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**Memorandum**

TO: Town Council

FROM: Community Development Department

DATE: August 7, 2018

SUBJECT: An update to the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan, pursuant to Section 12-3-7, Amendment, Vail Town Code. (PEC17-0049)

Applicant: Town of Vail, represented by Braun Associates, Inc.  
Planner: Chris Neubecker

**I. Purpose**

The purpose of this memo is to present the recommendations of the draft 2018 Open Lands Plan Update relating to Chapter 4, Trails. Staff will also follow up on discussion from the July 17, 2018 meeting on Chapter 3, Town Lands and Use of Lands, including answers to Council questions and summarizing potential refinements to the Plan. There will also be discussion on the next steps in the Council's review of the Plan.

For a copy of the draft 2018 Open Lands Plan Update, please select the following link:

<https://www.vailgov.com/openlandsupdate>

**II. Trails**

The 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan included a discussion on trails, including a concept plan with new trail ideas, proposed trailheads and new bike paths. Four of the five priority areas identified in the 1994 Plan included issues relating to trails. These priorities from the 1994 Plan included:

- Protect sensitive natural habitat areas, riparian areas, and hazard areas;
- Extend the Vail Trail to East Vail and add several trailheads to access the trail;
- Add a new trail on the north side and western half of Town to connect existing trailheads and neighborhoods;
- Add three "trailheads" in the core areas to access Vail Mountain trails and inform visitors of trail opportunities and provide better access to Gore Creek;
- Add bike lanes to the north and south frontage roads (the entire length of Town) and add paved shoulders to Vail Valley Drive.

Some of these actions have already been implemented, including the construction of the North Trail, installation of bike lanes along North and South Frontage Roads, and installation of trailheads and improved trail signage.

The draft 2018 Open Lands Plan Update addressed trails in much greater detail. This Plan Update includes a vision statement for Vail's trails and extensive discussion on the impact of trails, including the potential impact on wildlife.

The Plan Update includes a Conceptual Trails Plan that identifies twelve potential new trail "ideas" and other trail improvements and programs. The Plan also outlines a process for a trails plan and related environmental and wildlife analysis that would be completed prior to any new trail development.

In the public process of developing this Plan Update, there was a strong outreach to the community to gain input on trail related issues. The public engagement process included scoping sessions and community meetings, discussions and meetings with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, small group meetings, and a trails workshop. The vast majority of those attending the public meetings indicated that trails provide a benefit to the community, and the community's use of trails is significant. While there was mixed support for expanding the existing trail system, there was clear consensus that any new trails need to be sustainable and sensitive to potential impacts on the natural environment and wildlife.

As a result of the small group meetings on trails, five primary themes evolved that provided the basis for the vision statement for trails. The themes included safety, sustainability, accessibility, diversity and connectivity. The study included an inventory of 90 existing hard and soft surface trails totaling nearly 200 miles in and around Vail. The inventory also identified 14 miles of unsanctioned trails, or social trails, including many neighborhood connector trails that are used extensively.

A major concern with the expansion of trails is the impact that trails and trail users can have on wildlife. In response to this concern, a wildlife forum was held with a panel of local and regional wildlife experts. The wildlife forum confirmed concerns over the reduction in wildlife populations in the Vail valley. A video of the wildlife forum can be found at this link:

<https://www.vailgov.com/openlandsupdate>

As presented, the draft 2018 Open Lands Plan Update recommends additional study of potential wildlife and other environmental impacts from new trails as part of a trails planning process and before the construction of any new trails. Four main parameters were used to determine which trail ideas to include in the Conceptual Trails Plan. These include:

- The trail is located such that it may be feasible through design, construction, management and mitigating measures to minimize adverse impacts on wildlife.

- The trail be designed and constructed to be safe for all intended users or the trail improves the safety of the trail system.
- The trail improves or expands recreational opportunities for one or more user group.
- The trail improves neighborhood connectivity or provides beneficial linkages between existing trails.

Based on these criteria, several trail ideas were removed from consideration for the Conceptual Trails Plan. Future wildlife and environmental analysis will be completed as a part of making final decisions on any new trail development.

### **III. Input from Town Council and Next Steps**

The Community Development Department requests that the Town Council provide feedback on any elements of the Trails (Chapter 4) section of the draft 2018 Open Lands Plan Update that may need to be modified. Staff will take your suggested plan refinements, and will return with edits during meeting #6. At that time, we will present the final draft of the plan.

### **IV. Attachments**

- A. Open Lands Presentation from Braun Associates
- B. Public Comment