

BOULDER MAKES PROGRESS TOWARD OPENING CHAPMAN DRIVE TO MOUNTAIN BIKES (DAILY CAMERA)

By LAURA SNIDER
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If you go

What: The Boulder County commissioners will decide whether to approve a property deal between the city of Boulder and a private land trust. If approved, the deal would allow the city to open up Chapman Drive to mountain bikers.

When: 11 a.m. Nov. 8

Where: Third floor of the County Courthouse, 1325 Pearl St. in Boulder

The city of Boulder is close to wrapping up a land deal that would allow mountain bikers to connect from Boulder Canyon to Flagstaff Mountain via Chapman Drive.

The Chapman Drive connector was one of two mountain bike trail proposals approved last spring by the City Council as part of the management plan for the West Trail Study Area, a chunk of open space west of Broadway.

The second proposed trail would connect Walker Ranch to Eldorado Springs. To make either trail a reality, however, the city needs the cooperation of other landowners and government agencies.

Next week, the Boulder County commissioners will decide whether to approve a deal between the city and the Bonnie L. Schnell Revocable Trust that would make three lots out of two existing parcels. The largest parcel, about 119 acres, would go to the city's Open Space and Mountain Parks Department. That piece of land also encompasses the lower third of Chapman Drive, a 20-foot-wide dirt road built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps that intersects with Colo. 119 about 3.5 miles up Boulder Canyon.

The second two lots — which would be five acres and seven acres in size — would surround existing residences.

"Anytime you're moving property lines between parcels, anytime you're doing that, you have to go through the subdivision approval process," said Bryan Harding, a planner for the county's Land Use Department. "Those always go to the commissioners for final approval."

Mike Patton, director of the city's Open Space and Mountain Parks Department, said Monday that approval from the county commissioners is not the final hurdle for the project. The largest unsolved issue is the bridge that links Chapman Drive to Colo. 119 in Boulder Canyon.

The bridge, which serves the neighboring Red Lion Restaurant, washed out in June 2010. The county permitted the restaurant's owner, Chris Mueller, to put up a temporary bridge with the

condition that a permanent bridge be installed in six months, but more than a year later, the temporary bridge is still the only way to access the start of Chapman Drive.

“The holdup (with the property deal) has been the question about a bridge over the creek because the most plausible way to do it is in a relationship with all the landowners, including Chris Mueller,” Patton said. “What we’re trying to establish is who pays for the bridge.”

But Patton said he’s confident that a deal can be reached among all the parties.

“The gap that needs to be bridged, so to speak, (between the parties) is much smaller than it had been to this point,” he said.

Once the land is owned by the city, the open space department plans to build a trailhead at the base of the drive and open the whole road — which connects to the top of Flagstaff Mountain — to bikes.

The progress on the Chapman Drive trail is a bright spot for local mountain bikers, who have been hit by a string of bad news this year related to trail access.

When the City Council approved the two mountain bike connector trails as part of the West TSA management plan, they also upheld a ban on bikes in the rest of the study area, which includes the spectacular backdrop of the Flatirons. Mountain bikers had asked for a trail that would connect the center of town to the southern part of the system, including the Dowdy Draw and Marshall Mesa trailheads.

In the spring, the City Council also directed staffers to take a second look at whether mountain bikes should be allowed on a new loop trail being planned for the Anemone Hill area south of Mount Sanitas. But last week, the City Council voted against bike access on the new loop trail, a move that left many mountain bikers feeling disenfranchised with the city’s open space planning process.

The Chapman Drive trail would provide bikers with a crucial connection between the mountains and the city of Boulder, according to Jason Vogel, president of the Boulder Mountainbike Alliance.

“Right now, if you want to do that on a bicycle, you currently hit a brick wall on the city open space,” he said. “This would provide a pathway to open space that doesn’t currently exist.”

Bikers could use the Chapman Drive trail to access Walker Ranch — though they’d have to spend some time on pavement — or riders could make a loop to town by riding up or down Flagstaff Mountain Road for one leg of the trip.

Vogel said the Chapman connector would be one important piece of a larger regional trail system, and he hopes to see other connections added in the future, such as the promised trail between Walker Ranch and Eldorado Springs.

Patton said his department is still working on making that trail a reality, but he also said it will be a more challenging project than Chapman Drive.

“It is more difficult,” he said. “It involves the state, the county and the city.”

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