

Incline plan climbs toward review, approval

By Jeanne Davant

A plan to open the Mt. Manitou Incline to legal hiking took a step forward last week with an open house at Manitou Springs City Hall.

Dozens of Incline fans showed up to view the final draft of the management plan, which was revised after a series of meetings last fall to collect public input.

Most of the changes in this final draft were minor, said Manitou Planning Director Dan Folke.

"Essentially, Colorado Springs is the responsible partner in partnership with the city of Manitou Springs," Folke said.

Some adjustments to the budget outlined in the plan have been revised downward, said Tweed Kezziah, a member of the Tapis consulting team that is helping with the plan. That's because "the contractor found some innovative ways to construct the most difficult parts."

The plan retains projected use times from dawn to dusk and a ban on dogs on the trail. Those provisions were criticized at public input meetings last fall but were retained in the final draft for reasons of safety and emergency access, Kezziah said.

What's left of the Incline are the ties that supported rails for the cable car that carried materials to build water pipelines from the reservoirs on Pikes Peak. After the pipelines were completed, the Incline became a popular tourist attraction with a restaurant at the top.

The Incline was closed to the public in 1990 after a rock slide damaged portions of the track. But it has remained a popular and challenging hiking and training spot with an estimated use of up to 500,000 trips per year.

A task force was formed to investigate and outline what needed to be done to open the Incline to legal use.

As outlined in the plan, Manitou's main responsibilities include entering into an agreement with Colorado Springs and implementing managed parking on Ruxton Avenue, Folke said. - "There are no revenues coming to the city to do that, but we will retain any revenues realized," he said. The one exception is the Barr Trail parking lot; revenues from parking fees there must be used for improvement to the lot, the trailhead and Hydro Street, although they also may be used for implementing solutions that come out of the plan.

The plan calls for areas of paid parking, areas of residents-only parking and three-hour parking zones near Manitou Avenue.

Manitou is not bound to the specifics outlined in the plan, but City Planner Michelle Anthony and the Parking Authority Board have been working with similar ideas to solve the parking and traffic issues on Ruxton Avenue.

"The core problem is that we have more vehicles up there than the road can handle—an endless string of cars circling up the Barr lot and back down," Folke said. The congestion has spurred worries that emergency vehicles could not get through.

Join Friends of the Incline

The Colorado Springs Trails and Open Space Coalition is spearheading the formation of an Incline Friends group that will help make the Incline plan a reality.

Volunteers are needed in these areas:

- Leadership and coordination
- Fundraising
- Partnerships and sponsorships
- Grant writing
- Education and outreach
- Volunteer coordination
- Physical labor on the Incline

For more information or to join, e-mail Bill@trailsandopenspaces.org or call 633-6884.

The city is looking at larger issues of managing parking on Ruxton, such as what effect limited parking would have on adjacent neighborhood, Folke said.

"We just have to start trying some things to manage parking," he said. "If they don't work well, we'll tweak them until we find a balance and achieve the desired effect."

One of the most important things for the public to understand about the plan is that it places the primary responsibility for capital improvement costs on users of the Incline, Folke said.

A thorough investigation of the condition of the Incline showed that up to 75 percent of it is in fairly good shape, but the remaining 25 percent of the ties are disintegrated and dangerous.

Besides repairs and replacements of the ties themselves, the plan calls for erosion control and drainage improvements that will prevent further degradation.

"The plan relies on grants and donations to raise the funds to do the improvements," Folke said. Where feasible, the two cities and the property owners will help, but "for this to succeed, there has to be a really active friends group."

Folke said the Cog Railway, one of the primary owners, "wasn't willing to put in any funds.... In my view, the three property owners need to be responsible."

Folke said the final draft of the plan will be posted on the city Web site next week.

Next steps include reviews by the Colorado Springs Trails and Open Space Committee and the Parks Advisory Board.

The plan is scheduled to go before the Colorado Springs City Council on Feb. 22. The Manitou Springs Planning Commission will review it March 9, and Manitou Springs City Council will take up the plan on March 15 or 22.

"If everything goes according to plan, the Incline could be open by late spring," Incline Task Force member Sarah Tresouthick said.

[Return to Article Index](#)