

OPEN SPACE A PRECIOUS LEGACY (DAILY CAMERA)

By GWEN DOOLEY

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Periodically we in Boulder establish certain “blue ribbon” committees to deal with problematic issues affecting the future well being of our citizens and our city. The Mall Commission in the 1970`s established the Pearl Street Mall; in the 1980`s, BURA redeveloped the former Crossroads Mall; and in the 1990`s, a cross-section of Downtown Alliance members planned for its redevelopment. The Community Collaborative Group (CCG) is yet another such committee, this one charged with recommending trail management in the West Trail Area Study (WTSA), our cherished mountain backdrop. Arguably, the ecological health of this crown jewel sets the stage for the environmental and economic health of Boulder and to a great extent gives Boulder its identity.

The CCG committee, however, was formed differently: its members were elected by a caucus process to represent various constituents` interests in order to reach a broad, public consensus. Elected as a conservation representative, I and all other CCG members served from Sept. 15, 2009, until set free on Feb. 9, 2011 after presentation of our collaborative recommendations to the Open Space Board of Trustees, who is established by our City Charter to care-take OSMP lands and their financial needs.

Undoubtedly missteps and errors were made in the CCG election process. One group rather successfully packed other caucus groups; in my opinion, “neighbors” were defined way too broadly; and other procedural flaws emerged as we went forward. Nevertheless, we wound up with a group that worked intensely, spent long hours before, during and after regular and subgroup meetings and field trips, and had very few contentious encounters amongst ourselves. No individual or group got everything or even most of what we wanted, but the many compromises we made got us all an end-product we agreed was a “package deal” each agreement bound up with and resting on another. For anyone to cherry-pick it could therefore cause the whole consensus to collapse as individual members withdrew their previous agreements.

Since any one member of the CCG could veto any particular idea by simply saying “no way,” the numbers in any particular caucus were irrelevant. On the other hand, although the land is owned by the citizens of Boulder, membership in the CCG was extended to include non-citizens, and testimony as to our city trails and their use was given by folks in Weld and Jefferson counties as well as Boulder County.

I would point out that it was Boulder conservationists who gave us this precious legacy. In 1898, Boulder citizens purchased the Mountain Parks for preservation, which was later augmented by a federal land grant. In 1958, Al Bartlett and Bob McKelvey walked what would become the Blue Line, above which city water service could only be extended upon a positive vote of Boulder citizens. It is due to their conservation ethics that our western sky is not lit up by street and

residential lights. Thanks to them, Ruth Wright, Oak Thorne, Kurt Gerstle, and other conservationists, the city owns Enchanted Mesa. Many of these same conservation folk successfully brought forth the 1967 Greenbelt election that still funds “the acquisition of open space [and] expenditures necessary to protect [it] against loss or damage or destruction...”

As a conservation representative in the CCG, I tried to focus on several things: (1) Lessening conflicts between all user groups — human, plant, bird and native animals — through appropriate and properly placed trail-uses. (2) Meeting the visitor needs of children, the elderly and handicapped in what is now being called ‘slow landscapes’, where movement is slow and one’s interest is mostly held by the minutia and immediate. (3) Representing the plants, animals and birds who — while unable to speak for themselves or go to our recreation centers to re-create — attempt to live in shrinking, bifurcated ecosystems and habitats and will depend upon riparian and water quality protections as we face global warming and more dramatic drought conditions. (4) Keeping these resources in good, sustainable health in perpetuity as the citizens of Boulder have been promised again and again. (5) Protecting quiet, quality visitor experiences of nature for those wanting respite from the hustle and bustle of urban life, cell phones and — yes — such transportation modes as bikes.

Now our Boulder City Council faces balancing the various interests/demands for use with protection of our city-owned resources, without sacrificing our quality visitor experiences. I hope Council will listen to the past and protect the future. I hope our Council will accept without change the consensual recommendations of the CCG.

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