor that effort in case the mitigation designation falls through. **Favorite Open Space Addition** - In reality, there are two open space additions that he views with great favor: those involving the Line-Rimel-Hayden and Deschamps' lands. This is founded on the fact that they are very similar in nature and protect a number of resource values -- viewsheds, wildlife habitat and agricultural operations. If he had to choose but one it would be the Deschamps' addition. One reason for this stance is his interest in seeing program focus moving a bit more to the west of Missoula. The other reason is leverage - the fact that the Deschamps have made this commitment to resource protection, coupled with the recent Boyer easement further to the west, may engender similar interest by other landowners in the area.

Discussion of Program Issues

Jim Habeck is worried about management of open space lands after acquisition for their conservation values as overuse is degrading some areas. OSAC acquires qualified lands and approves bond money expenditures . . . and then what? The lands are handed over to others to manage who have allowed public recreational use that seems too often to negate the "natural values" vision statements in the OS Plan, described on pages 28 and 29. He wondered if OSAC's role can go beyond just the acquisition process. Mary explained the history of the division between Park Board and OSAC and that it has now for many years been clearly delineated that Park Board is in charge of the management of parks and open space.

Jackie said Jim raised good points and that in an email to Jim about this topic she said she is reading the book "Metro Green – Connecting Open Space in North American Cities" by Donna Erickson, a former professor at University of Michigan who was raised in the North Hills on the Spurlock ranch (daughter of Harriet Spurlock). Here are some of the more salient quotes in relation to this topic:

“Protecting and designing meaningful open space that enhances landscape ecology and human ecology is a tall order. The results must be ecologically sound, and they must be beneficial to people. That combination is difficult, partly because we have scant evidence on the effect of managed recreational use on habitat quality in urban contexts.”

“Unfortunately, human access to natural sites, particularly through more active forms of recreation, often decreases environmental integrity. Human disturbance particularly compromises wildlife and their habitats. So the balance between providing human access to connected open spaces and protecting environmentally sound corridors is a thorny one.”

Those statements are tempered with this one: *“Although recreation and environmental protection are often incompatible or conflicting goals, recreational access sometimes facilitates ecological stewardship and . . . environmental concern, which can result in the protection of more land for both objectives.”*

These issues were definitely wrangled over more during the drafting of the CLM than with the Open Space Plan since people and land mgt were at the heart of the CLM Plan. Jackie said she is aware and sensitive to the issue – she made sure that trail restrictions were drafted in the Council resolution funding the YAWLE parcel in order to prevent prime mule deer habitat from being disturbed by constructing a trail right through the middle of it up the little valleys on the east side of Jumbo. That was the first time that such a restriction was put in place in advance of acquiring a parcel, but it likely won't be the last, as she agrees with Jim that OSAC can make an initial evaluation and recommendation for when such resources are very sensitive to human disturbance and therefore should have special restrictions in order to preserve those resources (i.e. unique plant communities, critical or high value wildlife habitat or corridors, etc). She said that we certainly have some great expertise on OSAC to help with that and it should be discussed in more detail at the next OSAC meeting.

Tim said he is concerned about being able to leverage funds due to the economic situation and because FWP, DNRC, USFS have tied up all their acquisition funds for the Montana Legacy Project for years to come. That essentially means the open space bond fund is the main source in Missoula County and it will become more challenging to stretch those remaining dollars through our normal partnerships. He said he feels the need to check in with the public to get feedback on how we're doing in advance of going for another bond. He believes the committee is doing a good job of asking questions and evaluating the projects.

Ethel said she is proud of every project thus far and feels that she can tell citizens good reasons for every project. She believes we have done a very good job of balancing land types and distribution.

Jeff agreed with Tim that we should have a public open house to gather comments, share successes and get in-put. Jackie said another bond is still many years off so that there is no rush to do it for that reason, but maybe since we've reached the half-way point with spending, a public open house could be a beneficial way to educate citizens about the program and get feedback on the projects.

Mo emailed Jackie the following comments: I must say, I am still learning the OSAC process– but I do feel like things are moving ahead in a great direction. I appreciate how everyone has been trying to attend meetings in person. That makes a difference (despite my obvious absence at this important meeting). One suggestion: Since we are responsible for one half of the 'open space bond' funding, I think in the coming year it would be nice to have more report outs from the Open Lands Committee to see how our efforts link together, especially since we have now done 2 joint projects. Regarding OSAC process—I believe having committee discussions when doing both the rough cuts and final evaluations enhances the process and adds to the overall outcome of our decisions. I would encourage this in the future. Finally, I think Tim is doing a fabulous job as chair, not only in running smooth meetings, but keeping issues current in between.

Gary emailed Jackie the following comments: I am well pleased with the program and its accomplishments since my tenure with OSAC.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm with the next meeting date scheduled for 4:00 – 6:00pm on Thursday, January 13th at Currents.