

**City Council. August 16, 2016 meeting. Transcript of Council's comments
regarding a prairie dog working group**

[Note: This transcript includes the entire discussion that followed the prairie dog update by staff and the Q/A that followed that presentation but does not include the presentation or the Q/A]

Mayor Jones: My understanding is that a little guidance from us would be accepted on long term direction. Is that an accurate statement? Why don't you sum up...

Jane Brautigam: It is *very* accurate that we are looking for your kind of long-term view of the current policy that we have. And giving us guidance on whether that policy remains your policy...

Mayor Jones: Ok. I'm going to start doing that. Let's see if we can do it with mini speeches not long speeches okay. I guess, I want to applaud you for your leadership on these issues. I was encouraged by what you said about exploring things. We're not talking about the near term problem but more policy issues, but, um, I guess, I um, what Matt was saying about this notion of if we're going to use public land to solve private land wildlife mitigation issues that the private land owner needs to pay for that use of public lands. That needs to be part of that solution, I think that that is a principle we should apply. And figure out how to meaningfully do that whether it is the notion of... There were some interesting ideas that Lindsey [HSUS] brought up, whether it's considered a long term lease or conservation use permit or whether it is to go into a fund to acquire more land. I still think we should think about that even though it's not an immediate thing. We should think about "Habitat Banking" at some level. I mean that's what we're talking about, um, even if it's not acre for acre. Anyhow, we need additional sites, what does that look like? And so, anyhow, I think that principle is important.

I guess, I, one of the concepts within our management plans is the idea that they be, is the concept of 'adaptive management' ~ so we've talked about the experience we've had for the last 10 years. I think that we should tweak our plan. I don't know if we want to wait until it comes around for a full overhaul. The idea of putting together a working group of folks who are experienced in relocations, who know a lot about pesticides, who know about things like conservation leases and how that might look. Put together a working group to look at whether we can make some near term tweaks. That would be worthwhile. And I would include the county. We might as well work with our partners about how do we do this well and if the Southern Grasslands is the priority area, then let's figure out how do we do that well together.

The last thing I'll say is I am not a fan of "lethal control" – so the extent that we can move away from that. I know that there are consequences from doing that so I don't say that lightly but I think that that is where we should head. I guess the last thing

I'll say is that if we need to tweak our criteria on receiving sites, again, let's apply adaptive management in order to address multiple goals. I think that's something the working group could look at. Recognizing that there are other species that we're managing for.

So those are some of my thoughts about where we should head. But I would be willing to put it on the work plan, especially if other folks did the work; the working group did the work for us and presented something to us with you guys. I mean obviously staff would be a major player there. Um, that was a long-winded rambling response, but those are some of my thoughts. Sam...

Sam Weaver: I tend to agree with those thoughts generally speaking. I think a working group is probably a good idea if staff can plan that into the work plan to be able to staff that. I would want it to include not only prairie dog advocates and experts in prairie dogs but people that have a broad interest in protecting the potential receiving sites to make sure that they're not over populated with mono culture of some kind – you know – we use the receiving sites for private land preferentially before public land and then we end up with trouble in our parks or in our – you know what were hoping for is local food production land as well. So, I'm supportive of a working group. I do want us to proceed cautiously because I think that there are impacts that we could have if we say that we want to move all of the dogs on private land to public land and they're all going to be in front of the public land dogs that need to be relocated. I just don't think that's fair. And I think if, um, we would consider adjusting our schedule, that needs to be paid for in someway. And I also agree with the habitat banking idea. So when you look at the scope and the scale of this development and how much money it's going to cost ultimately, I think even, you know, the offer that was put on the table was generous enough, but it was a teeny teeny fraction of what the overall expenses will be for that project. And this is serious enough to Boulder and the way we've decided to approach it and I think we need to treat it seriously and maybe come up with some policy that says here's what it costs to get private prairie dogs moved onto public land. But here's a way that we can make it happen. So in other words it is, and it would take the working group to flesh out the details. I won't try and do that now but I do think that that is something that is worth doing and considering. Yeah, I guess that's all. The application of pesticides worries me because we've just gone to great lengths to try and do honey bee protection and so it is something I would want to be very cautious about. And that's it, thank you.

Mayor Jones: Ok – we have Aaron and then Lisa and then Mary.

Aaron Brockett: I'll echo what people said about interest in a working group and I like, Suzanne, what you said about "Adaptive Management". In looking at the numbers, if I've got these correct, I heard that we have 9300 acres in the system that are designated for potential prairie dog habitat, of which I think 2500 are currently

occupied was the number you gave – and 4000 odd acres of those used to have prairie dogs. So there are a lot of empty acres out there but, then this year we only have 16.5 acres available in Boulder for relocation. So to me that says that maybe our criteria are too stringent. And I saw that there was a potential interest in revisiting those criteria um but that sounds like it wouldn't happen on it's own for quite some time.

So I think if we brought some people together to look at those again, and look at revisiting that policy, I think it would be great if we could maybe identify some more lands so that we could accelerate some of the relocation options that we have out there.

And in terms of our current situation of prairie dogs on private land versus public, I mean the jurisdictional issues matter, and I think getting compensation if we were to take prairie dogs from private lands. I think compensation makes sense but I think kind of fundamentally we're looking at animals, we're looking at creatures and are they going to die or not. And so the fact that their on private land, you know, I think that still, if we don't intervene, they are just going to be killed. Whereas the prairie dogs on the public land that we want to relocate are not about to be killed. So I think that's a fundamental that I think, I mean there are people that care very passionately about this in our community and these are wonderful little critters.

I just have to say personally, I live like 4 blocks from the Armory prairie dogs colony. I walk by there all the time. I will miss them a lot as they leave for whatever reason because I believe that development project is moving forward. I would really love to see us step forward and find a relocation spot for those but try to work out some deal where there is some form of compensation.

Mayor Jones: Yeah – we are trying to avoid talking directly about the Armory site, yea...

Okay we have, but, I'm not disagreeing with you. Ok Lisa...

Lisa Morzel: So I agree with everything that's been said up here, so far. I do think we need to create a new policy where we can accept private dogs for public lands. I agree with what Aaron just said. These are animals despite whether they are on private or public.

I was very much involved in helping create the first prairie dog ordinance so I clearly am not in favor of lethal control. I don't think it's sustainable and I think ... I do know that in years past we do get these waves of plague that comes in and wipes out large expanses of our prairie dog colonies so to Matt's point that we just keep adding and adding and adding, that's true to some extent, except we do get frequent plague outbursts and we lose a lot of our prairie dogs at that point so, it is not totally a cumulative issue. And so I think there is room for additional prairie dogs that we

could accept from private landowners. I do think though that comes with a cost. And that the city would need to be compensated... to all of the points that Matt made. I like the adaptive management and I would like to look at tweaking the criteria for receiving sites. It seems that it could be a little bit too restrictive. In my discussions leading up to this my understanding that prairie dogs don't always have to be on just grasslands. But they could also be in shrublands. And I guess I'd like to look more or find out more about that. That they don't just live in one place, but that they evolve with the landscape. I'm also very much interested in partnering with the County and maybe City of Superior in our Southern Grasslands area, and yes the Fish and Wildlife Service and federal lands are at Rocky Flats and I just want to let everyone know that our FLAP grant did get approved and I will send a little memo about that and there will be a follow up meeting that. So there could be a link to Rocky Flats.

And I really think we need to look at prioritization. I think, again, it doesn't matter whether it's private or public, it seems like there is some sites that the prairie dogs, um, they have to find a solution sooner than later. And that we could be a little bit more flexible in terms of who goes first. And I would like to be looking at many more than 16 acres of receiving sites for 2016.

And I'm actually hoping to bring this up at our retreat this winter and seeing if we can do some things to look at improving our prairie dog policy but I'm personally, this happened, the new version of the prairie dog policy, came out in 2005 and I'm not real happy about that, and we refined it again, as Val said, in 2010. But I would like to look at something where we could reintroduce black footed ferrets and Ft. Collins has done that successfully. Sounds like we may have the criteria in order to allow reintroduction in our Southern Grasslands, so I would really like to look at that. Um, but I would like no prairie dogs killed.

Mayor Jones: Ok, we have Mary, Bob and Jan.

Mary Young: I'll be brief. I agree with what's been said so far. And to what's been said so far, I would add as far as a working group goes, I think that that working group could take a look at things like, um, address things like Open Space priorities, if there's some plan. I know that Open Space has some priorities for land purchase and reprioritize the order that new lands come up or new potential purchases. It could inform that. And a working group could also inform the order at which lands are looked at. I know Tracy got up and said which plans are coming up. I don't know what drives that order but perhaps that could be revisited. I also understand that a lot of what we're looking at in terms of relocation is ultimately the state regulations and they have the final say. And I don't know how the City - maybe we add that to look at those State regulations and see how that might be affected. And finally, it seems that one of the things we've all been trying to get a handle on is how many acres we have available and how much is available for prairie dog relocation. And

when you add everything up it looks like we're at 1/3 occupancy. It looks like we have about 3000 acres that are occupied and 6000 acres that aren't, is that correct?

Heather: Within that protected status? Yes.

Mary Young: Ok – so, um, and that's all I have to say.

Bob Yates: I'm going to agree with what Lisa and Aaron said. That I think we shouldn't get too hung up on whether a prairie dog happens to be on private property or public property. In other words, whether we're shifting from public to public or private to public.

I think you put up a slide earlier Val, that indicated that your estimate is that there is only about 64 acres of private prairie dogs yet to relocate so that's a pretty small and finite amount, compared to some of the public stuff we have to relocate so I agree with Aaron and Lisa, that we shouldn't get too hung up on whether the sending end is a private property or the sending end is a public property.

Remember that up until a couple of months ago, this property was public property. It was owned by the National Guard. So if the National Guard had come to us a couple of months ago, it would have been public to public, so...

I think it's easy to say, let's stick it to the developers. You know, and let's charge them a really, really big fee because they're making a lot of money on this but we have to keep in mind that the developers for the most part, certainly in the more recent cases, are developing houses for people. So I think that that's a priority of ours as well; to develop housing for middle income and low income people, so I think, we don't want to make it so hard for them and so expensive for them, that they can't do what we want them to do.

And I think as a final point, David Geer would tell us that if we made it super, super expensive, at some point in time we've crossed the line, we've effectively prohibited lethal control. If we've taxed them so high, we've effectively said you can't do anything so I think we have to be really careful here about being overly aggressive about charging a private developer to move.

Certainly relocation costs and whatever Jane thinks is reasonable is fine but I think, let's not go overboard.

Jan: Well that's the point I was going to make, so nice job Bob, you just did it [slaps high five with Bob]. And I do agree with what everyone else said. I think we make it a very high priority. The county and the city have made raptors a huge part of our open space program and prairie dogs are a key species for that so I think we should make it a high priority and I'm definitely with Bob on what he just said. Thank you.

Mayor Jones: Anything else?

Lisa: One last – One other thing. While I’m not a big supporter of pesticides or herbicides, I would like to look into what conflicts exist right now into being able to successfully relocate and I get the Delta Dust and things, but I’m not a toxicologist, but I would like to know more about what kinds of things we could use to allow successful relocation of prairie dogs. So I don’t know if that will require us modifying some of our IPM policy. I don’t know but I think we should consider. And I like Mary’s comment about looking at our State Legislative agenda, while generally I say, “Good luck with that” I’m hoping we have some changes in November.

Mayor Jones: Yep. Well just to be clear. Last legislative session, we had to help fight a bill that would have prevented relocation inside the same county. Ok – Have you gotten what you needed from us?

Jane Brautigam: Yes – we have. Thank you so much. Most appreciated your comments.

[Applause – Lisa holds up her two stuffed prairie dogs]

Bob: Thanks to all of you for coming out.

Lisa: And thanks to staff for giving us a full presentation.
