



Memorandum

TO: Vail Town Council
FROM: Community Development Department
DATE: August 15, 2017
SUBJECT: Comprehensive Open Lands Plan Update

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this session is to provide the Vail Town Council an overview of the progress to date on the update to the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan (Plan), and to seek direction on the following policy statements. The original Plan, survey results and additional information may be accessed: <http://www.vailgov.com/openlandsupdate>

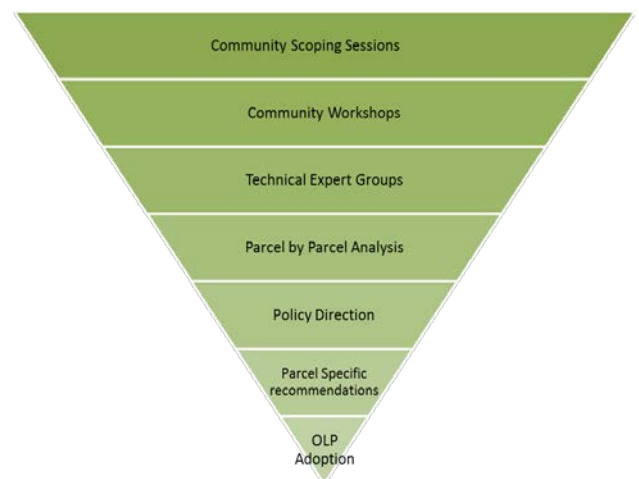
1. *The Vail Town Council supports/does not support the acquisition of private lands for the following purposes, consistent with the 1994 Open Lands Plan:*
 - a. *Affordable Housing*
 - b. *Open Space*
 - c. *Parks*
 - d. *Natural Area Preservation*
 - e. *Public Facilities*
2. *The Vail Town Council supports/does not support acquiring lands adjacent to municipal boundaries from the US Forest Service for purposes a.-e., above.*
3. *The Vail Town Council supports/does not support the use of conservation easements to further protect town-owned lands.*

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

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 22nd and June 15th 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 22nd 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 15th 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

June 15th 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. TRAILS

Improvement of the trail and bike path system was identified as the #2 priority of the 1994 Open Lands Plan. Many of the recommendations, including construction of the North Trail and the addition of widened shoulders on the Frontage Roads were completed. However, the OLP trails plan was generally presented at a Master Plan level, and details were vague. As the town moved to implement another of the Plan's recommendations in 2015 (extend the Vail Trail to East Vail), the project was met with some opposition and was tabled in favor of a more detailed trails plan.

What's been done:

- Trails presentation/discussions within the context of three (3) Community Open Houses and a more detailed discussion at the June 15th workshop at roundtables.
- Two (2) meetings with Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials to discuss potential new trails. This resulted in the removal of several trail sections from the concept plan due to sensitive wildlife habitat such as bighorn sheep winter range.
- One (1) meeting with U.S. Forest Service officials to discuss the approval process for any potential new trails. This is discussed in more detail below.
- Hiring of S.E. Group, a planning consultant with experience in trails, outdoor amenity and wildlife habitat planning.
- GIS Inventory of existing trails and social trails.

USFS Process:

The USFS wants to ensure that any new trails are well-vetted and fit within a regional trails context. With this in mind, they have recommended the following multi-step process:

- Develop a Trails Master Plan for Vail that shows all potential new trails. These trails should be shown on a map in a general 200 yard-wide corridor.
- The trails plan should be discussed in a regional context with the other Eagle County communities including Minturn, Eagle Vail, Avon and even with Summit County.
- Submit the Trails Master Plan to the USFS for approval. The plan will go through a NEPA process at a high level and will likely be integrated into the White River Travel Management Plan.
- *Approval of the Master Plan does not constitute approval for construction of any trails.*
- Once the Master Plan is approved, individual sections of trail can then be submitted for construction. At that level, the actual trail alignment would be completed and then go through the NEPA process. This is a potentially multi-year process.
- The advantage of this process is that any new trails will be well studied and the community will have several opportunities to comment on their development.

Town of Vail Process:

During the 2015 Vail Trail process numerous concerns including wildlife impacts, the effects of trails on neighboring properties and how to deal with multiple user types arose. It is important that the town work towards consensus when developing a trails plan. The June 15th workshop, attendees with different opinions on trails ended up sitting at the same tables. This small group setting allowed for dialogue and sharing of reasonable thoughts, resulting in a better understanding of other's concerns. With this in mind staff proposes the following:

- Hold a series of 3-4 scoping sessions during September consisting of 8 to 10 stakeholders representing various neighborhoods, user types and ages. They could include property owners and renters, business owners and even some of the future Chamonix housing residents. The idea is to represent the past, present and future of Vail.
- The meetings would discuss trail concepts, wildlife impacts and the USFS process. They will be planned to encourage dialogue with a goal of incorporating multiple needs and concerns.
- The results will help to develop a comprehensive plan of trails, trailheads and signage for multiple user types which will then be presented during a trails Open House later in the fall for additional public input.

Trails Master Plan

The comments from the Open House and subsequent Town Council sessions will help finalize the Vail Trails Master Plan. It is intended that this document will be submitted to the USFS for approval as the "corridor-level plan". If approved, Vail can begin the process on individual trails, working with the Forest Service as their workload allows.

V. NEXT STEPS

The immediate next steps in the planning process are:

- 1) Drafting of the OLP
- 2) Presentation of the draft OLP to the Planning and Environmental Commission
- 3) Finalization of field work by SE Group
- 4) Trails workshop
- 5) Planning and Environmental Commission recommendation of adoption of the OLP to the Vail Town Council
- 6) Vail Town Council adoption of the OLP