

BOULDER MOUNTAIN BIKERS REGROUP FOLLOWING ANEMONE HILL DECISION (DAILY CAMERA)

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By Heath Urie

Emotions run high on both sides after council rejects trail access

Hurt feelings, bruised egos and political attacks all are among the fallout of the Boulder City Council's decision not to allow mountain bikes on a planned loop at Anemone Hill.

And, while some people are questioning whether some of the leaders made up their minds long before Tuesday night's vote, others are wondering where mountain bike advocates will go from here.

"I guess I feel like the door was slammed in the face of the mountain bike community," said Jason Vogel, president of the Boulder Mountainbike Alliance.

Vogel said the council's narrow 5-4 vote -- which rejected mountain biking as an allowed use on a planned 5-mile pedestrian and equestrian trail just west of downtown Boulder -- has perhaps caused irreparable harm to the relationship between the city and mountain bikers.

"There's a political reality in this town that mountain bikes are still not welcome here," he said. "It makes me wonder whether engaging with the city open space department is worth our time, at least for the time being. Maybe there's some place for us in the future."

Councilwoman KC Becker was among the minority bloc that voted in favor of additional mountain bike access. She expressed similar concerns about the future relationship between the city and mountain bikers.

"I think the mountain biking community has been very positive" by maintaining trails and helping to raise money for the Valmont Bike Park, she said. "I hope that spirit of cooperation and participation isn't lost because of this."

Becker said she was "definitely disappointed" in being outvoted, and that there are few opportunities left to allow mountain bikers into the most coveted areas of open space west of the city.

'We have blurred the lines'

On the other side of the issue, people in favor of restricting access to Anemone Hill were elated a day after the council's decision.

Gwen Dooley, a member of PLAN-Boulder County and a former Boulder councilwoman and open space trustee, said allowing bikes on Anemone Hill could have led to disastrous consequences for local wildlife.

"We know that the biggest threat to wildlife is loss of habitat," she said, emphasizing that she was speaking for herself and not on behalf of PLAN-Boulder. "We have blurred the lines between urban and open space. We've got to give some place where animals are not disturbed, where they can live their lives according to their needs."

Dooley was among several people who said it was unusual to see some council members apparently read from prepared remarks just after hearing from nearly 60 members of the public Tuesday night.

Macon Cowles appeared to read directly from a lengthy prepared speech, which included a motion to open up the planned Anemone Hill loop trail to mountain biking. Becker followed by reading comments from her laptop in support of Cowles.

The motion was defeated, but some people were left questioning whether the speeches were a sign that at least some of the leaders made up their minds long before Tuesday's meeting.

"When I talked to Macon on Sunday, he said he hadn't made up his mind," Dooley said. "But he had, obviously."

Cowles did not respond to a request for comment on Wednesday.

Vogel, the Mountainbike Alliance president, said that "everyone walked into that room, except for maybe one or two people, with their mind made up. I don't think the public comment period made much of a difference in most of the council members' eyes." Becker said she was reading from her notes more than a prepared statement, and that she remained open to changing her mind during the lengthy public comment period.

"There are just some things you don't know until comment period," she said. "There's always an opportunity to be persuaded."

'You are out of touch'

Some of the fallout from Tuesday's meeting has put Councilwoman Lisa Morzel in the political hot seat.

Morzel, who hopes to retain her seat in next week's election, was the only one of the three incumbents running this year to vote against a mountain bike loop. That touched off a flurry of e-mails to Morzel on Wednesday from angry bike advocates.

"I'm sending along a note in support of those who are not going to vote for your re-election," James Dziezynski wrote to Morzel. "You are out of touch with those you represent and the city of Boulder deserves better."

Boulder resident Jeff Gaillard expressed similar feelings.

"I live downtown and have no access to mountain biking without using my car," he wrote. "A multi-use trail would be a wonderful addition to downtown Boulder and the many people who live and work here. For a number of reasons, including the vote last night, I have decided not to vote for Lisa Morzel this year."

Morzel responded Wednesday by saying that her vote was made with deference to the community as a whole, rather than the desires of one group of users.

"People need to understand that Anemone Hill is a valued piece of property to not only the mountain bikers, but to people who live in that area," she said. "You need to always balance the benefits to the broader community."

Morzel said there's still the possibility of adding a connector trail on the south end of the property for mountain bikes, and that she has worked for more than a decade on council to acquire open space and to develop options for bikes and bike access.

"I will continue to advocate for bikes, for safe access and to make sure people can access great mountain bike trails," she said. "To me, the big goal here is to get people from the city of Boulder in a safe manner to great mountain biking trails that are already existing on Betasso" Preserve in Boulder Canyon.

Former Boulder Mayor Shaun McGrath -- an avid mountain biker -- also jumped into the fray on Wednesday, writing to a group of upset riders that singling out Morzel "could cause mountain bikers to lose any access in Anemone Hill."

'You do not help your cause'

Mayor Susan Osborne also has found herself in the crosshairs following her "no" vote on mountain bike access to an Anemone Hill loop.

Osborne engaged in a testy e-mail exchange with bike advocate Isaac Stokes ahead of Tuesday's meeting. Stokes wrote a brief note to the mayor asking her to "please end mountain bike apartheid in the West TSA."

Osborne wrote back in part that, "I am really done with the whiney and spoiled and, frankly, erroneous fiction you guys tell yourselves. You do not help your cause."

On Wednesday, Osborne said she was frustrated with the bombardment of e-mails from constituents ahead of the meeting.

"People were calling us all kinds of names," she said. "It felt like, give us credit for something. I feel like we don't get credit for anything."

She went on to say that she's "certainly sorry about the rancor" that the issue has caused, but she doesn't think the correct response is for the cycling community to leave the table.

"We make tough decisions all the time, and it's really rare that the person or group on the losing side does a, 'I'm going to take my marbles home and I'm not going to play anymore,'" she said. "We have another vote on a mountain biking trail that at least to some people seems like another pretty good option. I don't get the strategy where you basically take no prisoners."

That vote will come next month when the council decides whether to add a 2.9-mile connector trail for mountain bikes that would link Settlers' Park to Fourmile Canyon. The council sent that idea back to the Open Space Board of Trustees for input.

"If (mountain bike supporters) decide they're not interested in that, there's certainly enough homeowners near where the trail would go to make the case in the other direction," Osborne said.

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