

One small step for Littleton prairie dogs

By Sarah Sparhawk

Gina Writz had read an article about two plots of land in Littleton, Colorado, which had been sold for development. She became concerned.

“What are they going to do with the prairie dogs?” “Probably not something Writz could stomach knowing about.

Black-tailed prairie dogs, the most common of the species in the state, are granted no protection by Fish and Wildlife, so they would most likely be killed.

“I’m an animal lover in general,” she said. “It’s never been ‘my mission is to save prairie dogs’ but when I found out the option is poisoning...”

Writz became compelled to prevent harm to the prairie dogs on the corner of Wadsworth Blvd. and Coal Mine Ave. She was going to find them new digs.

Armed only with a compassionate heart, Writz searched for information that could help her. The high school counselor admitted she had “no idea” what she was doing when she began her battle in July 2013. However, she was determined to save these prairie dogs, taking it upon herself and spending a sporadic three months finding a place to relocate the small colony to. She attended the annual Prairie Dog Gala, hosted by the Prairie Dog Coalition, in search of support. She met Ghia Speakman, the Coalition’s programs manager.

“Gina is so dedicated,” said Speakman. “She has been working so hard on this.”

According to the Prairie Dog Coalition, part of the Humane Society of the United States, prairie dogs are environmental superstars. As a key species, they provide food, shelter and [more](#) for other wild animals and the ecosystem. The prairie dog population is rapidly decreasing in the United States and Mexico, which is why Writz knows even the smallest colony is crucial.

This month, she went on [9 News](#) to spread awareness of her goal.

Writz diligently completed applications for relocation land, endlessly met with homeowner associations near open spaces, and worked her natural charisma on the city’s board of directors regularly.

Under the impression that Foothills Park and Recreation was supportive of her cause, it was not until December it was decided that she and the prairie dogs would no longer have their support.

“I was absolutely crushed and had nowhere else to turn,” she said. “To me, this project was done. And I was also upset that they made this decision behind my back and didn’t even invite me to the meeting. All my hard work had come to an end.”

But she had spent too many years getting to know these prairie dogs and grew to enjoy them. At this point, there was nothing to stop her from fighting for them.

“What do I have to lose? A couple people saying mean things about me online or saying ‘crazy animal lover’? That’s fine. I will take that.”

Backed by 45-50 community members, Writz stood in front of Foothills one last time.

Maybe it was her infectious smile and the ease at which she speaks. Or maybe it was because the board knew she was never going to leave them alone, but as of June 26, Writz successfully claimed a piece of land for the homeless prairie dogs. At last, all her protesting for prairie dog protection paid off.

“...this will be the end of poisoning prairie dogs. My hopes are that they designate land as a wildlife sanctuary and land for [prairie] dogs to be relocated to,” Writz said.

While humane removal of prairie dogs is seldom explored or utilized due to the length of time and money involved, this is a huge step for the grassland rodent and their fan base. Writz, however, can guarantee that she will be there.

“I’m not going anywhere. If there is another group of prairie dogs in danger of losing their homes – I’m on it,” she said.