



ROCK LEDGE RANCH

HISTORIC SITE
LIVING HISTORY ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 6299 • Colorado Springs, CO 80934
(719) 578-6777
www.rockledgeranch.com

August 5, 2021

John Stark
Garden of the Gods Manager
Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services

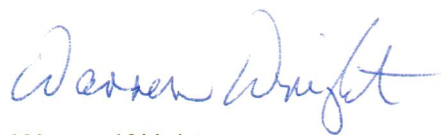
Dear John,

The Living History Association at Rock Ledge Ranch strongly supports the proposed revenue increase for TOPS. With all the natural resources of this city, county, and region on full display every day, it is paramount that we as a community take additional measures to protect and expand these exquisite amenities that are a part of our everyday life. Asking our citizens & neighbors to fund these expanded measures is highly appropriate.

Here at Rock Ledge Ranch, we see first-hand the connection of the people and the land every day. With all the anxiety and stresses of the past 18 months, many citizens have turned to the Ranch for a peaceful break and reconnection to the land and life as it once was.

We urge the City Council to approve inclusion of the proposed revenue increase for TOPS at its next meeting on August 10th.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Wright

President, Living History Association at Rock Ledge Ranch

cc: Andy Morris, Manager, Rock Ledge Ranch

MISSION STATEMENT

To Preserve, Protect, Restore and Maintain the natural and Historic site which is set within an open park, while providing opportunities for safe, educational experiential programs which represent and interpret the social, agricultural and economical development of the Pikes Peak Region from 1775 through 1920.

Pikes Peak Marathon, Inc.

America's Ultimate Challenge®

PIKES PEAK ASCENT®

PIKES PEAK MARATHON®

A Colorado Non-profit Corporation

(719) 473-2625 info@pikespeakmarathon.org www.pikespeakmarathon.org

July 30, 2021

Colorado Springs City Council
107 North Nevada Avenue, Suite 300
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Dear City Council Members,

The Pikes Peak Marathon organization stages four popular and demanding running races. Our mission statement is to provide exceptional races in outstanding venues that promote health and physical fitness, and gives back to the communities and environments in which they occur. As many of the local runners use and train on the trails in the Colorado Springs area, they have greatly benefited in using the 66 parks and 50 miles of trails provided by the TOPS program.

The Pikes Peak Marathon organization appreciates all that the TOPS program has been able to provide for the citizens and visitors of Colorado Springs. However, there is a critical need for increased funding in order to better facilitate a more proactive, sustainable, and strategic approach to the city's park portfolio.

Colorado Springs is increasingly known for its spectacular parks and scenery. Our economy thrives on the tourism attracted to our famous parks, as well as our events held in these special places. With the increase in popularity and population, there is even a greater need for open space acquisitions. However, let us also make sure that these acquisitions are properly fund for their timely development and ongoing maintenance.

We encourage you to support the tax increase being proposed by Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services. The large number of TOPS acquisitions recently added to the city's portfolio will greatly benefit from an increase in funding support and help to ensure that these become the amazing public properties envisioned when acquired.

We are fortunate to live in a beautiful place and enjoy exceptional world-famous parks. Let's be sure that General Palmer's vision that began with him donating many of these, can continue and also include our ability to support these in the way that they deserve.

We appreciate your consideration and all you do on behalf of the City of Colorado Springs.

Sincerely,

Ron Ilgen
President, Pikes Peak Marathon, Inc.
Former Chair of the Colorado Springs Parks Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board

Pikes Peak Pickleball Association

www.pikespeakpickleball.com



Karen Palus
Director
City of Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
1401 Recreation Way
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80905

August 3, 2021

Dear Karen,

The Pikes Peak Pickleball Association (PPPA) supports the TOPS initiative to increase the rate of sales and use tax dedicated to trails, open space, and parks from its current rate of .1% to .2%. The purpose of this increase includes developing and maintaining parks which directly benefits the members of our pickleball community. Pike Peak Pickleball Association's nonprofit mission is to promote pickleball in El Paso County and this TOPS initiative will help ensure that the city parks in which we play the sport we love are preserved and expanded. Thank you for all the hard work your organization does to beautify and maintain the city of Colorado Springs.

Sincerely,

Joe Johnson
President of the Board of Directors
Pikes Peak Pickleball Association



We advocate for the creation and conservation of an interconnected network of trails, parks and open spaces across the Pikes Peak region.

The Trails and Open Space Board of Directors unanimously supported the TOPS ballot initiative under consideration by the Colorado Springs City Council.

The Board vote took place at our July 28th meeting.

During TOSC's last strategic planning session 5 years ago, increased public funding to support acquisition, development and maintenance for city parks, trails and open spaces was declared a top organizational priority. Since that time TOSC staff and Board have been actively preparing the community for this opportunity with support for two surveys, eliminating the 30-word limit and providing ongoing TOPS information to our members, partners and residents of the region - highlighting successes and identifying needs. From the very beginning Trust for Public Land was a key partner. Their advice and experience with similar ballot measures proved to be indispensable.

TOSC hired a consultant to create a "TOPS Briefing Book" that provided background and made the case for an extension and increase. We then brought members of the community together in small groups to get their input and garner their support.

With the support of the TOPS Working Committee, Parks Advisory Board, Mayor and members of City Council, we are convinced this is our opportunity to take this initiative to voters in November and not only secure the future of TOPS for the next 20 years, but also honor and continue the vision set down by our Founder 150 years ago.

Susan Davies

Susan Davies, Executive Director

Trails and Open Space Coalition

Andrew,

Please pass this along...I hope it helps.

I am the President of the Pikes Peak Catamounts Hockey Association in Colorado Springs. I am writing to lend my support to the TOPS Ballot Item concerning Sertich Ice Center.

Sertich was built in 1975 (my oldest son played for Doherty HS in the mid 1990's, and Sertich still looks the same today!!) and looks it's age. The staff at Sertich does a fabulous job in maintaining this old facility meaning minimal downtime, and the unimaginable task of scheduling ice.

Besides being old, it has also outgrown its capacity. It may have been fine in 1975, but not today. At a minimum a second sheet of ice SHOULD be added. The building addition could be a steel building to minimize building costs that can be used for the actual rink.

I'm beyond sure that that Sertich would have no problems selling ice time.

It may not hurt to have Parks Management personnel tour the Denver area rinks and compare them to Sertich. Again, at a minimum a second sheet of ice at Sertich is desperately needed.

Feel free to contact me should you have question or comments.

Regards,

Joe Seiberlich, President
Pikes Peak Catamounts Hockey Association
Jrseiberlich@q.com
Ppchpresident@gmail.com
719-640-6910



MEDICINE WHEEL TRAIL ADVOCATES

August 4, 2021
ColoradoSprings

To the TOPS Working committee:

Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates (MWTa) is a community-supported nonprofit organization of mountain bikers who build, share and protect inspiring trail experiences. Our vision is of a world class system of MTB trails in the Pikes Peak Region, and we've been pursuing it since 1991.

MWTa participated in strategic discussions about the TOPS program for over a decade, and we were pleased to be invited to participate in the Council Presidents Parks Sustainability Commission this spring of 2021. The primary goal of the commission was to develop recommendations for a TOPS renewal and extension through a Nov 2021 ballot..

The board of MWTa commends the commission on several positive aspects of the proposed ballot. We believe that in this effort we are close to language that will ensure a successful program for years to come. Notable benefits of the proposed ballot language before you include:

- a .2% sales tax, compared to .1% in the existing TOPS program, generating revenues estimated at approximately \$20M/yr, an additional \$10M/yr compared to today.
- The current tax is set to expire in 2025 while the new ballot proposes a new 20 year sunset - this provides significant resources needed to expand and maintain our Parks system well into the future, including a stable revenue stream against which we can borrow if needed
- significant additional resources to address specific issues that have plagued our Parks system for years.
 - "Taking care of what we have" - the proposed language calls for a significant increase maintenance resources, including 25% of the new total or \$5M/year
 - Lack of resources for non-TOPS properties - the proposed language clarifies that maintenance funds can be used for ALL properties, not just those purchased by TOPS. MWTa believes this is much needed, long overdue change to TOPS.
 - Maintenance of effort from the general fund - although this clause in the new language might not be 'enforceable' it clearly shows the intention that the new TOPS isn't intended as a replacement for current Parks funding through the General Fund
 - More funds for Parks development. We've had many neighborhood parks planned throughout the community, sometimes remaining unbuilt for decades - because although the land has been acquired, we have lacked the resources to turn it into a park

However one aspect of the proposed ballot does not meet a primary objective of a revision to TOPS: It does not guarantee **any** amount for OS acquisition, and opens the door for \$19M of

the \$20M yearly total to be used for maintenance, with \$1M for administration - no acquisition is guaranteed at all.

MWTA suggests that the TOPS WC update the proposed ballot language to reflect the often repeated community desire to preserve acquisition power of today's TOPS program- which has been wildly successful and popular. Open spaces have defined our community since it was established by General Palmer, and MWTA believes that the new TOPS program must reflect our ongoing commitment to this strong OS acquisition program, in writing.

According to the language in the current proposal, assuming 5%=\$1M/year is used for admin and 25%=\$5M/year for maintenance throughout the system, the remaining 70% will be allocated toward:

- Parks at 40% (of 70%, which is 28% of the total \$20M or \$5.6M/yr
- Trails and OS both each are allocated 30% of the 70% = 21% of \$20M, or \$4.2M/yr

We note that \$4.2M/yr for the OS category is about the same as the actual OS acquisition amount spend by TOPS for acquisition over the last few years. Today, OS is allocated at 60% of \$10M = \$6M/yr, of which 28% currently goes to 'stewardship' which includes salaries for TOPS rangers, and for fire mitigation. Over the the last 2 years, around \$4M/yr of the OS account has been allocated for OS **acquisition only**.

It is widely acknowledged that with the current maintenance needs and capital backlog, even the full \$20M/yr would not be enough to fund all the maintenance and operational needs of the system. Other funding sources are definitely needed to address our system needs.

It's also acknowledged that there is a list of potential acquisition targets that would benefit our parks system, and that we will not run out of properties to purchase. A recent survey of possible OS targets in the region showed the value of these properties to be over \$1B. Despite this, in any given year, for a long list of reasons, there might not be ANY suitable acquisition targets to match the funds available in the OS account. In today's TOPS, acquisition funds can be carried over year-on-year, as was done recently, and then used for purchase of the Black Canyon Quarry and PikeView quarry frontage property

It's also known that maintenance costs for OS are less than 1% of the cost per acre required to maintain Parks properties.

The proposal ballot language specifies that the 21% for OS can be used for **acquisition, improvement and maintenance with no guidance on how this is broken down, nor any definition of what constitutes an 'improvement'**. With the proposed ballot language, a Parks budget could be presented that converts the TOPS tax entirely into a maintenance fund.

MWTA believes that a successful TOPS initiative must include clear instructions that guarantees the success of the OS acquisition program throughout the life of the initiative.

MWTA suggests small changes to the proposed language. In the OS category, change the words "**acquisition, improvement and maintenance**" to "**Acquisition and Master Plan Implementation**". Or, if the word 'improvement' can be defined satisfactorily, simply drop the word 'maintenance' so that there is no chance the entire OS fund could be diverted to maintenance.

Another (slightly more complex) option would be to say that, in any given year, within the OS category, some reasonable minimum, eg 50% of the OS account or \$2.1M/year must be reserved for OS acquisition ONLY. If suitable acquisition candidates aren't ready for processing in that year, the funds must be saved for acquisition in a future year.

We believe that a change such as this, or another similar change, is necessary to ensure the future of the OS acquisition program in TOPS, and respectfully request your consideration of this small adjustment to the proposed language.

Thank you for your consideration,

David Adair

President, Board of Directors
Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates
president@medwheel.org



MEDICINE WHEEL
TRAIL ADVOCATES

A chapter of IMBA, Member of the Colorado MTB Coalition
A 501(c)3 charity E.I.N 20-5765291
PO Box 2543, Colorado Springs, CO, 80901

www.medwheel.org

Dear Members of the TOPS Working Committee and Parks Advisory Board --

I am writing to you today about your chance -- probably for the last time -- to weigh in on a proposed ballot measure to both extend the life of the current TOPS program and to double its level of funding. While on the face of it, both extension of TOPS and increased funding would seem to be no-brainers, there are several important issues which I believe require further examination.

But first -- and by way of introduction for those of us who don't know each other (and many of us do know each other) -- let me start with a few words of personal history. I have been involved in parks and open space issues here in Colorado Springs for nearly 25 years -- starting with the effort to save the then Stratton land as the first TOPS open space purchase. This led to two terms each on the TOPS Working Committee and Parks Board -- experiences I found both enjoyable and rewarding -- as I hope you do. I have also done stints on the boards of the Garden of the Gods Foundation and Trails and Open Space Coalition. More recently I played leadership roles in the fight against the City/Broadmoor "Strawberry Fields" land exchange and the subsequent "Protect our Parks" (POPS) ballot initiative to require voter approval for any such exchanges in the future. As I am sure you know, we lost on the first and won on the second.

I am a strong believer in and supporter of the TOPS program. Very simply. I think it is the best thing Colorado Springs has done for itself in the last half century. Compared to other Front Range communities, we started late and still lag far behind most of our neighbors to the north in total acres of open space land preserved. That said, we have had some spectacular success stories thanks to TOPS. I would not, for example, trade the Red Rock Canyon Open Space for the entire City for Champions extravaganza.

Thus, at this point, it would seem to make sense to extend and even increase funding for TOPS. Unfortunately, I believe there are some major flaws in the ballot language now before you -- ballot language now presumably in its final form. I also believe there were serious flaws in the process which produced this language. The process started with a "commission" of "stakeholders" convened by then City Council President Richard Skorman. This was a great idea. The group of about two dozen community leaders and park and open space advocates met virtually five times and were beginning to focus on some specific ballot language when the process was ended. I know there were several members of what might be called the "advocates" side who felt they group really needed to have at least one more meeting to try to reach consensus on what language to put forward. This didn't happen. I will

attach with this email draft language done by former TOPS WC Chair Bill Koerner that was favored by a number of the advocates. Instead, what is now before you is language drafted entirely by city parks and legal staff.

So, what is the problem? My biggest issue -- one I know others share -- is that the language is totally open-ended. TOPS money could be spent for almost anything the parks department does. What is before you now is essentially a measure to make up the post-2008 "Great Recession" deficit in the parks budget riding on the good name and reputation of TOPS. Is this a bad thing? Probably not -- but it isn't TOPS as we have known it. TOPS was first and foremost envisioned as an open space acquisition program -- together with smaller funding components for the development of new trails and parks. Yes, 2% was taken off the top for "admin" and ordinance's language does include "stewardship" in the 60% allotment for open space. However, at that time the acquisition money was seen as so sacrosanct that in a 2003 tweak of the ordinance it was deemed necessary to provide a separate 6% off the top for the maintenance of TOPS properties. In 2013 another tweak opened the 20% parks category to use for maintenance anywhere in the system. Since then more permissive readings of the ordinance have allowed more and more open space funds to go to a wide variety of "stewardship" activities.

Given this history, I believe the language should include safeguards for at least some level of open space acquisition funding. The proposed Bill Koerner language I attached would put this at 80% of the 30% open space account -- which, of course, is only 21% of the whole. Other proposals are out there that would lower this safeguard to 70%, or to even as low as 50% -- but, and bottom line, at least some level of open space acquisition money must be protected. It is argued by some proponents of the language before you that there isn't really all that much more open space to buy. Possibly true, but do we really know? We have the Jacobs study to document our park needs, but no concomitant study has been done for open space needs -- particularly as our city expands farther to the north, east and southeast.

I must say I find the 5% off the top for "admin" to be excessive -- a cool \$1 million and more than three times what is provided currently. Really?

I hope you will consider these issues. I will leave you with one more thought/question. Do we really have to do this now? The current TOPS mandate runs until 2025. This November's election is an odd-year election which historically produces a low turnout. Would November 2022 or even -- and possibly better still -- our municipal election in April of 2023 be

better? Between now and then there is no change in mayor or council membership -- so the local political dynamic shouldn't change. Would it be worth waiting and doing a more detailed look at future open space needs and options and getting it right?

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider the points raised above. If you have further questions, I can be reached by phone or email at the number/address given here.

With best wishes --

Kent Obee

phone: 719-634-2856

email: kentobee@aol.com