



COAL CREEK
CANYON COMMUNITY
& STAKEHOLDER INPUT



COAL CREEK CANYON COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Introduction

Close interaction with the public, Jefferson and Boulder County staff, and key stakeholders was critical throughout the master planning process and resulted in the identification of residents' concerns, perceived needs and priorities regarding the provision of parks and recreation facilities, programs and services. Coal Creek Canyon Park and Recreation District (CCCPRD or the District) representatives and the project team worked to include a wide representation of interests and user groups, so as to embody the diverse needs of the community's residents and stakeholders. These efforts included a significant number of meetings and forums for residents to participate and to provide input, so as to guide the identification of important issues and appropriate solutions.

On September 20th, board members and Master Plan steering committee members for the District participated in a visioning session as part of the Master Plan project kick-off meeting. On October 11th and 14th, , four focus group meetings and an open public input meeting were held where residents and stakeholders of the District were provided a number of opportunities in which to provide input on this planning effort. Throughout November and December, numerous stakeholder interviews and meetings were held with Jefferson County Open Space and Community Resources staff, Boulder County Parks and Open Space staff, US Forest Service staff, Regional Transportation District representatives, the Coal Creek Canyon Fire Protection District, Golden Gate State Park, Camp Eden, Camp Wondervu and other alternative recreation providers and key stakeholders (see Alternative Recreation Providers and Programming section of the report).

Coal Creek Canyon District Board & Master Plan Steering Committee – Visioning Session Summary

The consultant team met with the CCCPRD Board Members and Master Plan steering committee members and performed a SWOT Analysis (a strategic planning technique

used to assess the internal and external environment in which a organization operates and competes) to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in the existing and potential parks and recreation facilities and programs within the District. This facilitated discussion was intended to identify what the board and key volunteers learned during their efforts to guide formation of the District, what their goals as a board are, and what vision residents have for the Canyon in regard to parks and recreation. During this SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) discussion, some of the topics addressed were the identification of existing strengths of the Canyon, future parks and recreation opportunities, as well as internal and external challenges that may negatively impact the future of the District's programs and services.

A common theme discovered is that living in the Canyon is second to none when it comes to the quality of life for those who call the Canyon home. Some of the **strengths** that were identified tend to intertwine parks and recreation-oriented issues with lifestyle considerations. These include a love of the mountains and outdoors in both winter and summer, wildlife, varied terrain and trails for hiking, and numerous parks and outdoor recreation opportunities located nearby. Additionally, residents strongly tout the "sense of community," which is characterized by an abundance of volunteers, a close knit rural community where privacy is prized while also having the feeling of the Canyon as being one big neighborhood, as well as the benefit of being located close to the supporting urban amenities and employment opportunities. True to the independent-mindedness of residents living in the area, Canyon residents have relied almost exclusively on community-based volunteer efforts to accomplish most functions in the area. The impressive number of volunteer groups and organizations consistently provide opportunities for residents to help others in the community, while continuing to foster the Canyon's progress over time.

As there are many strengths associated with the District, some of the **challenges** that were identified by the Board generally focused on the long-term reliance on non-District facilities, current lack of funding, and anticipated needs for providing new or improved parks and recreation opportunities in the

District. Specific challenges noted include a lack of existing facilities, the challenge of getting people involved, residents' fear of change, severe winter weather conditions, geographic and topographic constraints, transportation limitations, potential auto-bicycle conflicts on a limited primary road network, and occasional burn-out as various efforts seem to rely heavily on an overburdened volunteer pool within the Canyon.

There are generally two groups of District residents – those who like to be involved in more community activities and those who have moved to the Canyon largely for privacy. A significant number of District residents are isolationists who do not desire additional amenities, or there may be those who want amenities but do not want to pay for them. One of the primary issues involved is having fairly limited means of communication among District residents. Other challenges identified for the District include lack of insurance, ever-present fire danger, fear of "flatlanders," and unwanted trespassing.

Some of the **opportunities** identified by the board members and steering committee members included engagement of the community through this planning process, as well as positive implementation of the Plan, which will provide the District the opportunity to develop a track record for success and a level of trust as it works to serve the residents. Other opportunities included the education of residents about the District's potential projects, consideration of controlled ways to leverage revenue from day-visitors to Canyon events, better promotion of existing programs and partnerships, promotion of a mill levy to support the Master Plan and pursuit of joint-venture grant opportunities that allow the District to pursue needed funding for future improvements.

One opportunity that has been consistently brought up by residents is a small centrally located park with amenities such as a sledding hill, ice skating and a multi-use activity center. The District has multiple related considerations that were identified in regard to this concept, including a location in easy access to the "Village" or central area of the Canyon, trying to locate a park within three miles of the highest population density in the Canyon, and to obtain land from private land owners through donations or county leases.

Strategic partnerships can be strengthened to maximize value from the District's efforts and expenditure of District resources. The Board and Steering Committee identified opportunities for sharing in the costs for complementary improvements with the existing elementary school site or partnering with Jefferson County or Boulder County efforts to accomplish parks and recreation improvements or programs in the area. The District may also work with existing transportation providers such as Ride Provide to minimize District residents' travel time and costs while strengthening availability of existing and proposed facilities located nearby. Board and Steering Committee members also introduced the possibility of implementing an innovative program where small projects can be achieved primarily through efforts of volunteers while having the District support ideas with a mini-grant process to further leverage limited District funds.

It was also recognized by board members and key volunteers that although there are a number of great opportunities for the District to consider, there are a number of factors that need to come together in order to overcome some of the external **threats** that could impede the District's full formation, growth and progress. Some of these threats include the significant decline in the nation and region's economy, impacting the amount of traditional and alternative funding that is available. Economic circumstances will likely influence residents' willingness to support a dedicated funding mechanism for facility and program development. Additionally, program user fees determination needs to take into consideration income levels (see **Demographics and Community Profile**) so as to fully capture those users needed to assure the success of District facilities instead of losing them to alternative providers. Additionally, Coal Creek Canyon has historically placed a high community value on the preservation of open space. Although this value has helped preserve the natural setting and character of the community, these designations may place restrictions on the District for the development of certain kinds of recreation facilities.

Public Meeting and Focus Group Input

Under the heading of "Participate, Plan, Play!" four focus groups and a public meeting were held on October 11-14th, 2010 consisting of various stakeholders, user-group representatives, individual users, community leaders and interested residents. These participants represented a range of residents who have lived in the Canyon for only a few months to over 40 years, as well as interest groups and organizations who are working to continually make Coal Creek Canyon a better place to live and play.

Some of the **strengths** that participants identified about the Canyon include the area's natural beauty, privacy, neighbors that are close and caring, diverse group of residents, sense of community, access to open space and hiking, as well as being the "best place in the world to live." Additionally, its location provides easy access to many desired regional natural and urban amenities. Fun activities participants mentioned they currently enjoy in proximity to the Canyon included kayaking at Gross Reservoir, hiking, interactive groups, quilting, book club, yoga, Mountain Mamas, CCCIA events and bible studies, to name a few.

Identified as **weaknesses** and apparently missing from the Canyon are facilities and programs such as classes for seniors, fitness-oriented offerings, art programs, Boy Scouts, multi-generational activities, and access to a facility for "drop-in" or unscheduled community gatherings, which might include opportunities for a picnic area, gardening, ice skating, amphitheatre, outdoor movies, a gathering place and meeting rooms. A significant challenge is balancing the needs for additional facilities and programs with available funds, as well as the concern of bringing unwanted traffic into the Canyon on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the geographically spread-out population of District residents presents unique challenges related to communication and proximity to any concentrated or centrally located planned facilities or programs. Since there are few facilities located in close proximity to District residents, extensive travel distances between existing parks

and recreation facilities outside of District was stated to cause stress for those who choose to participate in a variety of activities. Some expressed becoming tired of being a “Car Canyon.” Trespass issues were also mentioned by these groups as an ongoing concern for the private property owners. Potential solutions mentioned to address trespass issues include providing additional trailheads for public trail access and increasing signage and promotion of publicly accessible trails.

The participants expressed that there are a number of **opportunities** to introduce the parks and recreation projects in “small bits” in order to have the best rate of success for the Master Plan. For example, accomplishing smaller projects, improving what the District or Canyon already has, and increased and consistent communication in the near-term would help gain resident support. Following gaining that support, specific opportunities mentioned include having a community gathering place, providing a place for youth to gather, creating recreation facilities that can serve both summer and winter activities, improved trail system with better access, protecting open space, jointly supported improvements associated with the K-8 school facilities, and a variety of programs for all ages.

A general description for a desired community gathering place was described by these groups generally to include the following elements: multi-use fields, access via horseback, bicycle or hiking trails of varied levels of difficulty, dog park, snowshoeing, community garden, nature or discovery center, a drop-in building for social activities, programs and classes, outdoor amphitheater, restroom facilities, programs for the elderly, ice skating, after school and weekend activities for youth, sledding hill, playground, picnic tables, and other associated improvements. Various properties with a desired central location, as well as acquisition strategies were discussed for the placement of this community gathering space.

This Master Plan can be a uniting element since there are residents living in two counties that create this community. A continued reliance on the many volunteer organizations will

be crucial to achieving the goals of the District. Additionally, potential key partners identified for the District included CCCIA, churches, schools, the coffee shop, the gas stations, Boulder County, and Jefferson County. This approach meets with a common theme of keeping it simple, sustainable and low maintenance. Specific opportunities where this could be showcased include use of existing facilities while others are being funded and built, establishing access to existing properties for recreation purposes, construction of a playground, and supporting improvements to the existing gravel field at the K-8 school.

Some of the **threats** identified by the various participants include limited funding and resources available to the District. Also, the potential for miscommunication among residents of the District regarding goals of the Master Plan could result in uninformed or misinformed voters. Lastly, there is also concern that developing community facilities could increase the undesirable trend of trespassing and congestion of the highway access into the Canyon.



Stakeholder Interviews

Coal Creek Canyon Fire Protection District - On November 22, 2010, a member of the consultant team held a brief phone conference with Joe Cuervorst, District Fire Chief.

As Fire Chief, the primary concern expressed by Mr. Cuervorst is providing adequate access to properties obtained by the District to minimize them becoming a challenge to possible search and rescue efforts.

Camp Eden and Wondervu Conference and Retreat Center - Camp Eden and Camp Wondervu are located within the Coal Creek Canyon Park and Recreation District along Camp Eden Road on the southwest end of the District. CCCPRD representatives met with staff members of both camps in order to identify potential partnership opportunities. Both Camps are retreat/camp facilities for private faith-based kids' camps and group retreats. Both facilities have an extensive collection of amenities, and are under private ownership by the respective groups, but may be interested in hosting non-faith based events.

Camp Eden was founded in 1944 and is owned by the Beth Eden Baptist Church. They provide on-site caretakers, and offer summer camps for kids and teens as well as retreat opportunities for women and men. Indoor amenities include a full kitchen, a main lodge with a stage that seats over 100 people, lodging without connected bathrooms, indoor shower/bathroom facilities, gymnasium with loft with game tables, etc, and a second kitchen attached to the gym. Outdoor amenities include an 800' tube hill and Nordic area, small pond, and paddle boats access to Jebson and Thorodin trails. Typically, the summers are booked, but there is availability in the fall and spring as well as during the winter. They are currently open to working with the District on one-time or re-occurring events on their site and are developing a fee list and marketing plan.

Wondervu Conference and Retreat Center was founded in 1977 and has on-site caretakers as well as summer interns and staff that run operations for groups that attend throughout the summer months. Indoor facilities include a chapel with

capacity for 600 people with a changeable stage and high ceilings; cafeteria for 60-70 people; a lodge which includes a kitchen, all-purpose room, four bedrooms, a bunk room, indoor bathrooms and nurses clinic; a bunkhouse with private bedrooms, and a large bunk room for 60 people, as well as additional lodging buildings open in the summer months. Outdoor amenities include a 6-acre lake for canoeing and fishing, a central open area with a sand volleyball court, large field, and a few areas with blacktop. The facility is typically rented in its entirety for a week at a time, especially in the summer. However, there is more availability during the spring and fall and during the winter.



Golden Gate State Park - CCCPRD representatives met with Dan Weber, Park Manager, on November 22, 2010. A very small portion of the State Park (north edge) is located within the District. The State Park's management plan dates back to 1996 and is planned to be updated in the next 5 years.

Through discussions, it was stated that Colorado State Parks is willing to participate in regional trail connections, although there are fee issues with a connection to White Ranch since it is not a State Park. The concept of an Eldorado State Park to Golden Gate State Park trail could enter Golden Gate State Park in a rather steep and difficult area where there is little other development.

Consideration also included potentially marking off trails for winter use in the Aspen Meadows area, as well as plowing the road to keep that parking lot open in winter. Dan also provided contact information for an equestrian group, Boulder Horseman Association, that was interested in access to Thorodin and also referenced Boulder Area Trails Coalition (BATCO) as potential partners in reaching recreation goals in the area.

Seen as an opportunity for the Canyon, park representatives would like more users at the Harmsen Ranch facility (acquired in the last 2 years) on Gap Road where they have available meeting rooms and overnight stays facilities.

Yet, in regard to facility and amenity improvements, there are significant challenges, as the Park has seen a large reduction in funding from the State, which has resulted in an increase to Park pass fees. The GGC State Park is currently funded 85-90% by user fees.

US Forest Service - On December 3, 2010, representatives of the CCCPRD met with Christine Walsh (Boulder District Ranger) and Ed Perault (Recreation Staff Supervisor) with the US Forest Service. Within the District, a single parcel located off of Skyline Road is owned and maintained by the USFS. The area does not have good public access and is on the fringe of USFS land.

USFS has numerous trails and parcels to manage and noted that it is illegal to create "unofficial trails" on USFS land. The agency stated that there could be opportunities to work with other entities, such as the CCCPRD, but contend that parcel access and the sentiments of area neighbors were still lingering issues. Mr. Perault suggested the CCCPRD consider connectivity to the west to Gilpin County lands and trails. The USFS also suggested partnering with a number of other groups with common parks and recreation interests.



Transportation Providers

Ride Provide (a non-profit contractor for the Regional Transportation District which operates the Coal Creek Express van) – A CCCPRD representative met with Shelley Cook (Ride Provide Manager) and Al Parsons (Coal Creek Express van driver) on December 6, 2010 to discuss issues related to the Coal Creek Canyon Park and Recreation District Master Planning effort. The Ride Provide is willing to work with CCCPRD to increase ridership on the Express, especially when it positively impacts RTD routes and makes the RTD subsidy more sustainable.

A variety of options were discussed to encourage residents' use of the Express van for recreation purposes and Ride Provide is willing to prepare a cost analysis once the CCCPRD provides more detail regarding potential ridership impacts from the Canyon. A change in a fixed route requires PUC approval, but Ride Provide is willing to handle that when appropriate.

Another option that Ride Provide may consider is CCCPRD chartering the Express van for recreation outings. Also discussed was the possibility of in-Canyon transportation during the day between the existing morning and afternoon "commuter runs." This might apply if CCCPRD supported activities being held at locations such as Camp Eden or Camp Wondervu, the school, CCCIA, a community gathering place or other facility located in the Canyon.

Any agreements with Ride Provide would be enhanced by (or perhaps dependent on) some kind of subsidy from the CCCPRD which could come from the District's budget or grants. Overall, Ride Provide is very supportive of the CCCPRD and seems excited about working out solutions to help people take advantage of the recreation opportunities in the area. In reciprocation, CCCPRD has expressed its willingness to work with Ride Provide to help increase ridership on the Coal Creek Canyon route by encouraging use of the van to get to recreation destinations.

Senior Resource Center - A CCCPRD representative met with Hank Braaksma, Transportation Manager for the Urban Division of the Senior Resource Center (SRC) on December 6, 2010. SRC has 3 divisions: urban, mountain (Evergreen), and a volunteer driver program with 70 drivers. SRC contracts for transportation services with a variety of agencies and for all ages, not just seniors. SRC recently contracted to run the Gilpin County Connector (365 day/yr; 14 hr days (two 7-hour shifts). SRC also recently contracted to provide a 9-month fixed route service with Nederland for about \$100,000. Essentially, the SRC services currently cost about \$60/hour.

Boulder Mountainbike Alliance (BMA) – Representatives of the District spoke with Jason Vogel, BMA president on November 2, 2010. Jason indicated that the organization is strongly in support of trails in the Canyon. Some potential trail opportunities include a regional link between Doudy Draw and White Ranch, Crescent Meadows to Golden Gate State Park, Myers Homestead to Magnolia Road, as well as a link between Walker Ranch and Golden Gate State Park. BMA is also very supportive of developing an established partnership with the District to strengthen the voice for trails with the County, as well as through public processes, such as the Walker Ranch Management Plan update. BMA also offered their contacts and expertise in trail planning and design.



Boulder County Parks and Open Space – During November and December of 2010, the consultant team, District Board members, and trails volunteers held individual interviews with Ron Stewart (Director), Rich Koopmann (Planning Manager) and Jesse Rounds (Resource Planner) of Boulder County Parks and Open Space. These interviews were intended to identify potential partnership opportunities between the County and the District, as well as to seek out information on successful strategies and programs that the County has used in the development and management of their park and open space system.

The County manages a large system of open space, natural areas and trail networks. The majority of these lands are owned by the County, as well as some that are preserved through conservation easements and joint-ownership. The focus of the Department is primarily on open space conservation and passive recreation, rather than developed and programmed parks.

Two of the County's properties that fall within the District's boundaries include a significant amount of land between Eldorado Canyon State Park's Crescent Meadows and Inner Canyon and Walker Ranch. In regard to the lands between the State Park, these parcels are primarily owned by BCPOS, but there are a few parcels that are still held by BLM and private land owners. The County received the patent from BLM 2-3 years ago and is currently not doing much with that property, but it will be included in the 2011 Update of the Walker Ranch Management Plan. This property is characterized by rugged terrain and large mammals, such as black bear. Dependent on the route alternatives, there may be the possibility of creating a short, easy loop in the western section of Crescent Meadows.

Walker Ranch is scheduled for an update to the property's Management Plan starting in early 2011 and will take approximately a year to complete. Currently, this property is primarily utilized by mountain bikers and hikers. There are also currently portions of the property that are closed for safety reasons, due to a recent fire. It is important to recognize the public input portion of the Plan update could have a significant

impact on uses and management policies. Users have been pushing for connections from the property to Golden Gate State Park. Use of this property could also be impacted by a future study of sensitive areas and species that could result in some areas designated as conservation areas.

In regard to additional trail connections, opportunities may include promoting existing trails at Crescent Meadows that are ADA accessible and good for kids and seniors, trail connections between Eldorado State Park and Golden Gate State Park, trails within Jefferson County Open Space, and connections from Boulder County and City Open Space to White Ranch.. Additionally, the County offered to be a resource on trail design standards, which evolve based on classification.



County staff members also provided insight as to successful programs they can offer and have used for the purposes of land acquisition and conservation (see Map B and Map G in the GIS Mapping and Spatial Analysis of the Report). Some of these include the County Lease program, which is primarily for agricultural uses but has also been leased for recreation purposes. Additionally, the County has often purchased properties in conjunction with other partner, using an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for management of the property. Staff also mentioned two Bureau of Land Management (BLM) programs and acquisition through the State Land Board that have been used by the County. Following is information provided by the County on those programs, as well as supplemental research by the consultant team:

- **Recreation and Public Purposes Act** - The act authorizes the sale or lease of public lands for recreational or public purposes to State and local governments and to qualified nonprofits. Examples of typical uses under the act are historic monument sites, campgrounds, schools, fire houses, law enforcement facilities, municipal facilities, landfills, hospitals, parks, and fairgrounds. Counties, cities, or other political subdivisions of a State and nonprofit organizations may purchase up to 640 acres a year for recreation purposes, and an additional 640 acres for other public purposes. Applicants will be required to first accept a lease, or lease with option to purchase, to assure approved development takes place before a sale is made and a patent (government deed) is issued. The patent includes a \$250 filing fee.
- **Land Exchange Program** - The BLM's authority for land exchanges derives from FLPMA as amended by the Federal Land Exchange Facilitation Act of 1988. The land exchange program enables the BLM to exchange the checkerboard pattern of federal, state, and privately owned lands in the West into consolidated areas that can be managed more efficiently and at lower cost for all parties involved. Land appraisals play an important role in

the land exchange process, where the parcels of land exchanged must be of equal value.

- **The State Land Board**- was established in 1876 to manage more than 3 million acres of land and 4 million acres of mineral rights that the federal government gave to Colorado to generate revenue for public education and some of the state's institutions. The Board's activities generate significant revenue annually for its trust beneficiaries, primarily through agricultural leases for grazing and crop lands, mineral development and interest earned on invested funds. In recent years, the Board has expanded its efforts to increase revenue through commercial development activities and leasing lands for recreational activities.



Jefferson County Open Space and Community Resources

– On November 30th, 2010 members of the consultant team and representatives of the District met with Tom Hoby (Director), Amy Ito (Open Space Planning and Development Director) and Frank Kunze (Environmental Planner) of Jefferson County Open Space and Community Resources Department. This meeting was intended to identify potential partnership opportunities between the County and the District, as well as to seek out information on successful strategies and programs that the County has used in the development and management of their park and open space system.

The County manages a significant system of open space lands, natural and cultural resources, parks, trails, and recreational facilities. The County emphasized the significant impacts that the economy has had on funding levels and discussed how this could greatly impact the monies that they have available for municipalities and special districts. The Department has approximately \$60 million over the next 20 years and \$105 million has already been requested, although not awarded, through its Joint Venture Program. The allocation of these funds could be greatly influenced by the County's current strategic planning effort, which will be completed by the spring of 2011. Past allocation of funds was approximately 60% for County projects and 40% to municipalities and special districts. However, current priorities include ADA accessible facilities, natural surface trails, introducing residents to nature and the outdoors, and passive recreation.

Some potential acquisitions and projects that were discussed included connecting White Ranch to Golden Gate State Park, Booth Cattle Company, preservation of the Coal Creek Corridor, connecting Eldorado Canyon to White Ranch, and other potential open space and trail projects.

The County is open to partnering and encouraged the District to tie into County plans for regional trail connections, identifying specific properties to lease from the County (which must be supported by capabilities to manage and maintain), promoting existing recreation programs and facilities so as to not duplicate services, partnering with local community organizations and

working to protect the rural, mountain characteristics of the Canyon. The County also stated that the results of this master planning effort and identified priority projects could influence their future strategic and facility planning efforts, such as the Coal Creek Canyon Park Management Plan update.

Key Findings

Through these Stakeholder and Public meetings it is evident that there is strong support for the creation of a few community-based recreation amenities that fit within the context of the rural, mountain characteristics of the Canyon. Yet, there are also some significant concerns about changing the face of the community as well as the ability to fund and support such recreation amenities.

Some of those desired recreation amenities and opportunities most commonly heard throughout this public input process include a community gathering space, trails, fitness facilities and increased access to recreation opportunities. Overall, the challenge of gaining support among District residents could be best achieved through clearly communicating with and engaging residents in the planning and design of priority facilities and programs (which are to be outlined in the Recommendations phase of the project). In the mean time, maximizing the use of existing facilities and programs, further developing partnerships, and leveraging funding and resources will be important to continue to gain District residents' support.

