Middle Park Colorado Broads Extra meeting March 4, 2021

Attendees: Sarah Bransom, Joyce Clair, Sharry Erzinger, Sally Sharp, Pat Welch, Travis Wright, Melanie Zwick

**Travis’ meeting with developer** Yesterday, Travis and Shanna Ganne (executive director of GCHA) met (by phone) with Bob Fanch, Harris Sherman and Jeff Vogel. Travis reported that Fanch was not aware that the RR went past Arrow to Hwy 40. The developer would be making more cuts in the Corona Road for utilities in addition to those for new streets for a development. Emergency access was brought up as a good reason to develop. Travis suggested using the Water Board Road and was told it was not up to proper R&B standards. A couple times, Travis brought up the possibility of putting a conservation easement on the property and was told that would preclude development and they are going to develop. The developer did bring up Colorado Preservation, Inc. Travis did not mention Broads. Shanna mentioned a couple other history related resources. It appears that somehow information from proponents is going from the FS to the developer. Broads should keep that in mind. The developer asked about the boundaries for the Colorado’s most endangered place designation. Travis pointed them to a website. The 3 mile growth plan was brought up several times by the developer. They asked about GCHA’s objectives and Travis reported they are the same has they have been for the past 50 years. Disturbingly, the developer repeatedly asked what GCHA needed. Fanch stated he wants the old D Bar T property preserved for an unmarred view from Devil’s Thumb Ranch and his surrounding developments. Ironically, he thinks the FS is the way to do that. Harris Sherman did most of the speaking. It was agreed that future calls could be worthwhile.

Thank you, Travis.

Travis’ high-level takeaways from the 90-minute discussion:

* The developer believed that the historic railroad over Rollins Pass ended at Arrow and did not extend to US Highway 40. (The historic railroad grade extends 3.7 miles from the townsite of Arrow to US 40.)
  + Perhaps this can be used as a way to give public officials an ‘out’ to say that they didn’t know this fact but with this new information now oppose development?
* They also did not understand the track alignment from where the historic Rollins Pass track merges with the existing Moffat Tunnel alignment. I explained this.
* Despite learning these facts, they still wish to press ahead with the development.
* The development will impact the feeling and setting of Rollins Pass as described previously and will also create multiple junction points with new roads crossing the historic road. However, they also mentioned there will need to be additional ‘cuts’ made into the road at multiple points to lay underground utilities, etc.
* I asked about the potential to only use existing roadways outside of the exchange parcel to connect the neighborhoods (such as the Denver Water Board Road) as a viable alternative, they said that road does not meet existing standards. (Curiously, how does or how will the Rollins Pass road be altered to meet standards?) They said emergency vehicles are seeking another way to access neighborhoods in that area and this would help. I believe they have a letter of support from the local fire department on this based on what was shown on their screen.
* I asked twice (in different ways) if they would consider making this a conservation easement to remain consistent with their brand of “honoring and preserving pristine landscapes for future generations.” They said that that doing that would preclude development and their plans are to develop the area.
* They mentioned that the plans do call for some portions open space to help protect wetlands and they can’t speak to what exactly would be developed on this yet as it needs to be annexed into the town and then zoned first. Although it seems like townhomes or single family homes.
* They did bring up Colorado Preservation, Inc. (which shows that concerns from those in opposition sent to the Forest Service are making their way to the project proponent). We mentioned that GCHA operates on a shoestring budget of $200K each year to operate four museums across the county and so we partner with CPI and have worked on multiple ‘endangered places’ projects, including most recently the Winter Park Balcony House.
* They probed for who else we are working with or who else they should speak to and Shanna (our Executive Director) mentioned History Colorado. I mentioned that Dr. LaBelle from Colorado State University has been a great resource for the GCHA and has given wonderful lectures about the pass. We did not feel it appropriate to mention other groups at this time.
* I raised the point that this area is listed on the State Register of Historic Properties, the National Register of Historic Places, and is listed as one of Colorado Most Endangered places. They asked about where those boundary lines are, and I mentioned that the polygons for the state and national registers are available online. I pressed again that this is listed as one of Colorado’s Most Endangered Places and asked knowing this, if they are still willing to develop it. They only see the road as endangered and not the area, further, they emphasized that the area is in the Town of Winter Park’s Three-Mile Growth Plan and is a “logical place for future growth to occur.” This statement about knowing about the Colorado Endangered Places status yet choosing to proceed clearly illustrates how the area is under imminent threat.
* They asked about GCHA’s objectives. I stated, “GCHA objectives haven’t changed in nearly a half century when it comes to Rollins Pass and other areas within the county—the historical association has always advocated for preservation of areas, the interpretation of history, and the importance of setting. That has been a constant.” I also stated that this is one of the most precious 550-acre parcels in Grand County.
* They asked about what the GCHA needs (do we have goals of improving the road) etc. We replied that our focus is on education and public awareness and that the Forest Service oversees road maintenance. We stressed this is our open air museum and that because everyone who has worked on the historic Moffat Road has passed, we can only know about them through the artifacts that are in, under, and to either side of the road.
  + They expressed repeatedly what we needed (presumably to get our buy in and an unspoken transactional agreement: help us get this and we’ll help you get what you need.) The biggest concerns we have with this is that there are groups—including offroading groups—that seek to re-open Rollins Pass as a motorized thoroughfare across the Continental Divide—if they sign onto helping the developer, the developer may help improve the road and/or open the road which will further degrade the historic integrity of the area. This is a new tertiary threat that development now brings to the picture on Rollins Pass. Further, it’s GCHA’s understanding that the developer is worth billions of dollars and presumably could have more influence on this area than anyone involved previously.
* One of the more revealing things that was discussed was that the developer stated that he wants to fold his 1500-2200 acres of private land under US Forest Service control so the viewshed from Devil’s Thumb Ranch is preserved. He said the US Forest Service is the go-to party to ensure the long-term preservation of the land. I acknowledged that concern but countered this is what GCHA was hoping for and relying on for Rollins Pass—that it, too, would remain under USFS control.
* He also stated that there have been many issues with trespassing, hunting, and more on his property and by making the lands public, this frees up these concerns. I asked if he’d be trading one problem area for another. “What will be your response if there’s complaints about public usage on lower Rollins Pass—how will current use play nicely with an HOA? (ATV trailers, public urination, dogs, noise, camping, littering). What will he tell a future homeowner who paid say $1.5 million for land and built a $5 million dollar home about these issues?” He was silent for a solid 10 seconds and didn’t seem to have a concrete answer.
* We agreed that future calls on this would be worthwhile and that GCHA can serve as a historical knowledge resource and I will bring it back to my board to see if there are any ideas on how to work together.
* I asked them for spatial data for the boundaries of all three parcels such as an ArcGIS shapefile/geodatabase or a Google Earth KML to know where the exact boundaries are and they said this would be sent. (Update: they sent maps but not shapefiles as requested, and we had clarified the difference on the call).

**Letter to the FS** Travis suggested that we pare down the letter as to not tip our hand at this time. It was suggested that the letter mention the Feasibility Analysis and being in the dark. We should send information to the FS as appropriate.

**Melanie meeting with Fanch** It was decided that the meeting should be Broads rather than Melanie personally. We must have our points and be prepared. The Broads letter should be sent to the FS before this meeting. It was decided that Sarah, Pat and Melanie will attend the meeting. Melanie will contact Fanch with some prospective dates.

**Other considerations**  What is most ecologically important and what provides the most help for biodiversity?

What about the Wilderness Land Trust buying the land?

Water in a development for landscaping – there should be no outside watering allowed.

**Compelling story** Sally showed how to make comments and changes in Google Docs. She suggested we use Google Docs instead of e mail. The compelling story is being reworked by Travis.

Submitted by Melanie Zwick