



## Memorandum

TO: Vail Town Council  
FROM: Community Development Department  
DATE: March 21, 2017  
SUBJECT: Comprehensive Open Lands Plan Update

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this agenda item is to inform the Town Council on the progress being made on the update to the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan.

### II. BACKGROUND

In December, 2016, the Town authorized an update to the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan (the Plan). The process for updating the Plan involves revisiting the existing Plan to identify initiatives that have been addressed (and those that have not); evaluating via a community engagement process the goals, objectives and initiatives of the existing Plan; and drafting an updated plan with goals, objectives and initiatives identified during the process to address the community's needs.

One of the first steps in the process was to host three (3) Community Scoping Sessions. The purpose of these meetings was to inform the community about the existing plan and to understand what is on the community's mind with regard to the Open Lands Plan. No formal presentations were made. Rather, participants were asked to visit a number of stations, each of which provided information about the existing Plan and Town-owned lands.

The next step in the process was a more in-depth Community Workshop, held on February 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Grand View Room, where the facilitator provided background information on what has changed since the original Plan and context for the discussion. Participants were asked to work in small groups to develop a response on each of the topic areas:

#### 1. Land Acquisitions

- a. Protection of Environmental Resources
- b. Housing
- c. USFS Land Swap

#### 2. Trails

- a. General/User Groups
- b. Wildlife and Environmental Considerations
- c. Neighborhood Connectors

#### 3. Use of Town Lands

- a. RETT
- b. Designated Open Space

c. Public Facilities

### III. WORKSHOP DISCUSSION AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Brief summaries of the workshop group discussion follow.

#### **Land Acquisition:**

##### ***a.) Protection of Environmental Resources***

Participants were asked to provide parameters for environmental resources (e.g., what should be protected, how to prioritize lands for this purpose, etc.).

Consensus amongst groups was reached that the maintenance of open lands should be included as a top priority as well as the “acquisition, preservation, and protection of natural open space”. Sensitive environmental resources were defined as follows.

- Gore Creek ecosystem, corridor, and water quality
- Wildlife and wildlife habitat
- Wildlife corridors to allow for the free and safe movement of wildlife through town, to the creek, and sensitive seasonal zones. This discussion included wildlife crossovers for I-70

#### **Community Suggestions**

- Minimize wildlife/human interactions (e.g. wildlife-resistant containers, education).
- Minimize pesticides or use organic/natural fertilizers and pest management options wherever possible.
- Explore possibility of controlled burns for weed control and habitat restoration.
- Town of Vail should purchase 1602 Matterhorn Circle for wildlife corridor and access to Gore Creek.
- Further minimize and consider use of Mag Chloride when possible- or find safer alternatives.
- The Plan should seek to maintain, encourage, and protect native biodiversity both in animal and plant life.
- Use Plan to help mitigate and treat stormwater runoff where appropriate.
- Noise pollution- both I-70 and loud vehicles.
- Designate the Middle Bench of Donovan Park Open Space.

##### ***b.) Housing***

Participants were asked what role housing should play in the Plan, and under what circumstances is housing appropriate on town land.

A general consensus was reached that the Plan should not focus on housing. However, with respect to available lands within the town, the group agreed that it depended on the parcel; open land should stay open land, preferring infill or redevelopment opportunities for housing. The group was in favor of re-development of existing housing, especially in seasonal employee neighborhoods to increase density in those locations.

#### **Community Suggestions**

- Housing is only appropriate if the Town can acquire new developable / re-developable land and there is no impact on sensitive environmental resources.
- Housing should be addressed by the private sector or through public-private partnerships with the Town. It's not primary a Town responsibility. It's considered the "cost of doing business."
- "Housing should be encouraged on Safeway parking lot."
- Research/implement additional phases/opportunities at Buzzard Park.

### ***c.) USFS Land***

Participants were asked to identify the circumstances under which they would support a land swap with the USFS.

There was no support for a land swap with the USFS, unless the land was threatened by other development (i.e., if the USFS was given the authority to sell land to private entities and began doing so).

## **Trails**

### ***a.) General Trail Use***

Participants were asked for their feedback on whom trails should serve, types, wildlife and environmental considerations, how to reduce user group conflicts and community needs.

In general participants were in favor of trails and not opposed to expansion of trails (with the exception of the Vail Trail, which several opposed), provided they are properly constructed and managed with concern for wildlife. They preferred the terminology of *rec paths* over *bike path* (Gore Valley Trail).

#### **Community Suggestions**

- Improve existing trails (e.g. signage and maintenance at trailheads).
- Accessibility - improve access for wheelchairs and other accessible devices, (not necessarily pavement, but proper grading, widths, etc. to provide fair access to a growing number of disabled and elderly).
- Research directional or one-way trails to minimize conflict.
- Need for soft surface connections to the west (make Davos/Buffalo Ridge/Triple Trespass legal trails with easements, property purchases, etc.).
- Dual trails- i.e. Eagle single tract side walks, soft surface and paved to allow for slower speeds and more traffic. Cross-country skiing v.s. snowshoeing trails at Nordic center
- Reduce pressure on valley-floor trails by improving trails on Vail Mountain.
- Research alternate day use on certain trails.
- Add a speed limit on the recreation paths.
- Paved recreation paths need to be extended to complete connection through town instead of simply widening shoulders for bike lanes.
- Mitigate impact of "groups" from rental stores, tours, etc. taking up whole recreation path.

### ***b.) Trails, wildlife and environmental impacts***

Participants agreed that wildlife and environmental considerations were critical for trail development. Though suggestions were varied, participants agreed that trails should be

constructed properly to discourage cutting of corners, braiding, widening, and limit or do not develop trails where a high probability of wildlife interaction exists.

#### Community Suggestions

- To manage dog interactions- certain areas must be on-leash required.
- Improve signage for wildlife concerns and education.
- Use best available research to determine proper users, seasonal closures, and explore possibility of time of day closures (dusk to dawn, etc.).
- Create a “trail host program” for enforcement and education on wildlife ethic, trail ethic, and user programs.
- Create a variety of trail types based on location- some should be paved, while others should be narrow and overgrown.
- Further use of bike shops and outdoor shops for trail education.

### ***c.) Neighborhood Connector Trails***

#### Community Suggestions

- Inventory existing trails, identify needs.
- Improve or decommission social trails (e.g. Intermountain-Stephens Park to Vermont road, or back to Intermountain water tower, etc.)
- Create easements in areas to ensure trail access is maintained (e.g. connection to North Trail from the end of Garmisch Drive).
- Research the creation of easements to ensure trail access.

### **Use of Town Lands**

Participants were asked to discuss land purchased with Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT), Designated Open Space, and to anticipate future needs for public facilities or public uses. Participants raised questions about how, when, and should land that was purchased with RETT dollars be changed, and what constitutes designated open space.

### ***A.) Land Purchased with Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT)***

#### Community Suggestions

- Further research using the Eagle Valley Land Trust or conservation easements for protected areas.
- Middle Bench of Donovan should be Designated Open Space.
- 1602 Matterhorn Circle should be purchased and also designated open space.
- The land between the East Vail Interchange and Katsos Ranch Road/VMS should be designated open space to protect big horn winter habitat.
- Purchase land and designate as open space for expanded habitat protection- especially for moose.

### **Public Facilities**

#### Community Suggestions

- The Town should discontinue convention center discussions- there is enough capacity in hotels and the town shouldn't compete with businesses for convention space.
- There is a need for a performing arts center or concert center. The old CMC theater should be purchased.

- There is a need for another ice rink in the winter.
- There is a need for a public pool.
- Safety structures are needed to keep vehicle accidents on I-70, prevent vehicles from coming off I-70 and onto the Frontage road.

#### **IV. NEXT STEPS**

The next step in the planning process is to conduct further research based upon the feedback at the workshop on additional parcels, easements, trail development, wildlife and environmental impacts, and additional parcels for protection or other purposes. An analysis of all Town-owned lands and the formation of a Technical Expert Group are also ongoing.

The next Community Meeting which will involve a more in-depth discussion of specific parcels will take place on April 25th in the Grand View Room at Lionshead. After the second Community Meeting, another update on the planning process will be presented to Town Council, currently scheduled for May 16<sup>th</sup>.