

4.18.2016 North TSA City Council Driving Tour and Virtual Tour Notes

Driving Tour Attendees

City Council members: Matt Appelbaum, Aaron Brockett, Jan Burton, Zan Jones, Lisa Morzel , Sam Weaver, Bob Yates and Mary Young

OSBT members: Curt Brown, Molly Davis, Frances Hartogh and Tom Isaacson

Staff: Steve Armstead, Heather Bergman (Peak Facilitation), Juliet Bonnell, Mark Davison, Mark Gershman, John Potter, Lynn Riedel, Heather Swanson, Patrick von Keyserling, Gabe Wilson, Tracy Winfree

Steve pointed out Wonderland Lake as the bus drove by it and once stopped at Foothills Trailhead, provided a brief overview of the agenda for the driving tour. While at Foothills Trailhead, Steve talked about some of the Draft Plan's recommended actions relevant to the Foothills Trailhead and trails area. He informed council about recommendations to improve trailheads, access and connectivity (including the addition of the new Horseshoe Trailhead) and to improve trail sustainability through the rerouting of Foothills and Hogback trails. He also spoke about the North Foothills Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) and the conceptual routing of the North Sky Trail, sensitive resources and Schneider Draw and the effort being made to minimize impacts to them. Staff pointed out and discussed the location of the drainages on the east and west side of US 36, the conceptual routing of the alternative scenario east side diagonal connector trail, and the location of the Foothills Business Park and conservation easement.

Lisa mentioned the Rocky Mountain Greenways project and that the existing proposed connections do not adequately serve the desire for connectivity and that a third, more suitable option for this connection should be explored.

Steve noted that OSMP staff is coordinating with partners on the Rocky Mountain Greenway project.

Sam asked why the west and east connectors were either/or proposals and why we weren't considering including both connections in the plan.

Steve responded that we were aiming to achieve and balance varied interests in the plan and informed Sam that significant resource and trail sustainability challenges are associated with both connections.

Zan asked about the possibility of putting the North Sky Trail through the conservation easement.

Steve responded that staff is exploring this possibility with the property owner.

While at the Joder Trailhead, staff pointed out where the North Sky Trail would connect into the Joder property. Staff also discussed the proposed trailheads for Joder (in the draft plan as well as the alternative scenario), Joder trails and their locations, Joder property inclusion as an HCA and the sensitive resources that exist on the Joder property.

While at Lefthand Trailhead, **Steve** spoke about improving trail sustainability and visitor experience on Lefthand Trail and other Boulder Valley Ranch (BVR) trails as well as the alternative scenario east side and diagonal connector trail route and regional connections.

Aaron asked whether the existing gates in the North TSA will be improved.

Steve answered that we are working on improving them, but clarified that the gates still need to achieve their purpose of keeping cattle where they're supposed to be on the system.

While viewing the conservation easement from the Lefthand Trailhead, **Steve** clarified that the chain link fence doesn't accurately reflect property ownership, but that the western-most fence does show the boundary that the North Sky Trail needs to be west of and therefore, the elevation that must be gained in order to get up and around the conservation easement.

Zan inquired how much lower the trail would be able to go on the landscape if the trail could go through the conservation easement.

Gabe responded that the trail couldn't go too much lower because we'll still need to lose and gain elevation to get around multiple drainages. Staff is planning to integrate portions of the existing railroad grade into the North Sky Trail to minimize natural resource impacts. The lower area closer to US 36 is very wet, has lots of shale barrens and is poor from both a trail sustainability perspective as well as from a visitor experience perspective.

Lisa requested topographic maps overlaid with plan maps to give council a better overview of the plan in conjunction with the terrain. She also requested a map of the hiking tour council was originally scheduled to take before it was turned into a driving and virtual tour due to inclement weather.

City Council Chambers North TSA Virtual Tour Attendees:

City Council members: Matt Appelbaum, Aaron Brockett, Jan Burton, Zan Jones, Sam Weaver, Bob Yates and Mary Young

OSBT members: Curt Brown, Molly Davis, Frances Hartogh and Tom Isaacson

Staff: Steve Armstead, Heather Bergman (Peak Facilitation), Juliet Bonnell, Leah Case, Mark Davison, Eric Fairlee, Emily Garding, Mark Gershman, John Potter, Lynn Riedel, Heather Swanson, Patrick von Keyserling, Gabe Wilson, Tracy Winfree

Virtual Tour: Foothills Trail to railroad grade

Steve talked about trailheads, accessibility and connectivity and improving trail sustainability. He also spoke about the North Foothills HCA and the North Sky Trail (western connector).

Zan clarified with Steve that Foothills Trailhead would be improved and a new trailhead (Horseshoe Trailhead) would be added north of Foothills Trailhead.

Gabe spoke about trail sustainability and the proposed improvements along Foothills and Hogback trails. **Heather** spoke about wildlife and other natural resources in this area. **Steve** spoke about the North Foothills HCA and its important biodiversity.

Zan clarified that activation of HCA status would take place after the completion of the TSA process. **Steve** confirmed that after the TSA plan is approved and council has adopted an ordinance authorizing visitor access conditions, HCA access requirements can be enforced.

Heather noted that the areas east and west of US 36 are high biodiversity areas and provide unfragmented habitat. Xeric tallgrass and big and little bluestem provide important habitat for grassland dependent butterflies with highly suitable habitat west of US 36. The areas east and west of US 36 are also situated to provide opportunities to increase regional connectivity.

Lynn noted that in this area there are many rare plants and communities. We saw Bell's twinpod blooming during our driving tour. Shale barrens are where Bell's twinpod occur. Xeric tallgrass, needle and thread grass and New Mexico Feather grass are also prominent in this area. The steep slopes that we viewed west of US 36 also include upland shrublands which provide great habitat for rattlesnakes.

Staff informed council that the obvious topographical features that we noted from the road include drainages. There are a number of drainages that run from west to east which is challenging from both a resource perspective as well as from a trail design and sustainability perspective. East Beech is a series of mini-mesas with drainages cutting in between them and the mesa tops contain rare plant communities.

Schneider Draw is the most prominent of the drainages. The existing social trail crossing of the draw was damaged by the flood. The proposed alignment of the North Sky Trail dips lower across Schneider Draw to cross it.

Heather noted that in addition to the drainages there is also rattlesnake hibernacula in this area.

Gabe spoke about the proposed integration of the railroad grade into the North Sky Trail. Staff is striving to protect/minimize impacts to resources as much as possible in this area. To do this, as much of the existing infrastructure as possible would be integrated into the new trail connection. The existing trail tread of the railroad grade social trail would need to be widened.

Council members asked whether staff had looked at the possibility of routing the North Sky Trail closer to US 36.

Staff responded that the area closer to US 36 is flat and very wet and would require extensive materials to elevate the trail. There are also many shale barrens in this area which would be impacted by a trail. The further east the trail is routed, the more elevation it needs to re-gain in order to get around the conservation easement. Gabe noted that it would be possible to bridge across the draws and/or contour in and move back out of them.

Mary asked how construction of bridges would impact resources.

Gabe responded that we use best management practices in order to minimize impacts, but there would still be impacts. Larger bridges have fewer impacts (since they go over/avoid more resources). But it was noted that small bridges can impede riparian flow and that upland vegetation could be impacted by bridges.

Tracy noted that the proposed trail alignments are conceptual and that staff is looking at associated natural resource conservation projects as part of implementation. **Heather** added that where the trail actually goes will be influenced and impacted by where wetland permitting is approved. **Steve** noted that no off-trail permits would be allowed in the North Foothills HCA in the draft plan and seasonal restrictions for dogs on the North Sky Trail are also included.

Virtual Tour: Longhorn Road to Pavilion

Staff informed council about the alternative scenario east side connection and that it will be designed as sustainably as possible in order to get some drainage on a side slope. Staff will use a rolling contour design. Heavy clay soil in this area would be prone to muddy conditions, so the trail would be surfaced to reduce the number of closures due to muddy conditions. The alternative scenario connector would link into Lefthand Trail and connect into the Beech Pavilion which the city would take over management from Boulder County.

Aaron asked how the connection between Beech Pavilion and Neva Road up to the Schooley property would be made.

Steve responded that city staff would talk with the county, private property owners and Lefthand Water District to pursue options for creating this connection.

Gabe elaborated that the connection west of US 36 as well as the improvements to the Lefthand Trail would include hardening. If the connection is on the east, the addition of the diagonal connection would create a loop opportunity, move unsustainable portions further west, and improve the crossings of drainages. Staff is aiming to improve visitor experiences, particularly with an eye toward designing these trails to be better experiences for all visitors including bikers. BVR trails would be improved in both the draft plan and alternative scenario.

Heather noted that East Beech encompasses grassland preserves for prairie dogs. Prairie dog colonies are favorite hunting grounds for golden eagles that nest on the Palisades on the west side of US 36.

Virtual Tour: Joder property

Steve informed council that Joder will be integrated in with the North Foothills HCA. North Sky Trail will connect into the Joder property on the south side of the property. Expansion of the Joder Trailhead parking is necessary and will be accommodated by the addition of a new trailhead on the Dagle/Wright property in the draft plan and in the alternative scenario this additional passenger vehicle parking will be provided by a new trailhead on the Schooley property. The existing ranch vehicle access/trail that was developed into the Interim Joder Trail was damaged greatly by the flood and OSMP has spent approximately \$80,000 to rebuild the infrastructure to create this trail connection up to the Buckingham

property. At least part of the Interim Trail needs to remain vehicle accessible to provide access for people that live at the house located on the property as well as for emergency and maintenance access. One loop on the Joder property is proposed on the northwest portion of the property.

Zan asked if the loop would be a new trail or would incorporate existing social/historic Joder riding trails.

Gabe responded that we're hoping to use some pre-existing infrastructure to support a new trail (particularly with the North Sky Trail up to the Joder property), but this may not be possible with the Joder loop trail.

Joder is a continuation of the habitats that we see further south on the system. There is a large drainage on Joder that supports a high diversity of bird species, so the proposed loop trail would avoid crossing this habitat. The upland shrublands on the Joder property are heavily used by deer. There is lazuli bunting habitat, butterfly habitat and deer fawning in this area, so the loop trail has been designed and would be managed through regulations to minimize impacts to these species.

Mary asked about Dagle/Schooley to clarify what parking would look like and what is included in the draft plan versus the alternative scenario. **Steve** clarified that equestrian parking would remain at the Joder Trailhead in both the plan and the alternative scenario. The Dagle Trailhead would provide additional passenger vehicle parking in the draft plan while in the alternative scenario Schooley would provide additional passenger vehicle parking.

Virtual Tour: Neva Road to 55th St to Jay Road.

Steve spoke about the Northern Properties, how the North TSA allows for future regional connectivity, and Boulder Reservoir connections to link from the Boulder Reservoir area up to the county's proposed Lagerman trail system. He noted that OSMP would work with the Parks and Recreation department to provide a trail connection west of Boulder Reservoir.

Heather elaborated that the resources on the Northern Properties vary greatly. There are seasonal closures of some Northern Properties recommended to protect bobolink. There is also an elk migration corridor that goes through several of the Northern Properties and efforts to conserve and protect plains topminnow are being made on some of the properties.

Aaron noted that the county is trying to purchase properties just east of US 36 (Loukenen, near Ryan, Andrea, Jacob) and questioned what this could mean for our management of the Northern Properties. **Steve** responded that as the county acquires properties we will look at the appropriate planning process during which trail connections could occur.

Tracy informed council that the county isn't ready to talk about timing yet for regional connection concepts.

Steve noted that the proposed trail along 55th Street would provide a connection from Boulder Reservoir up to Niwot Road.

Next steps:

- May 24 (study session on draft plan)
- June 7 (council meeting agenda item with public hearing)

Staff will work toward finding times to get council members out on the ground in the North TSA prior to the May 24 study session.

Aaron mentioned that he would like to walk along the potential west of US 36 connection.

Sam recommended going out two council members at a time in order to simplify logistics. In addition to the west of US 36 connection, he expressed interest in seeing the proposed east of US 36 connection. He noted that heat maps of habitat suitability are really helpful and he'd like to have more of them available for reference.

Mary, Jan, and Matt all agreed that seeing the west and east side connection is their highest interest.

Zan suggested they'd be ok with one staff member hiking with them and providing them with information about the area, instead of the entire staff team accompanying them. Then any additional resource-specific questions can be answered as follow-ups during the official study session.