

Responses from Benita Duran 10/14/2019

Open Space Questionnaire

1. Survey after survey has shown that people who get out into nature have a stronger desire to save the environment. Fostering this love of nature means finding ways to excite people with different backgrounds who may not simply want to slowly hike through our open spaces. But, we know that more users means more impact. Where do you draw the line in terms of increased access for groups who may want to enjoy our open spaces in different ways like picnic areas, biking trails, fishing, etc? Can we increase and improve the recreation opportunities on Boulder's open space and also save our more-wild places like designated wilderness areas?

I'm supportive of opportunities to balance users/interests etc. I'm not inclined to draw a thick line of distinction here on users. I recognize that it is a constant challenge. Yes, we definitely can increase and improve opportunities through educational tools in multiple languages. This can be a major element of making nature accessible to more people. A benefit of this is that it engages users to consider the 'full picture' of our climate crisis and why every action does matter. Sierra Club (national org., not local) published a survey of Latinos in 2016 that pointed to "Latinos overwhelmingly support ..clean power plan and a clean energy economy." Directly engaging our local Latinos and other people of color (who also pay taxes to support the program) can help make our program more welcoming and accessible. I also believe more volunteer resources can help here. The designated wilderness areas are a 'must save' component and monitoring for any effects/impacts of climate change is an important consideration. I believe the leadership of the OSMP must help inform and guide the improvements and enhancements of recreation opportunities on OS.

2. The North Sky Trail, a vital multi-use connector trail between Boulder City and open space areas to the north, was approved after lengthy discussion during the North Trail Study Area process but has been stalled for nearly five years. If elected to council, how would you unstick this process and complete the trail within your first term?

I don't like reading about things 'stalled' for nearly five years. Yikes. Time is money and it would have been less costly to do this five years ago. I pledge to use my skills in collaboration to help unstick things like this. While I don't have the details of this process or the funding sources/commitments history, at this moment in time, I would commit to helping to unstick this process, whether through pursuing action from the OSBT or other bodies; and secondly, help find/confirm needed funding sources to support the efforts. I believe that philanthropic support for programs is a needed element that helps relieve the pressure on the city's general fund. In several answers, I return to the idea that building a strong charitable giving arm of the OSMP is a sustainable model for the present and future. Look to the Denver Greenways Foundation or Jefferson County for models.

3. What is your position related to acquisition versus maintenance of our current OSMP land stock? On what grounds should we acquire new properties?

I was an employee of the city in the peak of the acquisition phase of the OSMP program and understood the necessity for that aggressive phase of acquiring property. It is unfortunate that during that period we missed a move on acquiring the land known today as CU South Campus. But that is old history – 1996. I do not support a land swap or any attempt to change ownership of this area. However, I do support consideration of purchasing the designated OS-O land of that area if it becomes available in negotiations with CU. It would be an important addition to our holdings and complimentary to the envisioned plans of CU. Today and forward, I believe in following the Master Plan of the OSMP, which council adopted in September, that emphasizes the focus on maintenance of our land, particularly in light of our climate change crisis and what we are experiencing -- such as the increase of extreme weather conditions. I would expect that there will be exceptional opportunities to consider acquisitions that are not anticipated today. If elected, I would be open to this.

4. How would you address increased visitation of OSMP?

I would utilize data to inform any decisions here and monitor for changes over time. Data relating to addresses, zip codes, dogs, etc. can help inform characteristics of users and can help in broadened education on other trails that may be considered to balance out high usage in certain areas (Sanitas and Chautauqua). We like visitors who stop for a cup of coffee, grab a bite for lunch or dinner after a hike, so we want to find more ways to be encouraging and welcoming and not discourage this. Also, I suggest a donation box “friendly fee” for visitors, to encourage charitable support of our system. I support enhancing the charitable giving arm of the OSMP – the new foundation that was established a year ago. I believe philanthropic support of the additional needs of maintenance and programming is important, as it relieves pressure on the general fund and can help allocations to other critical needs like infrastructure and basic services.

5. What role does recreation play in a healthy society? How would you support that in future policy?

Recreation is a major player in one’s holistic health picture. Recreation and wellness activities keep us sane and contribute to our quality of life. I would continue to support efforts that get people from all walks of life into the outdoors. Partnerships with public and non-profit organizations is a key part of this and engaging to support programs that reach children, seniors and people of color are important components to me. I would encourage partnering with national outdoor/nature organizations to learn more about some engaging ways to broaden outreach to people of color. I have researched several organizations and one that could be a resource is “Latinos Outdoors,” affiliated with the National Park Foundation. In addition, Council policy should support a well rounded healthy living program for low income communities – I’d look at the “sugar tax” as a funder of special outreach efforts that connect young people with recreation centers and open space/outdoor opportunities.

6. Where do you see yourself on the conservation vs. recreation spectrum with regards to Open Space? Specifically, as a council member would you likely vote against an OSMP-recommended new trail or other recreation facility because of conservation or environmental concerns, or would you support it if the research showed that those concerns were insignificant or could be mitigated?

I am in the middle – some days I am fulfilled as an admirer of an open field view of our rolling hills on Highway 93; but most days I am a daily dog hiker/walker, and occasional mountain biker. I have lived a better life because I experience our City’s treasured open space on a daily basis. I am an outdoor explorer and know my outdoor experiences are what keeps me sane and relatively fit – mentally and physically. I know and support the balance of uses on OS, and the responsibility is significant. With that said, I would always align with research and intelligent recommendations/approaches – presumably coming from/through staff and the OSBT, and would pay close attention to all information communicated to me that support mitigation and related concerns.

7. Do you feel that hikers, mountain bikers, trail runners, equestrians, and other trail users can all have a positive experience on a shared multi-use trail in OSMP?

YES. I would add to this the element of ‘age’ and I would like to promote days for the ‘aging gracefully’ population – who don’t tear down trails like we used to, and yet still want to have the experience. I like multi-use trails for their functionality in design, but also because, in my view, they send ‘signal’ that they are not exclusive and can be welcoming and accommodating for diverse uses and USERS. I have an interest and commitment to seeing more diverse users of our systems and programs for the benefit of all of Boulder.

8. Several multi-use regional trails have been proposed over the years (including the Front Range Trail, the Boulder-to-Erie Union Pacific Rail-Trail conversion, and others) but the connectivity stalls when there is a need to include OSMP land in the process. Would you support these regional trails, and why or why not?

I support regional trails and regional cost sharing for these programs. I believe it is a good governance issue and the experience of Mother Nature knows no geographic lines on a map. I would work to unstick the road blocks, because delays cost money and we have limited resources to expend.

9. One of BATCO’s initiatives is the Trail Around Boulder, a 34 mile multi-use trail encircling the City of Boulder, which would allow access to, and appreciation of, Boulder’s amazing geographic setting. It would connect neighborhoods and would offer transportation alternatives to the car, encourage a healthy lifestyle, attract visitors to Boulder, and make trails fun again. It would link existing trails, 80% of which are already in place, and would require only about 7 miles of new trails all of which could be carefully designed to avoid sensitive habitats. Yet the City of Boulder (OSMP) has resisted all attempts to complete the Trail Around Boulder. Would you support this trail, and why or why not?

Yes, I would support this trail – it sounds to me like a legacy, signature project that would be a stunning addition to our system. I would help fundraise for this through the OSMP Charitable Foundation. The Trail Around Boulder is the type of project that has the potential to attract interest

from ALL of Boulder, which is a key element of my agenda – to bring communities together, collaborate and engage. I see many opportunities to bring new and diverse community members and non-profit organizations to this project. Sounds very exciting to me!

10. Recent articles in the local media have spotlighted communication issues within several City departments, including Planning, Public Works, and Transportation. A consulting firm hired by the City found that arduous, slow, and unpredictable decision making, a lack of discipline in implementing procedures, and lack of support from Council, resulted in staff dissatisfaction. The same problems plague Open Space and Mountain Parks but the issue is much larger than staff dissatisfaction. Many members of the public have contributed thousands of hours of volunteer time, expertise, and effort to OSMP management -- only to experience similar frustration with Council overriding sensitive negotiations in seemingly arbitrary votes that promote a different preconceived agenda. As a Council member, how would you improve relations between the City and the public?

Related to OSMP specifically, the Master Plan illuminated a changed course for the department – more focused on maintenance and programming over acquisition. Knowing a bit about the history of this department, these roles of the future are very different from the positions/roles of the past; and likely for the past several years it has required the department to begin to transition to more field staff and operations; and also as importantly, more outreach and communication staff. I suggest that one way to improve relations would be to actively seek out racial and ethnic diversity in hiring for any and all positions in OSMP.

More broadly, volunteer support needs to be valued and appreciated; and aligned with clear goals and objectives. I believe in transparency and clarity in public processes (and have had the experience of managing many of these type of processes); and it may be that a more structured public engagement process can sometimes help keep volunteers/public involved and engaged as stakeholders. In the situation eluded to above, the focus/direction was changed by Council, and not clearly communicated. If elected, I'd strive to avoid that as I highly value public engagement and participation as this 'free' time and expertise saves the city hundreds of thousands of dollars. I believe the city manager's leadership team has a role to play in monitoring public processes and engagement on task forces and ad hoc committees to assure that they stay aligned with the council policy direction and/or issue of focus.

11. Do you feel that recreation is adequately represented on the current OSBT? Why or why not?

I'm interpreting this as a question of balance of individual's philosophical representation, on OSBT, as appointed by the sitting City Council. First, in my view, it is the responsibility of the City Council to address the diversity of thought/perspective/experience in the appointment of members to every board and commission– whether advisory or statutory. It can weigh most heavily for statutory bodies and its' related decision making. I am defining recreation as select and/or limited active use of OS – trails access for different uses primarily; and conservationists as attention to preservation, possibly acquisitions, also limited or no public use of OS. At this time, I don't have the impression that recreation is adequately represented on the current OSBT. The body may be more leaning on the

conservationist side of the spectrum at this time. I do believe that all bodies, but particularly those whose programs are funded with public tax dollars, with significant responsibility of a newly adopted master plan (and hopefully a successful ballot item), it is important to pay attention to balanced representation. Beyond philosophical positions, I believe that all bodies should reflect the people of the city. In light of the newly adopted master plan, and its direction, an intentional leaning towards recreation expertise is appropriate. If elected, to address situations like this one, I would advocate for transparency in the process – announcing clearly the preferences of the position(s) to be filled and what characteristics, if any, are being sought in the given round of application. If the applicant pool does not provide one or more candidates fitting the call, I would delay vote on the appointment until appropriately qualified candidates are identified.