

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ABBREVIATED MINUTES

January 13th, 2011

4:00 – 6:00 pm

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

Also Present: Jackie Corday, Open Space Program Mgr, Pelah Hoyt & Lewis Kogan (FVLT), and Jim Habeck

**Discussion of Future Open Space Priorities**

Jackie began by informing members of stats related to the City's open space:

- So far we have protected 2619 acres using ~\$2.5 million of the 2006 Open Space Bond funds.
- The 1995 Open Space Bond was used to protect 3630 acres thus far for ~\$4.6 million.
- Combining total money spent/acres protected = 6,200 acres for \$7,100,000, which = ~\$1100/acre
- Adam asked what the leverage value of the acreage was – i.e. how much was that land actually worth verses how much we paid for it? Jackie said she would look into that.

She then pointed out there are several ways to categorize open space projects from the past and continuing into the future and that Jed and other members at the December meeting had thought about that too. The Open Space Plan created 5 categories: 1) conservation lands, 2) agricultural lands, 3) scenic views and vistas, 4) trails, and 5) urban parkland. She read from the plan the following: "*Conservation lands will continue to be the main focus of this plan.*" Plan, pg 23. This is reinforced by "*public opinion,*" which "*strongly supports keeping conservation lands as the main focus for future open space acquisitions.*" Plan, pg 33. She then read from the Foreword written by former OSAC Chair Karen Knudsen: "*The goals of the Open Space Plan are as follows: Preserve natural systems through open space acquisition and conservation easements. Protect, maintain, and enhance areas that sustain our human, plant, and animal communities.*" Jackie also said projects can be categorized into those that reflect more strongly on human use values (e.g. urban parks & trails, open space with lots of access) versus those with higher ecological values (e.g. riparian parcel like the Kelly Island addition, elk corridor in Grant Creek (Sherry), and the clay hills woody draws (Lemm parcel)). And then there are projects that balance both human and ecological values, such as the Rimel, Line, Allied Waste, and Spooner Creek easements and the Marshall Canyon purchase). As discussed in the December meeting, along with conservation, people lean strongly toward desiring access to and use of the lands acquired.

Jackie reviewed the priorities provided by OSAC members at the December meeting and noted that eight members had ranked conservation type lands (e.g. North & South Hills, Clark Fork River corridor, Grass Valley) as their number one priority and seven members ranked them as their second choice. No other category (ag land, trails, parks) ranked a close second. This reflects that the members' priorities are in line with the highest priority of the Open Space Plan. Most members either ranked or mentioned the importance of commuter trails, which Jackie said also reflects the latest citizen poll results taken for the update of the County Parks Plan. The poll results included the following:

- City respondents indicated they use the most: 1) hiking trails, 2) paved commuter trails, 3) river access, 4) playgrounds, and 5) natural surface bike trails (for County respondents pools ranked as #5);
- Asked what their greatest need for park facilities was, city respondents answered: 1) 80% need hiking & biking trails natural surface, 2) 70% need paved commuter trails, 3) 70% natural area/wildlife habitat, and 4) 68% river access.

- City respondents ranked highest "maintain existing land with passive activities" with "maintain lands for conservation values" a close second. These results parallel what was found in previous surveys taken in prep for the 2006 Open Space Bond and a County survey to update the Growth Policy.
- In spite of the economic difficulties nationally and locally, people were still willing to be taxed to acquire and maintain more open space - 70% of all county/city residents would support paying from \$10-19/year more in taxes to acquire more open space and trails (it was 80% for city residents).
- 77% of all county/city residents would support paying from \$10-19/year more in taxes to maintain what we have for open space and trails.

Jackie then informed members about creating her 2011 workplan and how she set her priorities based upon the following factors:

- Geography & need - Looking at the updated open space map, we have done a very good job with providing accessible open space to the north (North Hills, Mt Jumbo) and east (Mt. Sentinel) and soon Bonner Hill will serve East Missoula/Bonner in addition to the YAWLE and Marshall Canyon acquisitions. We have protected a large portion of the viewshed and kept working ranches in place in the South Hills (access is still needed). To the west the viewshed of McCauley Butte is protected and there are 200 acres of the Clark Fork River corridor directly accessible to residents living south of the river. However, there is still a great need for urban parkland in the Franklin to the Fort neighborhood and for a community park and accessible open space in the Mullan area west of Reserve and north of the river.
- Lack of opportunity in North & South Hills – Within the past couple of years, FVLT and RMEF have contacted the large landowners that have not yet granted a conservation easement on their properties located in the North & South Hills Cornerstones. The Trust for Public Lands also has made contact with a large ranch owner within the Butler Creek Cornerstone. So far, these landowners are not ready to move forward with an easement and thus there presently is a lack of opportunity for the City to make any significant progress in protecting these Cornerstones until the landowners are ready. (They are also not interested in selling their land at a price that would be remotely attainable for the City to acquire). At this point, with \$2.5 million still available, if and when a land trust successfully negotiates an easement, we will be ready to evaluate any proposal.
- Challenges – lack of partners – Between the recession and the MT Legacy Project, our traditional partners will not be able to come to the table with any significant funds for many years to come. That means that we will mostly be on our own for funding projects.
- Choosing from each type – My list includes potential projects from 4 of the 5 types of open space listed in the plan: 1) conservation lands, 2) agricultural lands, 3) trails, and 4) urban parkland. All of the priorities also reflect priorities mentioned by members at the December meeting.

Jackie then went over her top 5 priorities from her 2011 Work Plan:

1. **Franklin Neighborhood** - Continuing work to acquire parkland in the F2F neighborhood (the USFS Motorpool 14 acre parcel now looks more promising since the FS indicated it will be sold within 2-4 yrs).
2. **Mullan Area** - Work with the Airport and private land owners to obtain a community park in the Mullan area, secure the Milwaukee Trail, and preserve some farmland.
3. **Trails** - Completing trail easement acquisition for the Kim Williams Trail extension to the Canyon River golf course/subdivision, the Bitterroot Spur gap between South Ave & Livingston, and connecting the end of Rimmel Way to Hillview Way via a trail adjacent to Moose Can Gully.
4. **Elk Corridor** - Protect the North Hills elk corridor through Grant Creek Valley by continuing to work with RMEF, FWP, and private property owners.
5. **Bike/ped Infrastructure Funding** - Continue working for passage of a better Transportation Bill that provides greater funding for bike/ped infrastructure.

Jackie is also watching what is happening in the Montana Legislature. There are many proposals that are not friendly to lands conservation programs. One pending bill would negate the perpetuity of conservation easements. There are other efforts to disallow state agency acquisition of lands and holding conservation easement interests in lands.

**Election of Officers** – Members voted unanimously to re-elect Tim Aldrich as chair and elect Bert Lindler as vice-chair.

### **Open Space Updates**

- 1) USFS Motor Pool and Shops at 14<sup>th</sup> and Catlin: Jackie has been in contact with Forest Service personnel and found that there is a 2 to 4 year target for selling the property. The FS is looking for a cash deal to enable them to move their current facilities. Jackie is working with City leaders to brainstorm possible ways for the city to acquire all or a portion of this property. She will meet with Regional Forester Leslie Weldon soon. It was suggested that we may need to seek assistance from our Congressional Delegation. This possible acquisition is a work in progress.
- 2) Everyone hoped to close on the Deschamps project in December, but one family member out of the 7 involved is still not in agreement. If this closes soon, our acreage accomplishment for the year will be close to 1700 acres, which would be the largest total acreage preserved in one year in OSAC history.
- 3) Closing on the Bonner Hill has been delayed while the significance of a large water tank on the property is being considered because the water came from a contaminated source.
- 4) One goal of the Conservation Lands Management Plan is to formalize coordination of groups involved in managing these lands. Jackie and Morgan are working on that now and they propose creating a Conservation Lands Advisory Committee (CLAC) to replace MJAC, GPAC, and the CLTAC. The Committee would have 12 voting members and two non-voting participants from FWP and the U. S. Forest Service. The goal is to formalize this by late spring 2011. Pelah Hoyt asked how would CLAC interact with OSAC? Jackie said that's a good question without a concrete answer at this point – possibly inviting the CLAC chair on OSAC fieldtrips would be a good start if the proposal was for acquisition (verses conservation easement).
- 5) There was a good discussion of whether or not OSAC should analyze potential projects with the objective of making recommendations on management stipulations where appropriate (Jackie gave the one and only example where that has been done thus far - prohibiting a trail straight up Mt. Jumbo on the YAWLE property in order to protect Mule Deer habitat). After a good discussion, there was agreement that this is important for us to consider on each project where needed and that the CLM Plan should serve as the new basis for land management. It should not be considered a criterion in the evaluation, however this should be a role we play to make sure we not only recognize and identify critically important attributes of a property but also to address the protection of the property's conservation values.
- 6) There was a request for the status of accomplishments and spending in the County Open Lands Program. Jackie said she had requested this information, but it was not yet available. It will be

provided soon. They have conserved approximately 6800 acres to date at a cost of ~\$1.5 million. Their partners have included RMEF, TNC, Vital Ground, and FVLT.

Jim Habeck provided “public input” relative to the priority of protecting the continuity of the riparian habitat along the Clark Fork River while there are efforts to accommodate public access and use of the corridor. He mentioned the needs for access, parking, put-in and take-out. He was told that there will be a boat ramp installed this year as part of Silver Park improvements.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm with the next meeting date scheduled for 4:00 – 5:30pm on Thursday, February 10<sup>th</sup> at Currents.