

Open Space Board of Trustees

December 10, 2025

MEETING AGENDA

(Please note that times are approximate.)

- I. (6:00)** Call to Order and Roll Call
- II. (6:03)** Approval of the Minutes
- III. (6:08)** Public Comment for Items not Identified for Public Hearing
- IV. (6:20)** Matters from the Board
 - A. Trustee Questions Or discussion on Written Information Memos or public comment (10 min)
 - B. OSBT response to Council request for Board input on council 2026 priorities (20 min)
- V. (6:50)** Matters from the Department
 - A. Update on OSMP Climate Action (40 min)
 - B. City Strategic Plan 7(C) / OSMP Multimodal Improvements Assessment (35 min)
 - C. Update on the possible relocation of an existing Xcel Energy utility line easement across OSMP (10 min)
 - D. Director Verbal Updates (5 min)
- VI. (8:20)** Adjourn

Written Information Items:

- A. 2025 OSMP Prairie Dog Management
- B. [October 31, 2025 OSBT Retreat Summary](#)

Open Space Board of Trustees Members:

Michelle Estrella
(2021-2026)

Jon Carroll
(2022-2027)

Brady Robinson
(2023-2028)

Sarah Glynn
(2024-2029)

Harmon Zuckerman
(2025-2030)



Open Space Board of Trustees
***TENTATIVE Board Items Calendar**
 (Updated November 24, 2025)

January 14, 2026	February 11, 2026	March 11, 2026
<p>Matters from the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustee Questions Or discussion on Written Information Memos or public comment (10 min) <p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration and Recommendation of a Disposal request initiated by Colorado Department of Transportation associated with the Arapaho Road Improvement Project pursuant to the disposal procedures of Article XII, Section 177 of the City of Boulder Charter (30 min) Consideration and Recommendation of the relocation of an existing Xcel Energy utility line easement across OSMP pursuant to the disposal procedures of Article XII, Section 177 of the City of Boulder Charter (15 min) <p>Matters from the Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff management recommendation concerning the future of the Boulder Falls Trail (50 min) Update on the Marshall Mesa Trailhead Renovation Project (20 min) Director Verbal Updates (5 min) 	<p>Matters from the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustee Questions Or discussion on Written Information Memos or public comment (10 min) <p>Action Items:</p> <p>Matters from the Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update on OSMP's Prairie Dog Management Program and summary of the annual community update meeting (40 min) Fort Chambers - Poor Farm Concept Plan Update: Board input (45 min) Strategic guidance for 2027 Budget Development (40 min) Director Verbal updates (5 min) 	<p>Matters from the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustee Questions Or discussion on Written Information Memos or public comment (10 min) Outgoing Trustee Recognition (10 min) <p>Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration and recommendation of the sale of an OSMP-managed residential building pursuant to the disposal procedures of Article XII, Section 177 of the City of Boulder Charter (20 min) <p>Matters from the Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update (60 min) Update on the Chautauqua Ranger Cottage and Trailhead Improvement project - 40 min Paragliding rule update regarding Precautionary and emergency Landings - 30 min Director Verbal Updates (5 min)

*All items are subject to change. A final version of the agenda is posted on the webpage the week of the OSBT meeting.

OPEN SPACE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Action Minutes

Meeting Date November 12, 2025

Record of this meeting can be found here: <https://bouldercolorado.gov/government/watch-board-meetings> (video start times are listed below next to each agenda item).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Harmon Zuckerman, Chair
Jon Carroll, Vice Chair
Michelle Estrella
Brady Robinson
Sarah Glynn

OSMP STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Dan Burke	Jeff Haley	Jennelle Freeston	Lauren Kilcoyne	Brian Anacker
Heather Swanson	Sam McQueen	Leah Russell	Marc Pedrucci	Julie Johnson
Frances Boulding	Bethany Collins	Burton Stoner	Maria Mayer	

GUESTS

Denise Grimm, Principal Planner - Historic Preservation/Long Range Planning & Policy Team (Planning), Boulder County

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Call to Order and Roll Call (00:40)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Approval of the Minutes (01:25)

Michelle Estrella moved the Open Space Board of Trustees to adopt the minutes from October 8, 2025. Sarah Glynn seconded. This motion passed four to zero; Brady Robinson was absent at the last meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Public Participation for Items not Identified for Public Hearing (02:40)

Giles Troughton spoke about fire mitigation and the need to limit access to open space on high fire risk days. He additionally asked for the board to include this topic in their letter to City Council regarding priorities; focus needs to be on making Boulder a fire-safe community.

Paula Palmer spoke about the Fort Chambers/Poor Farm Written Information item and wanted to highlight the suggestion from Fred Mosqueda, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, for the fort itself to be represented. She said his idea was to construct replica of the gate to the fort at beginning of the pass. This would allow everyone to walk through the gate, entering the site, entering history and becoming part of it.

Lynn Segal said she didn't vote for the open space tax. She said we need to quantify the demand for services for each individual and then figure out how many people we want to have here.

Albert Nazander spoke about paragliding. He asked about a policy change to allow precautionary landing on open space when safety requires it. This would not increase use in a way that would be too impactful, and it would align regulations with federal law.

Vinay Shah, president of the Rocky Mountain Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, said paragliding is a low impact activity and the impact on the ground is similar to a hiker. He asked that the regulations be updated to allow for emergency landings when needed.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Matters from the Board (23:40)

Brady, in response to public comment, said the topic of paragliders being allowed to land on OSMP when its an emergency was discussed in August of last year. He said there should already be a caveat allowing this within the current regulations. Dan Burke said staff have met since Albert's citation and will be reviewing the City Manager Rule to adjust this language. Staff will bring something back to the board in quarter one of 2026.

The board spoke about the Fort Chambers/Poor Farm Written Information Item; they thanked staff for working to reach people where they are to collect comments and feedback. They said they felt like staff was truly engaging the community and taking it into consideration.

Michelle asked about the HUB office lease and the interim office move; she asked if the disruption to the workflow is worth the cost savings. Dan said the site that was selected is move-in ready which will allow for a seamless transition. There will also be an overlapping lease time which will allow for people to be moving while still using existing space and minimize staff disruption. This new site will also allow us to mimic some of the changes that will be happening either way when we move to the Western City Campus.

Regarding the OSBT response to Council and their request for Board input on council 2026 priorities, the board identified Jon and Michelle as the subcommittee in charge of drafting the OSBT response. The draft letter will be brought to the board in December before being submitted to council.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Recommendation from the Open Space Board of Trustees to City Council to support an application of Wells House and outbuildings (Poor Farm/Fort Chambers) to be designated a Boulder County historic landmark (1:00:00)

Julie Johnson, Cultural Stewardship Senior Program Manager, presented this item. Frances Boulding, Recreation and Cultural Stewardship Senior Manager, and Denise Grimm, Principal Planner - Historic Preservation/Long Range Planning & Policy Team (Planning), Boulder County, were also present for this presentation to support the conversation and respond to questions.

Michelle asked for clarification on the property owner being able to upgrade things at the house as needed. Denise said they have conversations with applicants and the building officials when these requests come up to allow for flexibility for upgrades to be made. Brady asked if there are any counter arguments to this application being supported. Julie said landmarking and regulations are there for a reason and would like to see this preserved. She said sometimes the encumbrances are a negative and people might be afraid that they wont be able to make any changes. Brady asked if we are protecting this home from a threat or if this is a future protection. Staff said primarily future protection though Frances said this property is also a risk for vandalism; getting a resident into the property will also help reduce that.

Public Comment

Tim Plass spoke on behalf of Historic Boulder. He asked that staff follow the recommendation from staff. The Wells House is a top-tier historic resource, is associated with important events and people and is already on national register.

Motion

Michelle Estrella moved the Open Space Board of Trustees to recommend that City Council support the OSMP application for a Boulder County landmark designation for the Wells House and agricultural outbuildings at 3902 N. 63rd street in Boulder. This property meets the criteria and qualifications identified by Boulder County, as outlined in this memorandum and related attachments. Harmon Zuckerman seconded. This motion passed unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – Request that the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) recommend the acquisition of approximately 16.37 acres of land located directly adjacent to the Diagonal Highway near the Boulder Reservoir for approximately \$175,000 for open space purposes (1:26:00)

Marc Pedrucci, Senior Property Agent, presented this item. Bethany Collins, Real Estate Services Senior Manager, was also available for this presentation.

The board asked what the use of this land might be if purchased and what the current habitat is like. Jon asked why the Utilities or Parks department isn't looking at buying this land instead of OSMP. Dan said while one benefit to purchasing this land was so the city could own the parcel (and not be purchased by a private buyer), staff wouldn't have brought it forward if it didn't have an open space value. The board asked about negotiations with property owners, if residences could be built, and if the public would have access.

Public Comment

None.

Return to the Board

The board said they have some hesitations about purchasing this property as staff didn't have a plan for use ahead of time and while also being in a constrained budget environment. Sarah said if it were to be purchased, she would like to see it become an agricultural property, allowing farmers to lease at a low cost. Jon added that he does still think this area is dangerous and would like to avoid it being purchased for private use.

Motion

Jon Carroll moved the Open Space Board of Trustees to recommend the acquisition of approximately 16.37 acres of land located directly adjacent to the Diagonal Highway near the Boulder Reservoir for approximately \$175,000 for open space purposes. Brady Robinson seconded. This motion passed four to one; Sarah Glynn dissented.

Sarah said she dissented because she can't see how this isn't doing more with less; there is not enough value to vote "yes".

AGENDA ITEM 7 – Matters from the Department (1:54:50)

Jeff Haley, Visitor Experience and Infrastructure Deputy Director, presented the "Flagstaff Corridor Operations and Management Project Update."

Michelle asked about the moveable fencing and where these will go once the gates are installed. Jeff said the temporary barricades are currently at the Halfway House but will be removed after the star is no longer lit. The ones at Panorama Point will help direct traffic but the gates will be open during the day, and barricades will not be preventing access. At night the gates will be closed.

Burton Stoner, Ranger Senior Manager, presented the "Ranger Workgroup Program Update." Maria Mayer, Ranger Supervisor, was available as well for questions. (2:15:00)

Harmon asked if rangers are able to document their contacts while out in the field. Burton said they are able to do this in the field which saves some time.

Michelle asked if rangers saw a lot of displacement of homeless camps to open space after the law was passed prioritizing camps be moved away from paths near schools. Burton said they did not see a big increase in this.

Sarah praised the ranger's social media posts and suggested more be added. She asked if we can add additional updates to each of the calls that are listed. She asked to look at how we can engage the community more. Dan responded that in addition to rangers we also have outreach and education staff; there is someone on staff looking at synergy of all three.

Brady asked about wildfire and limiting factors for encampments when they have 24-72 hours to move. On red flag days they need to move immediately.

Jon asked about the IGA in the packet and so many increased liabilities with things like use of force. This MOU will streamline practices and record keeping related to law enforcement. This is one of the few groups that don't report to a police chief or sheriff. He asked about plans to get more assistance from BPD to patrol flagstaff. Dan said this relationship will be enhanced with the MOU, updated policies and trainings.

Michelle asked about the evolution of the duties of a ranger and how this impacts recruiting.

Dan gave several verbal updates including that the Marshall Mesa Trailhead should be completed in December. The grant applications for South Mesa and Foothills were approved by council.

ADJOURNMENT – The meeting adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

These draft minutes were prepared by Leah Russell.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Open Space Board of Trustees

FROM: Dan Burke, Director, Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP)
Alycia Alexander, Climate Resilience Sr. Analyst, OSMP
Brian Anacker, Science and Climate Resilience Sr. Manager, OSMP
Jonathan Koehn, Director, Climate Initiatives

DATE: December 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Update on OSMP Climate Action

A One Boulder Approach to Climate Action

The City of Boulder is advancing meaningful climate action through strong collaboration between the Climate Initiatives Department (CI) and city departments like Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP). As a department, Climate Initiatives drives local and regional climate action guided by Boulder's climate targets, focusing on mitigation, adaptation and equity. The department achieves its mission through strategic investments in regulatory and voluntary programs, policy development and broad community engagement. Generally, the work of the department is split into three action areas: energy systems, circular economy and nature-based climate solutions.

OSMP supports the broader city efforts through the implementation of the OSMP Climate Plan (2024-2030), and its three objectives: (1) increase the resilience of natural and working lands, (2) reduce emissions from operations, and (3) foster climate change awareness. These objectives and the supporting solutions are presented in the diagram in this memo (next page).

The community can learn more by reviewing the resources below and/or joining the December OSBT meeting where Climate Initiatives and OSMP staff will present on their progress and plans.

Links to Climate Deliverables and Resources

- OSMP's Climate Resilience Story Map
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d7c1a3cf8d584573bc1dc4cee1bfd3f8>
- Climate Initiative Website <https://bouldercolorado.gov/government/departments/climate-initiatives>
- OSBT December 2024 Memo (Pg. 6)
<https://documents.bouldercolorado.gov/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=189248&dbid=0&repo=LF8PROD2>
- OSMP's Climate Change Webpage
<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/climate-change-and-open-space>



OSMP CLIMATE PLAN:

TAKE CARE OF WHAT WE HAVE – EVERY TON MATTERS
HELPING NATURE AND PEOPLE THRIVE
IN A CLIMATE CRISIS.

CLIMATE PLAN OBJECTIVE #1

INCREASE CLIMATE
RESILIENCE OF
NATURAL AND WORKING
LANDS

CLIMATE-RESILIENT
AGRICULTURAL LAND

FUELS REDUCTION

PRESCRIBED FIRE

CARBON-DENSE WETLANDS IN A
CHANGING CLIMATE

CLIMATE-READY RIPARIAN AREAS

POST-FIRE REFORESTATION

POST-FIRE ECOLOGICAL HEALTH
ASSESSMENTS

WILDFIRE STRUCTURE HARDENING

INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL IN
FUTURE CONDITIONS

CLIMATE PLAN OBJECTIVE #2

REDUCE
EMISSIONS

GREENER FLEET

REDUCED EMISSIONS FROM
VISITOR TRAVEL

SUSTAINABLE USE OF THINNED
WOODY MATERIAL

ELECTRIC APPLIANCES

RENEWABLE ENERGY

CLIMATE PLAN OBJECTIVE #3

FOSTER CLIMATE
AWARENESS, PARTICIPATION,
AND EQUITY

GREENER PROJECTS

CLIMATE-INFORMED EDUCATION

YOUTH CLIMATE LEADERS

TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE POLICY

SUPPORT FOR TRIBAL
ENGAGEMENT ON CLIMATE
CHANGE

OSMP Climate Plan (2024 – 2030)



MEMORANDUM

TO: Open Space Board of Trustees

FROM: Dan Burke, Director, Open Space and Mountain Parks
Lauren Kilcoyne, Deputy Director – Central Services
Kacey French, Planning Senior Manager
Jena Van Gerwen, Open Space Planner

DATE: December 10, 2025

SUBJECT: City Strategic Plan 7(C) / OSMP Multimodal Improvements Assessment

Executive Summary

This memo provides the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) with an update on the Multimodal Improvements Assessment, formerly referenced to as Strategic Plan Item 7C. Since the September discussion with the OSBT that focused on preliminary data exploration, OSMP, led by our Planning and Design staff, has developed a more detailed road map for this project that defines and describes among other things the project scope, approach, and timeline.

This memo summarizes the project's refined scope, methodology, and schedule, and staff will provide a brief presentation at the meeting to further outline progress and next steps. The goal of this update is to ensure the OSBT has a clear understanding of the project's context, direction, and current status.

Background

Early last year, the city adopted the [2024-2026 Citywide Strategic Plan](#). Under the City's commitment to creating a safe, accessible, and more connected multimodal transportation system, priority action 7C states:

Strategy 7. Invest in and maintain a transportation system with an array of multi-modal choices to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.

Priority Action C. Identify and implement key trail connections and access improvements to open space areas throughout the city that encourage multi-modal options for access.

Additionally, OSMP launched a focused effort to accelerate climate action and developed the OSMP Climate Plan (2024), which included:

Climate Plan Objective #2: Reduce Emissions – Implement solutions to lower greenhouse gas emissions related to staff operations, land management, and visitation.

Solution 2.2: Reduce Emissions from Visitor Travels – Evaluate how to reduce gas powered vehicle miles traveled to OSMP access points.

The OSMP Master Plan also outlines shared values and focus areas that align directly with this effort. Of which include:

OUTCOME: EHR.C – Climate Action.

STRATEGY: EHR.3 – Address the Global Climate Crisis Here and Now.

OUTCOME: RRSE.E – High Quality Trail Network.

STRATEGY: RRSE.4 – Encourage Multimodal Access to Trailheads.

Item 7c has been a key focus for the OSBT, with staff last presenting on this topic at the [September 2025 OSBT Meeting](#). At this time, staff shared an update and overview on the preliminary data exploration and existing conditions.

Scope

This project is intended to serve as a systemwide assessment to identify improvements to OSMP to fulfill Action Item 7C and Climate Plan Solution 2.2. With the help of research and data review to understand visitor use, the emphasis will be actions that OSMP can directly implement on its lands, which includes:

- Identifying key trail connections and recreational activities allowed on OSMP lands
- Identifying planned trails for priority implementation
- Identifying trailhead or infrastructure improvements
- Identifying small achievable changes that can be completed with interdepartmental or interagency coordination
- Enhancing education and outreach efforts

While the primary focus will be on improvements inside of OSMP's direct purview, consideration and identification of relatively small physical improvements outside of OSMP's jurisdiction and that could support safer and more connected access may also be explored.

In Scope

Trail Connections

The project will evaluate key trail connectors that improve access within the OSMP trail system or link OSMP trails to other regional networks that improved access to and within OSMP land. This may include assessing whether certain connectors should allow additional trail uses, such as cycling, to strengthen multimodal access.

Trailhead and Access Point Improvements

The assessment will focus on improvements to existing trailheads, access points, signage, and wayfinding to support safer, more welcoming multimodal entry to OSMP lands. The project may also identify potential new access points where simpler, neighborhood-scale entrances could enhance connectivity. However, the creation of new trailheads is out of scope.

Community Education and Outreach

The project will review current strategies for informing the public about multimodal access options and develop recommendations for enhanced communication. This may include updated informational materials, online campaigns, or wayfinding tools that help visitors navigate the system without relying on driving.

Out of Scope

Long-term multimodal access and regional strategies, such as bikeways, new shuttle services, micromobility programs, or broader citywide and regional planning efforts, are also out of scope. While these initiatives remain important to OSMP's overall work, they will not be advanced through this specific assessment. OSMP will continue to engage with partners (RTD, CDOT, Boulder County) and participate in ongoing efforts such as the Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT), the North Foothills and Longmont to Boulder bikeways, Trail Access Management and Parking Strategy (TAMPS) and the Comprehensive Plan, using findings from this project to help inform but not direct those broader initiatives.

In addition, parking fees and related pricing strategies will also not be evaluated through this project. This assessment is focused on identifying and implementing positive multimodal alternatives rather than measures intended to discourage driving. Parking fees also raise equity concerns, as they can disproportionately affect people who live farther from open space or lack alternative ways to get there.

Planning Approach

OSMP will use the next few months to understand current conditions and identify early opportunities for improving multimodal access, ensuring a strong foundation before developing and refining potential improvements.

Phase 1 – Background Research & Assessment

Staff will build on the initial data exploration conducted in 2025 and analyze how visitors currently access OSMP lands—including travel mode, facility use, visitation patterns, and trail and access point conditions. Using this foundation, staff will conduct a systemwide assessment to identify gaps and preliminary opportunities for improving multimodal access. This includes evaluating connections between OSMP properties, surrounding neighborhoods, trail networks, and transit, as well as opportunities to strengthen signage and wayfinding.

Phase 2 – Preliminary Opportunities & Community Input

OSMP will share the assessment, identified gaps and preliminary improvement opportunities such as focus areas with the community for feedback during the project’s first engagement window. Staff will also conduct an intercept survey on OSMP trails to reach underrepresented or people who may not participate otherwise and reduce self-selection bias, thereby creating a more equitable and inclusive process for a topic of broad community interest.

Phase 3 – Draft Package of Solutions

Using insights from the assessment and community input, OSMP will develop a draft package of on the ground solutions A scoring matrix will help identify which improvements best align with OSMP’s mission, ecological considerations, safety, connectivity, and other key factors.

A second engagement window will provide community members with the opportunity to provide input and react to the draft package proposal.

Phase 4 – Refined Package of Solutions

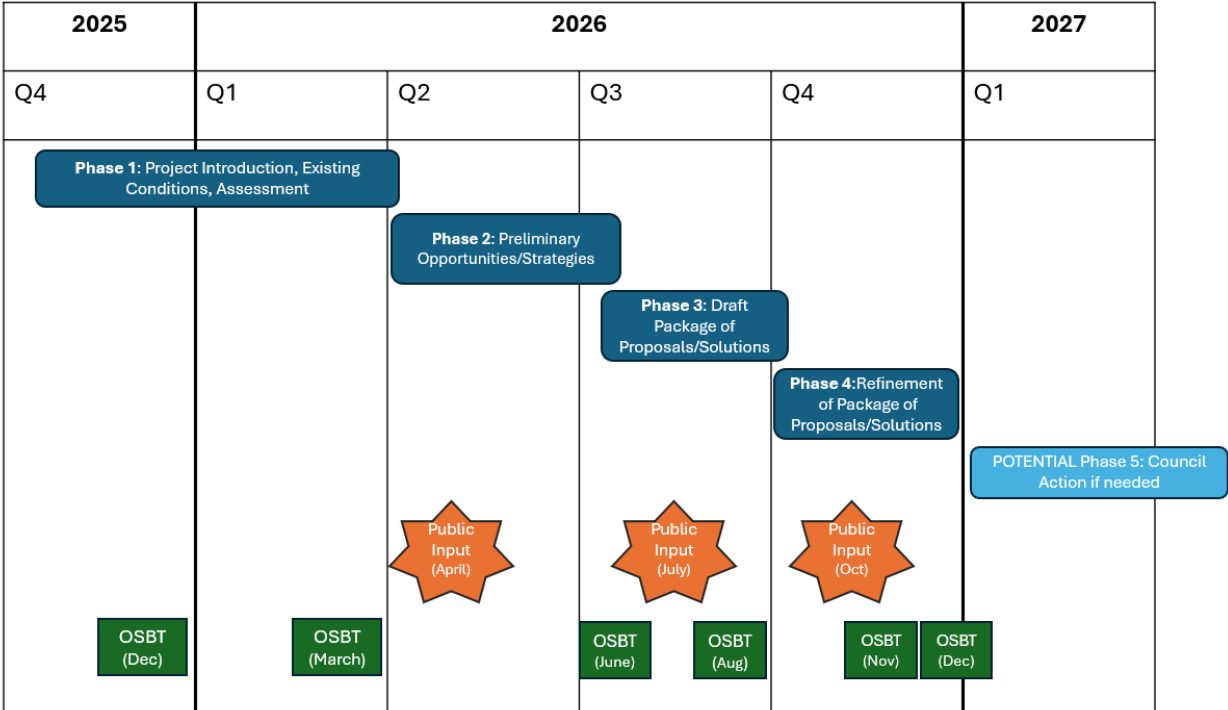
Staff will revise the draft package in response to community feedback and bring the updated recommendations forward for an additional review and final input prior to completion.

Milestones & Deliverables

Timing	Major Milestones or Tasks	Deliverables	Public Input	OSBT Meetings
Phase 1: Project Introduction, Background, Existing Conditions, Assessment 2025 Q4 – 2026 Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review existing conditions - Conduct assessment and evaluation for improvement areas - Community outreach and information sharing ahead of engagement window 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compiled data summary - Systemwide base map with potential improvements and priority areas - Public engagement materials 	Inform	Inform
Phase 2: Preliminary Opportunities &	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement Window 1 - Intercept Survey & questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public Engagement materials - Survey & questionnaire 	Consult	Consult

Strategies 2026 Q2		results summary		
Phase 3: Draft Package of Multimodal Improvement Priorities & Solutions 2025 Q3	- Draft package of multimodal improvements and solutions - Feasibility analysis - Engagement Window 2	- Draft package of multimodal improvements and solutions Scored matrix for feasibility analysis - Public engagement materials	Consult	Consult
Phase 4: Refined Package of Multimodal Improvements & Solutions 2026 Q4	- Refine package of improvements and solutions as needed - Engagement Window 3 - Finalize Package of solutions and improvements	- Refined Final Package of Multimodal improvements and solutions with clear actions identified, timelines and phasing, costs, and coordination milestones.	Consult	Consult (Oct) Consult (Dec)
Phase 5: IF NEEDED: Council Action 2027 Q1 -	-	-	N/A	N/A

Schedule



Next Steps

- **March** OSBT Meeting
 - OSMP will return to the Board in March to summarize the assessment findings and preview the April community engagement window.
- **April** Community Engagement Window
 - OSMP will conduct public outreach and intercept surveys to gather community perspectives on current multimodal access challenges and early opportunities. OSBT will receive a summary of engagement themes and intercept survey results as well as have the opportunity to provide input at the **June** OSBT meeting
- Ongoing Updates
 - Following each engagement window, staff will provide OSBT with engagement summaries at board meetings and offer the opportunity for the Board to respond to the input and share their own feedback.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Open Space Board of Trustees

FROM: Dan Burke, Director, Open Space and Mountain Parks
Heather Swanson, Deputy Director, Resource Stewardship
Brian Lieberman, Ecological Stewardship Senior Manager
Andy Pelster, Agricultural and Water Stewardship Senior Manager

DATE: December 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Written Information: 2025 OSMP Prairie Dog Management

The purpose of this written update is to provide the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) with general background and updates on the prairie dog management program ahead of the annual prairie dog public meeting and a more formal update to OSBT scheduled for the February OSBT meeting. The annual prairie dog public meeting is scheduled for January 12, 2026, at 5:30pm and will be held virtually.

BACKGROUND

Conservation and management of prairie dogs throughout Boulder, and on open space, has long been an item of intense community interest. While prairie dogs are a keystone species in native ecosystems, they also conflict with many human land uses. On many OSMP agricultural properties, the long-term presence of prairie dogs combined with impactful land use histories (tilling, removal of native vegetation, soil degradation, removal of historic irrigation practices, and in some cases overgrazing) leads to degraded and no longer productive agricultural lands. As a result, finding an appropriate balance between conservation and conflict management can be challenging.

Citywide prairie dog management is guided by the Wildlife Protection Ordinance and Urban Wildlife Management Plan. The Wildlife Protection Ordinance includes requirements associated with use of lethal control on prairie dogs, and damage of prairie dog burrows in conflict with human land uses.

Since 2010, prairie dog management across the OSMP land system has also been guided by the OSMP Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan. In addition, the OSMP Agricultural Resources Management Plan (2017) identifies strategies to maintain and enhance the city's agricultural operations, integrate agriculture with cultural and ecological stewardship and to enrich the community's opportunities to connect with agricultural activities on OSMP land.

Despite these overarching guiding documents, the topics and issues around degraded agricultural lands and prairie dog management, as well as management of prairie dogs on private properties within the city, receive substantial community interest and input. Following community and citywide conversations related to a private property prairie dog removal project in 2016, City Council asked the city to convene a community group to discuss prairie dog management across the city. The Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG) convened and undertook two years of work beginning in 2017.

Prairie Dog Working Group and Agricultural Land Restoration Background

In the spring of 2019, the working group's recommendations were being advanced to the OSBT and City Council for recommendation and approval. During the public hearings, some members of the community, including (Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) tenant farmers and ranchers, expressed concern that the overlap of prairie dogs on irrigated agricultural lands was making

agriculture impractical and creating operational hardships. They asked that the city examine this situation and develop ways to improve it. During the meetings at which the OSBT and City Council acted on the PDWG recommendations, they also recommended and directed staff to further evaluate these concerns.

Specifically, the OSBT and City Council identified that conflicts with the city's prairie dog management, which largely avoided use of lethal control on OSMP, and viable agricultural operations had affected OSMP's ability to fully meet the Charter purposes of Open Space and had contributed to soil degradation and soil loss. In response to the OSBT and City Council direction to examine ways to reduce conflict on irrigated lands, staff undertook an expedited process to review prairie dog management and restoration on irrigated agricultural lands during 2019 and 2020.

Prairie Dog Management in Irrigated Agricultural Lands

On August 11, 2020, City Council approved the staff/OSBT-recommended "preferred alternative" for prairie dog management on irrigated agricultural lands within a defined "project area" in the northern portion of the OSMP land system. The preferred alternative included removal of prairie dogs from irrigated lands using a combination of relocation and in-burrow humane lethal control, steps to exclude prairie dogs from recolonization, a commitment to the restoration of soil condition and agricultural productivity as well as changes to citywide policies to allow damage of prairie dog burrows from typical agricultural activities on irrigated agricultural lands, so long as that damage is limited in the depth of disturbance. The City Council memo with the full details of the preferred alternative can be viewed here:

<https://documents.bouldercolorado.gov/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=173530&dbid=0&repo=LF8PRO D2>

This approach was built from actions recommended by community members, including agricultural tenants and peer agencies, as well as staff's experience managing prairie dogs and previous attempts to restore agricultural lands in the presence of prairie dogs.

The preferred alternative involves tradeoffs, including impacts to prairie dog associated species through direct mortality with lethal control in burrows, loss of current prairie dog habitat and loss of prey for predator species using these properties including raptors, badgers, coyotes and others and prairie dog barriers on a large scale that create fragmentation and present barriers to movement for a variety of wildlife.

The preferred alternative included evaluation criteria for prioritizing which properties would be managed first to maximize success and benefit while minimizing these ecological trade-offs. The direction from OSBT and approved by City Council included (dependent on budget) that OSMP would annually undertake:

- Approximately 30-40 acres of prairie dog removals by relocation from OSMP irrigated fields (and up to 20 individual prairie dogs from other city priority projects) to OSMP receiving sites.
- Approximately 100-200 acres of prairie dog removals in the project area by in-burrow humane lethal control.
- Both relocations and lethal control would be followed first by the installation of barriers (fences) in appropriate locations to reduce subsequent recolonization by neighboring prairie dog colonies and the need for relocation and humane lethal control, and then second by the restoration of soils and vegetation.

- Previously prohibited agricultural activities on OSMP irrigated fields resulting in damage to prairie dog burrows would be allowed.

Following City Council’s direction, staff worked with citywide wildlife and city attorney office staff to obtain a special permit for lethal control, and modifying the language in the wildlife protection ordinance to allow burrow disturbance on irrigated agricultural lands related to certain agricultural activities such as keyline plowing or shallow tillage.

Between 2020 and 2022, staff worked with lessees and contractors to implement the “preferred alternative” including lethal control of prairie dogs and restoration on irrigated agricultural land in the northern portion of the OSMP land system as defined by the “preferred alternative” approved by City Council. During this timeframe, prairie dogs were removed from 348 acres of irrigated agricultural land, including 216 acres of lethal control, and 132 acres of relocation. These removals were followed by restoration activities on all properties where prairie dogs were removed, including water infrastructure maintenance and improvements, soil leveling, application of soil amendments and planting/seeding of vegetation.

2023 Comprehensive Evaluation

In 2023, staff undertook a comprehensive review of the program to determine if any modifications would be necessary to fully realize the goals of the program. During a variety of opportunities for public feedback, four OSBT meetings and two City Council meetings, modifications were made and included:

- City Council approval to expand removal program system-wide on irrigable agricultural lands designated as transition and removal areas* and associated changes to the special permit for lethal control.
- City Council approval to expand burrow disturbance allowance for agricultural activities to 6 inches (12 inches with notification) system-wide on irrigable agricultural lands designated as transition and removal areas and associated modifications to the wildlife protection ordinance.
- Hiring additional staff, purchasing equipment and increasing budget to bring lethal control in-house, with contractors only supplementing staff efforts in prairie dog removal.

In 2023-2024, staff accomplished removal on 438 acres of prairie dogs from irrigated agricultural properties, including 44 acres through relocation, and 394 acres through lethal control. In addition, restoration activities were performed on approximately 600 acres of agricultural lands..

Staff have found that the restoration activities following prairie dog removal can be challenging, expensive, and require several seasons to realize positive results on previously degraded properties. Recolonization of prairie dogs is common, even with robust barriers. Further complicating efforts, infrastructure on many properties has fallen into disrepair with the absence of ongoing agriculture and irrigation activities. Since 2023, staff have focused additional energy and resources on these restoration projects. Prairie dog removal is the first step in these projects, but the ultimate goal of restoring agricultural production is reliant on ongoing, successful restoration and revegetation efforts followed by tenant management of the property to sustain the ongoing agricultural management.

*Transition and Removal Areas are prairie dog colony management designations created in the 2010 Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan. These two designations are focused on properties where prairie dog management conflicts with other land management goals, most frequently irrigated agricultural uses..

2025 Management

2025 prairie dog management and agricultural restoration is ongoing following plans presented to the community, OSBT and City Council at the 2024 annual prairie dog updates. Prairie dog mapping has been completed for 2025, and post-processing of the spatial data is underway to prepare data to present as part of the 2025 annual community prairie dog update meeting to be held in January. Staff are also working with 7 neighbors to ensure 2025 barrier cost-share grants are closed out and planned barriers are completed in 2025.

Restoration efforts are ongoing, and staff are focusing substantial resources to ensure that restoration is successful in meeting the ultimate goal of the program: restoring degraded agricultural lands and returning them to agricultural production.

Because staff underwent a comprehensive review of the program in 2023, and is still in the early stages of implementing those modifications, large modifications to the prairie dog removal program in 2026 are not planned. However, staff continually evaluate the efficacy of all prairie dog removal, and restoration activities to look for opportunities to increase efficiency and success.

In our efforts to maximize our efficacy in meeting removal goals, staff are working with the city's urban wildlife coordinator and City Attorney's office to evaluate whether options to allow some lethal control year-round (not completely avoiding lethal control during the prairie dog breeding/pupping season) can be accomplished within existing policy and municipal code. These conversations are focused on removal in areas of recolonization of previously removed prairie dog colonies. Staff are evaluating options that would adhere to the City's and community's long-standing priority for using humane lethal control techniques when, lethal control is necessary, while minimizing the amount of lethal control required in recolonization areas over the long-term.

Next Steps

The annual prairie dog update community meeting will be held on January 12, 2026. Staff will host the meeting online with community members able to view presentations ahead of time on OSMP's website, and ask questions of staff during the live meeting. A recording of the meeting will also be posted on OSMP's website for community members unable to participate on January 12th. The meeting will be followed by a 1-week comment period for the community to ask any additional questions and provide feedback on planned prairie dog management in 2026. Following the meeting, staff will provide the OSBT with a memo and presentation on February 11, 2026, and then prepare an Information Packet to City Council in March 2026.