

## **Incline plan could affect Manitou parking, traffic**

**By Jeanne Davant**

A draft plan on officially opening the Mount Manitou Incline could result in major parking changes in Manitou Springs.

More than 70 people attended a meeting last Thursday in City Hall to review and comment on the draft plan, which was made public last week. The comprehensive plan addresses who will manage the Incline, how parking and traffic issues will be handled and construction and repair issues.

Attendees at the meeting were not thrilled with some aspects of the plan. For example, they didn't like the proposed hours of operation for the Incline: dawn to dusk. Some said they liked to hike in the predawn or post-sunset hours and want the Incline to be open 24/7. Others said they did not like a proposal to make the Incline one way, uphill.

A no-pet provision also drew some criticism, although other attendees said they agreed with the pet ban because of safety issues.

The biggest problem most attendees saw, though, was with the parking solutions proposed by the Incline task force.

Studies conducted in conjunction with the plan estimated that Incline users take up between 150 and 250 parking spaces per day during the peak season. There are about 200 spaces along the Ruxton corridor.

The plan calls for manipulating these spaces in various ways.

Parking in the Barr Trail lot, which has 34 spaces, would be engineered through a fee structure that encourages longer-term parking, such as by hikers using the Barr Trail and Barr camp, and discourages short-term parkers such as Incline users. That would be done by charging short-term parkers a higher fee.

A gate would be installed at the Barr Trail lot, which would be accessed by inserting a credit card at a parking kiosk. The card would be inserted again to exit.

Eight spaces on Winter Street would be eliminated to promote pedestrian safety, and 59 spaces along Ruxton Avenue between the creek bridge east of Pilot Knob Avenue and Osage Avenue would be designated residential only. If this provision were instituted, planners would have to figure out a way to accommodate churchgoers at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church. The draft plan suggests that special temporary parking permits could be issued.

The rest of the public parking spaces on Ruxton would be open to anyone and would have a three-hour time limit.

The Cog Railway would provide 40 parking spaces for Incline users, but these would be available only in the early morning before 9 a.m.

As proposed, the plan would displace about 100 parkers from spaces they now use when they hike the Incline.

"It is assumed that additional spaces needed for the Incline can be absorbed by parking availability at locations such as the Prospect Lot, the Smishny Lot, and on-street parking along east Manitou Ave. or at other potential future lot locations," the plan states.

The plan also recommends better utilization of the Iron Springs Chateau's 46 parking spaces, which will be addressed in the final plan.

Attendees at the meeting said they didn't see the parking plan working. They said a gate at the Barr Trail lot would not alleviate the traffic on Hydro Street if people attempted to access the lot when it was full. Traffic might even be worse unless there is a place for people to turn

around. Suggestions included placing the gate at Ruxton and Hydro, having a sign that indicates when the lot is full and issuing season parking passes.

Attendees did not think that the reallocation of parking spaces would alleviate parking problems on Ruxton and questioned whether the rest of the town could accommodate the displaced parkers. The extra parking provided by the Cog Railway would help, but not during peak use times.

Shuttle service is proposed down the road, and attendees said they'd like to see it instituted sooner rather than later.

Attendees at the meeting did like other aspects of the plan, including:

Initial focus on fixing the 23 percent of the Incline that is in the worst repair. The worse conditions are about two-thirds of the way up the Incline, according to study data.

Locating the trailhead at the base of the Incline near the Colorado Springs Utilities access gate.

A single organization to do the initial work to legalize and manage the Incline, such as applying for a special use permit from the Forest Service. The plan suggests that organization could be created through an intergovernmental agreement between Manitou and Colorado Springs. The bigger city would have the lead responsibility for getting things done, and Manitou would provide staff or contracted services and parking enforcement and would address inappropriate use of the Incline.

Forming a Friends group to assist with fundraising and promote volunteer work.

Constructing and improving connecting trails, including the existing social trail to Barr Trail.

Establishing rules of use and posting minimal signs.

A task force composed of the three entities that own the land the Incline passes through, along with volunteers, staff from the two cities and consultants compiled the draft plan. Four public meetings have been held to gather input from Incline users, including three last summer that focused on individual aspects of the plan, including parking.

The plan is set out in three stages. Stage A covers the minimal requirements and improvements that will be needed to legally open the Incline. Stages B and C build upon previous stages, adding features and improvements.

Cost estimates are not included in the draft; they'll be part of the final plan.

A trip count that was taken by the Colorado Department of Transportation for two weeks in September revealed how much use the Incline is getting and when high-use times are! As expected, peak use was on the weekends, with daily peak use around 11 a.m. Based on the numbers, consultants estimated that there are 350,000 to 500,000 trips up the Incline annually. They explained those numbers are trips, not users, and could include dogs or people who just walked past the counter and then turned around.

The last public open house will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. Jan. 20 at City Hall to review what's being called the preferred plan, which will emerge after the draft plan gets another workover. The final plan will go before the Manitou and Colorado Springs city councils, other advisory groups and the public in February or March.

To view the draft plan, visit <http://www.manitousprings-co.gov/incline.asp>.

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