



North Ada County Foothills Association

One voice. One goal. One plan.

April 19, 2009

Council Chair Michael Huffaker
City of Eagle
660 Civic Lane
Eagle, ID 83616

Re: City acquisitions and park development concept, 2000 BLM acres, SH16 and Beacon Light Road

Dear Councilman Huffaker:

As you're aware, NACFA has followed closely, since inception, the City's plans under the RPPA process for lease/acquisition and park development of the nearly 2000 acres of BLM (public) land on the doorstep of the North Foothills. Given the proximity of this land to areas for which entitlements have been granted and one developer's assertive actions affecting the land, including early attempts to acquire it, we have consistently advocated for:

- Retention of the land as public open space in a manner that preserves the rural nature of the area
- Limitation of improvements to those designed to maximize continued use as wildlife habitat and as non-motorized recreation space, particularly for hikers, equestrians and cyclists. In this regard, we strongly emphasize continued accommodation of equestrian uses, considering the long equestrian tradition of the area and the increasing restrictions being placed on equestrian uses in other part of the foothills in Ada County
- Preservation of the natural terrain, enhancement/restoration of native vegetation and protection of native and resident wildlife populations (and avoidance of manicured areas more appropriate to urban settings)
- Careful consideration of park economics in terms of: operation and maintenance costs; credited (future) impact fees; and design, NEPA and construction costs and financing
- Restriction of improved roads to the minimum necessary, with traffic circulation emphasis primarily at SH16
- Design features that encourage (only) non-motorized recreation, including multi-use looped trail systems and user-friendly road crossings for equestrians, cyclists and pedestrians
- Best practice wildlife crossings, in sufficient number to ensure continued sustainability of the resident populations

...citizens helping to create a sustainable vision for the future of Ada County's Northern Foothills...

We compliment the City on its vision for this acreage as articulated at the April 9, 2009, City Hall open house and especially for reestablishing its role as primary developer of the park concept over the past six months.

We strongly support the major elements of the City's current concept and commend the City's "packaging" and timing of park improvements into logical, well-sized and discrete elements, allowing both Council and the Eagle community multiple opportunities over the next decade to consider improvements in the context in which they're being proposed and maximum flexibility as the vision is implemented.

With respect to specific aspects of the plan, we offer the following for your consideration:

Amphitheatre

Absent more specifics of this feature, we are concerned primarily about the possibility of disruption to what is conceived as a quiet space for users and wildlife and cannot support its inclusion at this time.

An amphitheatre has great potential to fundamentally change the tranquility of this acreage by attracting large concentrations of users for single events, detracting from its solitude and tipping the character of the park more toward urban. We recommend consideration of other existing park locations within City limits for this amenity. A more central venue would likely increase utility of the amphitheatre and by locating it in one of the existing fully landscaped parks, would minimize or eliminate the requirement to provide water and restrooms, as well as shelter from the heat.

Furthermore, the placement of the facility using Linder Road as access begs questions about traffic impact on residents nearby, particularly if significant use would be allowed on weekends and during the evening and nighttime hours, when residents would normally and reasonably expect lower-intensity activity in their neighborhood than that occurring during the work week.

Additionally, we have questions about frequency of use, types and hours of events that would be allowed, sound and light control measures and the seating capacity of the amphitheatre. The large 500-seat facility currently envisioned would likely bring a minimum of 1000 people to the area at one time, with serious impacts on wildlife and adjoining neighborhoods. A smaller facility, perhaps in the 250-300 seat range placed west of Linder so that parking and other facilities could be shared with the rodeo grounds, would be somewhat less objectionable. If the City ultimately proceeds with the amphitheatre, appropriate controls and terrain-sensitive design would be crucial.

We understand that at this stage of development the City does not have answers to these concerns and, given the outyear schedule for the amphitheatre, have no expectation that such details would be available for some time. We will continue to participate in discussion of this feature as the City moves closer to making a final decision on it.

Fire protection

The expanded use of this terrain will present challenges for reasonably cost efficient protection from fast-moving rangeland/wildfires that could easily spread to residential areas. It's our understanding that mutual aid agreements will be executed with surrounding fire districts, including those run by federal agencies, and that major new equipment acquisitions (e.g., tankers,

planes) are not contemplated. While we support the economical approach, we look forward to understanding what additional methods the City plans to minimize the risk of wildfire and the potential threat to neighboring properties.

Natural enhancements

Conversation with staff at the open house assured our members that, though not specifically mentioned in the presentation, the City is committed to full use of native and xeric plants and to creation of wildlife crossings—either shared with humans if appropriate or solely intended for wildlife—to maximize and restore the native environment. These features are critical in our view and we encourage the City to include specific references to these aspects in the plan so that the intent is clear.

In sum, we fully support recreational development of the BLM acreage in a manner that protects and preserves its natural, open character and continues to provide the citizens of the Treasure Valley with an opportunity for wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, and other activities in a sensitively-executed, largely natural manner that emphasizes its rural setting. We believe the City is on the right track, given what we saw at the April 9, 2009, open house. In this spirit, provision of trails and trailheads and restroom facilities for equestrians, hikers and cyclists are a welcome addition, as are the multiuse pedestrian, equestrian and wildlife crossings.

While we hold reservations about certain aspects of the concept as articulated above, we find in general a broad agreement with this approach and thank the City for the thoughtful execution of the acquisition and development plan.

As the project progresses, we look forward to a continuing dialog and participating in public hearings as each phase of the project comes before Council.

Thank you for your consideration,



Katherine Pennisi
Chair
North Ada County Foothills Association

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