



## Memorandum

TO: Planning and Environmental Commission  
FROM: Community Development Department  
DATE: June 26, 2017  
SUBJECT: Comprehensive Open Lands Plan Update

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this session is to inform the Planning and Environmental Commission on the progress being made on the update to the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan (Plan). The original Plan, survey results and additional information may be accessed:

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

### II. BACKGROUND

In December, 2016, the Town authorized an update to the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands 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 reaffirmed or identified during the process to address the community's needs.

#### Step 1: Initial Community Scoping Sessions

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 was 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.

#### Step 2: Parcel Research and Evaluation

##### Town-owned Lands

All 165 town-owned parcels were evaluated to determine if or how they could be used to further the goals of the Plan. In performing this evaluation it was assumed that existing uses would remain. For example, Bighorn Park would remain a park and the Public Works facility would remain the Public Works facility. The following types of parcels were identified:

- Developed parcels such as the library, town hall and parking structures
- Park and recreation development parcels such as Ford Park and the golf course
- Designated Open Space parcels
- Parcels encumbered by natural constraints such as flood plain or steep slopes

After culling the parcels above, eight town-owned parcels remained. Of these eight, seven were deemed too small to be functional for any other use or were restricted by covenants. The one

exception is the Middle Bench of Donovan Park (although this parcel was purchased with Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT) funds and it is currently designated a park).

### **Private Undeveloped Parcels**

All privately owned, undeveloped parcels were evaluated to determine if or how acquisition could further the goals of the Plan. Parcels were categorized as follows in order to provide framework for evaluation.

#### Isolated/low density Lots

It was assumed that isolated residential lots in established neighborhoods would not have the potential to further the goals of the Plan and the majority of these lots were eliminated from consideration. For various reasons, five such lots could be considered for acquisition.

#### Gore Creek Parcels

In response to community input regarding the importance of protecting Gore Creek and improving water quality, all parcels fronting on Gore Creek were initially considered. Six of these thirteen parcels could be considered for acquisition.

#### Action Item Parcels from '94 Plan

Twelve parcels identified for acquisition (or easements) from the current Plan were evaluated with respect to whether they should remain in the updated plan. Further discussion of two of these twelve parcels is recommended.

#### Other Parcels

A handful of other parcels that did not fit into the categories above could be considered for inclusion in the updated Plan.

### **Step 3: Outreach to Technical Expert Groups**

Concurrent to the community workshops, staff and Braun and Associates conducted outreach to Technical Expert Groups (TEGs), including Vail Resorts, the US Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Vail Recreation District, CDOT, Vail Fire, Vail Local Housing Authority, Eagle River Water and Sanitation District, the Eagle Valley Land Trust. This outreach will continue throughout the process to include more TEGs as applicable.

### **Step 4: In-Depth Community Workshops**

The next step in the process was two more in-depth Community Workshops, held on February 22<sup>nd</sup> and June 15<sup>th</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.

#### **February 22<sup>nd</sup> Workshop**

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

### **June 15<sup>th</sup> Workshop**

Participants were asked to listen to the presentation and provide feedback as a group on individual parcels, both publically and privately owned, as well as take part in an initial discussion about trails in Vail.

## **III. WORKSHOP DISCUSSION AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

Brief summaries of the workshop group discussion follow.

### **February 22<sup>nd</sup> Workshop**

#### **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**

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

#### ***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 redevelopment opportunities for housing. The group was in favor of re-development of existing housing, especially traditionally locals' 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 a primary Town responsibility. It's considered the "cost of doing business."
- Housing should be encouraged on the 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, trail types, wildlife and environmental considerations, and 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.

### **June 15<sup>th</sup> Workshop**

The focus of the second of the two community meetings included an evaluation and discussion of specific parcels and:

- Town of Vail owned lands and how they could be used to further the goals of the Open Lands Plan,
- The Action Plan from the 1994 Open Lands Plan and how it could be updated to identify lands for acquisition that could further the goals of the Open Lands Plan, and
- A vision for trails within Vail, the process for the potential development of new trails and new trail ideas.

A summary of community feedback follows.

#### Environment

- Reiteration of the need for open space as a critical value to the Vail community, ecosystem, wildlife habitat and quality of life was a consistent theme throughout the discussion.
  - The Middle Bench of Donovan Park should remain open space, and be designated as such, due to the abundance of wildlife and recreational use.
  - The town should encourage Vail Resorts to place the East Vail parcel above the Vail Mountain School into a conservation easement or designated open space, due to its critical bighorn sheep habitat.
  - The Town should ensure that the passion/emphasis on wildlife and environment are captured and not watered down. In general, if the town can acquire a parcel for protection of the Creek or undeveloped land, it should make this a priority.
  - Ensure that maintenance (weeds, etc.) are included in the Plan.
  - Ensure that RETT parcels remain open space and make it more difficult/impossible to reverse.

#### Housing

- The town cannot accommodate all of the housing needs within the town boundaries; need to look elsewhere, partnerships for down valley development. Specific parcels, such as the 3 identified on the north side of the Safeway may be appropriate for housing, but the market should address this.

#### Trails

- The town should not add more hard surface trails except along roadways.
- Identifying user groups and demand is critical.
- Ensure that actual wildlife impacts are evaluated (no current studies on the uniqueness of this valley).
- Neighborhood connectors should be within town boundaries, not high in the forest.
- A West Vail connection would be heavily used.

- Widening of trails has negatively impacted user experience.
- USFS trail requirements must be met (multi-user).
- The Vail Trail should remain a walking trail.
- Be aware that additional trails could increase the parking challenges Vail already has.

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

The next step in the planning process is to provide the Vail Town Council an update on the progress to date at the July 18<sup>th</sup> session, and explore recommended actions for the Plan in a series of public hearings. Once input has been gathered and the draft Plan completed, the Planning and Environmental Commission will be requested to provide feedback and ultimately make a recommendation of adoption of the Plan to the Town Council. An analysis of all Town-owned lands and outreach to the TEGs are ongoing, as well as field research on existing and proposed trails led by SE Group. A trails-specific workshop will be held this August.