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Feedback on Boulder County trail plans

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Gold Hill residents made it clear that they don't want strangers on bicycles riding in the proximity of their property. The Gold Hill Fire Barn meeting room was packed on Thursday night, May 9, when Garry Sanfacon, Boulder County public outreach coordinator and Justin Atherton-Wood, Parks and Open Space resource planner, led a community kick-off meeting to discuss a multi-agency master plan for a network of access points and travel corridors for non-motorized users in the foothills and mountains of Boulder County.

On April 25, Nederland hosted a similar meeting in which residents had a chance to express their concerns, desires and questions about the project. Sanfacon said about 40 participants of different recreation users were in attendance, and the discussion centered on how to connect the town to outer recreation areas.

Gold Hill residents, on the other hand, were not receptive to the idea of opening up their 'backyards' for the recreation opportunity for visitors. "We are not an amusement park," they insisted.

The Regional Mountain Trails Master Plan Initiative is in Phase II; that of gathering information about the needs, desires and concerns of the public. Phase III, the preliminary planning stage, will identify the primary planning areas and map opportunities and constraints as well as analyzing trail corridor criteria.

In the fall, Phase IV will involve working with the partners, stakeholders and public to identify preliminary trail corridor options. A draft plan for a network of regional linkage trails in the mountains and foothills will make up the winter of 2013 and 2014 Phase V, and in the spring of 2014 the input and review of the draft plan will be integrated into a final plan which will be put up for approval and involve a series of public hearings. Phase VII will involve a collaboration on implementation.

The Initiative is a partnership with the National Park Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, City of Boulder, City of Longmont, Boulder County and United States Forest Service.

After Sanfacon introduced the Initiative, he asked for comments from the residents. One of the frequently asked questions was who had the right to decide to have trails in the Gold Hill area; under what authority was Boulder County issuing these plans and what kind of imposition would there be on private land.

Sanfacon assured the group that eminent domain would not be used to procure access. When one man said he felt the plans would go forward whether residents liked it or not, Sanfacon responded that tax dollars for the project were approved by the public. "This Initiative is by the will of the people."

When the concern of fire danger was brought up, residents were informed that each agency would go through its own environmental process and the review process will involve many public meetings.

Gold Hill resident John Sands called the project, which could involve multi-uses such as horses, bikes and pedestrians, difficult to manage and enforcement and safety issues should be a priority.

Would there be parking for users? Would the trails be accessed to community trails or across private land? Will dogs be allowed and will there be signage? How do we make sure people won't come up here to camp along the trails? Erosion controls? Toilets? Trash? What about fire-killed and beetle-killed trees?

Sands said he saw a bicycle zoom between a grandfather and his granddaughter and the child's hand was hurt. The bicyclist never stopped. "We live here because we love privacy. Do we really want to invite strangers up?"

Another resident expressed his concern about the public's ignorance of hunting laws. "How do I, a hunter, see a person not in orange during the hunting season?"

Long-term resident Gretchen Diefenderfer said she thought that coming to the mountains to hike was good for people's hearts and souls, "But they shouldn't infringe on

my privacy. There is lots of open space. I don't want bicycles tearing around my property. There should be separate trails."

What about the impact on wildlife, asked a few residents. Not only are the bears and mountain lions dangerous for the people using the trails, but the wildlife will disappear. They asked that an environmental study identify wildlife corridors and consider closing the trails for nesting inventory.

There would also be a large impact on the volunteer emergency departments, as hikers and bicyclists often injure themselves on mountain trails. Residents also said they did not want leash laws to pertain to the trails where they now walk their dogs off leash.

Mike Walker of Colorado Mountain Ranch Camp said he has clocked bicyclists zooming through his property going 40 miles per hour, which presents a danger to his horses and dogs, but more than that he is concerned about having strangers recreate around his camp during the summer when many children are in the area. "The more use, the more people, the more problems," Walker said. "We try to teach the children how to be good stewards of the land and they will see a negative impact on the ranch with the influx of strangers. What if someone on our property had ill intentions?"

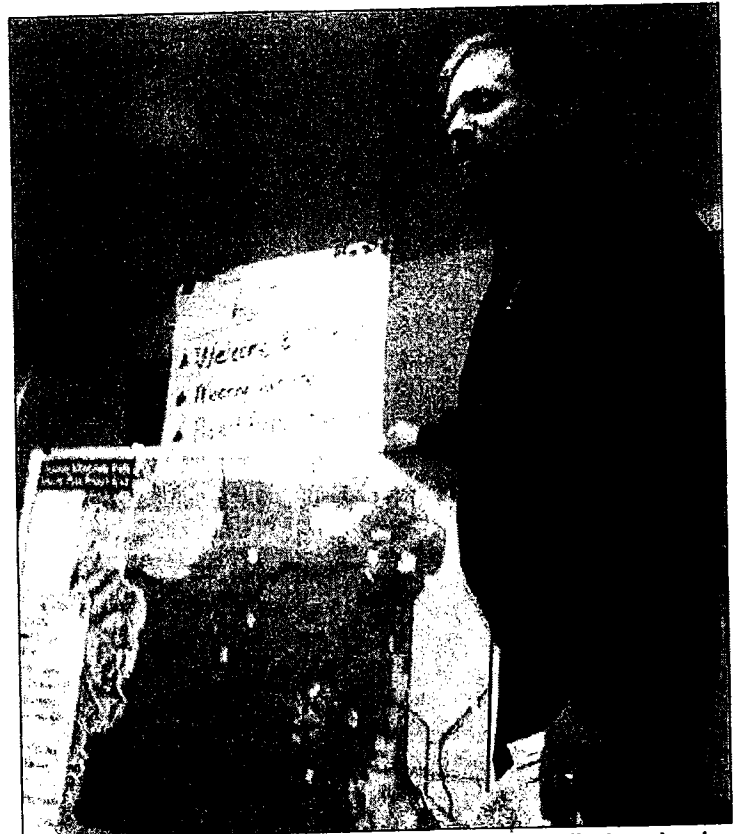
John Sands said the Initiative will become a Field of Dreams Syndrome: If you build it, they will come. The problem is that people from down below don't get it; don't understand the mountain dwellers' philosophy; show lack of respect and disconnect. "They just don't know what it's like to live up here."



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Seeking questions and opinions

Boulder County Land Use Public Outreach Coordinator Gary Sanfacon shows Gold Hill residents the area of the proposed trails master plan. The project is in the seeking information stage.



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Taking notes

Couder County Parks and Open Space Resource Planner Justin Atherton-Wood helped lead the Gold Hill public meeting on April 25 at the Gold Hill Fire Barn meeting room.