

Council OKs Incline plan – with reservations

By Jeanne Davant

Manitou Springs City Council reluctantly ratified a plan that could lead to the official opening of the Mt. Manitou Incline, but served notice to the city of Colorado Springs and the Cog Railway that Manitou would not bear all of the costs.

Manitou's responsibilities under the plan would be to maintain the trailhead, pick up trash, and implement and manage parking along Ruxton Avenue.

But Council members were concerned about a lack of detail in the plan and about costs the city would be assuming.

"I have serious questions," Councilman Michael Gerbig said. "We haven't even started yet, and we don't know how we're going to solve (parking issues)." Gerbig said he was also concerned about how the Incline fits into Manitou's open space inventory.

"We just spent \$1.1 million for Iron Mountain," he said. "We don't want this to become, ooh the Incline, and forget about the other space."

Visibly upset, Councilman Matt Carpenter took issue with provisions proposing higher fees for parking in the Barr Trail lot.

"The most concrete part of this plan is charging for Barr Trail parking," Carpenter said. "I pushed hard to get the Barr Trail lot back to being the Barr Trail lot.... Now we're telling people they have to pay \$30 to use the Barr Trail (for overnight camping.)"

Carpenter said he was upset that "nowhere in this plan is the Barr Trail being addressed. The lower part is a mess."

Mayor Marc Snyder called the Incline "a big dagger pointing into the heart of downtown" and noted that plan called for \$150,000 from Manitou in the early stages of renovating the Incline.

"The Cog bought this thing to stop competition, closed it down and kind of left it," Snyder said. "Colorado Springs Utilities (one of the three owners of the property the Incline crosses) has money committed to maintain their high-pressure line and nothing going into the kitty. The city of Colorado Springs Park and Rec, a PortaPotty is their contribution. We're a town of 5,000 people, and much more is being called for from us. I'm not feeling the love here ... I would like to see the entire cost divided up equitably."

Snyder also said Manitou would have to bear costs of paving and monitoring the Barr Trail lot, setting up and enforcing a parking plan from the Incline trailhead down the length of Ruxton Avenue, and increasing fire and police protection.

He said he thought legalizing the Incline would bring even more trail users into Manitou and was not convinced impacts on Manitou would be positive or that revenues would offset the city's costs.

Council members also expressed concerns about financing proposed in the plan, which sets out a three-stage the Incline, with the worst parts being addressed first.

The plan's funding scenario relies heavily on donations and grants. The task force that developed the plan rejected charging a fee to use the Incline.

"I'm not willing to throw city money at a plan based on donations," Carpenter said. "I strongly feel the Incline should be paying for this ... We're told if we charge a fee, that less people will go up there. I think that's a good thing."

Sarah Bryarly, project manager for Colorado Springs, said that city is assuming responsibility for the trail because of its governmental immunity. If fees were charged, that

coverage would be lost and the Incline would have to obtain its own insurance at a much higher cost.

"We struggled with all these problems," Cog Railway General Manager Spencer Wren said. "But the Incline gets worse every day. Traffic on Ruxton is going to be worse this summer ... If you delay, we're looking at another summer of a mess."

Bill Koerner, representing the Trails and Open Space Coalition, agreed that the plan wasn't perfect but said it provided Manitou with an opportunity to address parking and congestion problems.

"These problems existed even before the Incline started to get heavy use," Koerner said. "It's worth the time and effort of this community to get a solution we all can live with."

Calling the Incline "a gold mine up there," Koerner said, "We have basically a ski area. We ought to treat it like a traffic manager for a ski area."

"The difference is that ski areas charge 92 bucks," Snyder retorted.

"If it's this gold mine, why isn't the private sector knocking itself out and putting in a parking garage?" Manitou resident Dave Wolverton said. "To ask us to continue to shoulder that burden is not right."

The Incline management plan was the result of a lengthy process that included several public meetings. The task force worked with professional consultants to collect data on traffic, parking and use of the trail, which is officially off limits.

Surveys of traffic on Hydro Street to the Barr Trail lot showed 600 cars attempting to find a space to park in the 34-space lot on a peak Sunday. Traffic counts of Incline users estimated that 350,000 people a year make the trip to the top.

The Colorado Springs City Council and the Manitou Planning Commission have approved the plan. The Planning Commission spelled out four conditions, including that Colorado Springs and Manitou must enter into an intergovernmental agreement to implement the plan.

Council's task Tuesday was to review the Planning Commission's conditional use approval of the Incline as a recreational facility within a residential zone.

After Carpenter made and withdrew a motion to table the plan indefinitely, Council voted 4-1 to approve the plan. Carpenter dissented; Councilwomen Ingrid Richter and Aimee Cox recused themselves because of possible conflicts of interest.

"I recognize this might be our only opportunity (to participate), Snyder said. "I think we can move forward with the, understanding that the agreement (with Colorado Springs) has to come before us. If we can't agree, the conditional use fails. I hope people are listening and that the agreement is much more equitably drafted."

[Return to Article Index](#)