

Conservation Committee Minutes, June 3, 2014-

Attendees: Jim Daniel, Cherry Payne, Mark Young, Mary Clark, John Parker, Mike O'Farrell, Jerry Gulseth, Tom Bredenberg, Tom Brimacombe, David Yard (Board liaison), Dag Ryen (Board president and former liaison).

Guests: Steve Griego, John Segell, Kerri Segell, Carol Hawkins, David Johnson, Dick Huelster, Lyn deMartin, Joyce Hamner

May minutes were reviewed and approved.

Update on pilot project: Seven residents attended to discuss this work. John and Kerri Segell expressed their dismay about the greenbelt project directly adjacent to their lot. They feel like there was no discussion with them, but noted they received something on a Tuesday only to have the work commence the next day. Kerri noted that the path is much wider than 48". She expressed concern that the work was to accommodate one bicyclist. David measured the path and showed photos indicating that in places, the path is 5-7'.

Tom Brimacombe noted that the trail is a work in progress and that the work is being conducted by the committee members. Tom said that what people are seeing now is the preliminary work and it is not haphazard. There will be trail-edge mitigation. In order to grade and fill gullies, fill dirt has to be brought in. The next phase will be hand grooming, some of which has been done on the north side of the arroyo. Tom indicated that the final area will most likely be about 3' wide, and that by the end of the monsoon season, the trail edges will be softened.

John Parker recapped the background that led the committee to initiate the pilot project. He also emphasized that it is a pilot project and that he also lives in the impacted area. He has observed that the existing trails are in poor shape.

Jim noted that the committee plans to do reseeding along the edges as well.

Carol Hawkins expressed her concerns. Did the committee do an EA or EIS? The wind will blow away any seed. Last year, Boy Scouts delivered a mound of rock that still sits there, so she is concerned about follow up. She said that some paths were created by her and neighbors to avoid mountain bikers. She asked if the committee would have done this in the Preserve? She feels the committee is trying to make the new trails look like those in the Galisteo Preserve. She asserts that there currently is little conflict and the paths do not need to be as wide as they are. She also asked why there was no advance notification.

David Johnson stated he often walks the greenbelt toward the rail trail. It is his opinion that, except in a few places, the trail is in reasonable shape, and suggests the committee only perform moderate maintenance. Again, he expressed his dismay about the scraped width, and that over 1 acre is impacted. He also expressed concerns about invasive plants taking root along the trail edges before the native seeds that will be sown can begin to germinate. He noted that there are lots of hike-bike trails in the community, and that there are areas with no hike bike trails (Azul) that might be considered for work. He urged that the pilot project be terminated and that spot maintenance take place.

Lyn deMartin stated that everyone is accommodated except those who want smaller trails. She wants to know where the permission and funding came from and why residents were not asked about the project? The cactus people should have been on site to rescue disturbed cactus. She expressed disappointment in the lack of communication and consultation.

Joyce Hamner attended last month and came back again, and stated she is appalled and shocked. She is especially concerned that there was little to no advance notice. She called the

committee arrogant, and added that many folks are unhappy. Joyce noted that it is lovely to have little paths in the greenbelts.

Mark gave a recap of notification efforts. An article was placed on the web site and has been there since before the project started. As a result of last month's concerns, notices were placed in the trail work area and letters were delivered to the neighbors who live adjacent to the work area.

Dag concurred that we lacked in effective communications. There was an article in Vistas, but there is a 6 week lead time for that publication, so it is difficult to convey up-to-the-minute information.

Dag noted the paths along the roads are in the county right-of-way and they build and maintain them. They will not put a path on Azul because of a very narrow right-of-way. The county will soon begin work on the Monte Alto bike path.

Dag acknowledged that guests want the project to stop; he asked that they let the committee complete the grooming and get the trails to the way they have been envisioned. There are no plans to ask for or commence other projects of this kind until the committee can assess the effort.

Finally, he said that at 4', two people can walk together. Also, when passing others, walkers do not have to jump into the cactus to get out of each other's way. He noted that there is a safety issue that the pilot project will mitigate. He acknowledged that the guests may not see the trails as an improvement.

John Parker brought up the cupping of the Pueblo Canyon greenbelt and dual tracks of that trail. It is that way because it is a fall-line trail in the bottom of the greenbelt. The committee worked on some of the trails to mitigate erosional problems. The pile of rocks is going to be used to try to heal the main scar. That trail was not designed. John begged folks to bear with the effort and that the intent is not to make a 9' wide trail. He also invited guests to help us and reiterated that committee members as well as those working on the trail are all volunteers.

One guest mentioned concerns about motorized bikers in the trails. John noted that there will be an effort to install exclusionary devices.

Jim stated that the goal is not to invite new users; it is to encourage Eldorado residents to walk and enjoy the trails.

Kerri respectfully requests that we complete what we've done to date before continuing any more work. She also noted that the asters were wonderful last summer and now they are gone.

Lyn deMartin observed that there are many trails available for a variety of hiking experiences such as the bike paths, preserve, and greenbelt trails. She feels that the pilot project is replicating the kind of trail experience available along the bike paths and that this may not be necessary.

Tom Bredenberg stated he's lived here 35 years; it is time we gave some good thought to what happens in the greenbelts because the status quo is not sustainable.

David Johnson asked about other communications methods. He suggests a list serv (though he did not have a suggested solution to making that happen).

Six of the seven guests who attended in order to communicate their concerns about this project departed at that time, though they were invited to stay for the committee discussion. Steve Griego stayed.

Discussion: Security has been hand-delivering letters to residents in areas where the work is being undertaken.

Steve is hoping that we can get the trails groomed, but we need more volunteers. One more day on the tractor is needed before grooming commences. He also wanted confirmation that ECIA is responsible for the greenbelt. John confirmed that ECIA has the authority.

The latest greenbelt map and plats may need to be updated. There may have been an incursion onto the property at 9 Frasco (Russ Richardson); the homeowner was appreciative of the committee's (Steve's) quick response when he raised the issue. Steve noted that someone is placing rows of rocks across the graded trail and also some sticks. Russ told Steve that there is a resident who installs the rocks. Russ had marked his property with a stake and red ribbon which someone removed, which is why the trail accidentally cut a corner of his property. Mark and Steve will follow up with the plat maps to assess if the trail is or is not on his property.

Steve noted that he was lectured by a person who wanted to know what he was doing when he was trimming branches to make the trail safer and to allow adequate site lines. This resident stated that the trail was built by her. Steve has observed that there are 3 trails within 100 yards of each other that come into the arroyo.

Steve suggested that we refer to the trail as multi-user trail. Some of the curves are wider than 48" because there needs to be enough radius for all users to get around the corner. The 48" width is to reduce conflict between multiple users employing different modes of transport (walking and bike-riding). By putting in curves while maintaining line-of-sight for multiple users, safety issues and conflicts are reduced.

Dag suggests no tractor (Kubota) be used before we can create a map to show residents where the work will take place. Only ½k remains to be graded. Cherry suggested we stand down and focus our work on the trail hand work. John said that while there is some vocal opposition, the group expressing concern may not represent most residents.

David noted that people do not like change; he suggests that we develop an arsenal of photos showing initial work, one-year recovery and two-year recovery. Steve is taking photos to document the work. Steve said that a resident who attended an earlier meeting to express his concerns told him just a month later how nice the trail is now.

David offered it might be helpful for people to see the problem areas that may or may not be immediately adjacent to their property. Photos showing the earlier problems may help.

Jim observed that most people who attended tonight's meeting did not take the committee's offer to read an explanatory narrative that was provided to them. Cherry said that several questions have been raised about the completion of environmental assessments prior to doing the work. ECIA is a private landowner. Environmental reviews are required by NEPA, which applies to federal action, which this is not. Most states and counties have similar ordinances for local government work. These ordinances normally do not apply to private landowners, (including homeowners in Eldorado), though other permits may be required.

Tom said for \$500 we could probably get the seed we need to sow when the monsoons start. Tom will work with Mark to purchase seed.

Preserve Wetlands Restoration & Mitigation: this area near Apache Spring, which is a wetland, was heavily overgrown. On May 28, committee members worked with Jan-Willem Jansens of Ecotone to cut the dead material and place it on headcuts to mitigate erosion. There is still 100 yards to do, but there is a huge pile of dead wood that needs to be addressed with lots of deadfall. This work will clean out the drainage to allow water to flow again. David asked if

this was for egress and members explained that it is for wildlife access and to restore natural flow. It was suggested the remaining work be postponed until the fall, and that we recruit a bunch of young, energetic volunteers to help tackle the deadfall pile.

Greenbelt Map: The text is done; Mark and Tom Brimacombe will get together to choose some photos. The committee liked the windmill drawing on the existing map and suggested it be left in. There were some details discussed which Tom will add to the draft.

Educational Program: Mark suggested the committee consider an educational program for the community as it has in years past. Last year we contracted with someone to lead a walk that was not well attended. Tom Bredenberg suggested we video some of our educational programs. Mike said that most people do not understand the resources in the Preserve. He added that last summer he did a talk on the bats of Eldorado; he suggests that if he presents another talk, he expand the program to talk about bat diversity and the ecological niches they fill. He also suggests it be given in the summer when there are bats out and about so that the talk could be followed by field observation. There is \$500 in the budget for honoraria. One idea that keeps coming up is one on animal tracks, which we have never done. Mike will work with Mark to set a date for a bat talk, probably in July; Mike will follow up with William Newirth on an animal track/scat program. Another idea suggested was a program on night sky.

Goat mitigation: the goats showed up without permission, but were asked to leave because they did not have liability insurance. Until that happens, they cannot work in Eldorado. Mike noted that there are lots of mustards coming in and goats would really help.

New Trail Signs: the vendor has had medical and family issues and has yet to respond to our comments.

ECIA Manager's report: Sue Ann Armstrong and her spouse continue to pull the blue posts on the 300-series trails. They are staged and need to be hauled out, which Brian (ECIA) will eventually remove. Some people are illegally pulling posts on the Trail 105, which need to be reinstalled.

The No Bikes and No Horses signs cannot be pulled out because they are cemented in. Jim has the location points on his GPS. We do want to reuse the signs if possible. Some ways to remove them were discussed.

Other Business: Dick Huelster attended to talk about the possibility of his business doing digital maps for ECIA. The committee referred him to Mark to discuss needs and possibilities.

David Yard, as our new board liaison, wanted to know what he can do for the committee. Jim stated that we would like David to ensure we are working within our bounds. David noted that there will be an effort to get individual log-ins for homeowners on the web site and to develop some better means of communication with residents. For instance, they are thinking about setting up on-line dues payment systems. He thinks it would be helpful for people to be able to log in and link to a lecture, or the progression of a project. He would also like to see some educational efforts for young people using the web site and Eldorado open space. He suggested things like game trail cameras. The bigger issue is to make the web site more appealing, fresh, and interesting.

There are two pinon pines across Trail 401 in the open meadow area that needs to be cleared. It probably will require a chainsaw to remove it.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

The next meeting will be July 1.