

City public meetings set to begin Jan. 31

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The Daily Record

Open space, planned development, a motor sports park – or a combination of all three – are under consideration for the divisive Hogbacks area just east of Skyline Drive.

The city has developed a master plan to answer the question with the help of various individuals, agencies and organizations. The first in a series of public meetings will begin at 7 p.m. Jan. 31.

“We have no preconceived notions of what we’re going to come up with,” said Cañon City Councilman Keith Hovland, a team leader. “That’s the purpose of these meetings.”

The city has established an aggressive schedule and hopes to have a ballot issue detailed and in place for the November election.

“We will have to take a vote of the people to approve any master plan and to secure and expend any funds,” Hovland said. The City Charter does not provide public funding for parks, unless those expenditures are approved by a majority of voters.

The plan details seven separate steps and includes objectives, team members and timelines for each stage along the way. The city is looking for interested citizens to help with the footwork and, eventually, to form the final Hogbacks plan.

“The team leaders are now coordinating with their sources,” Hovland said. “We will have them at each of the public meetings to relay information and to answer questions.”

The public meetings have a three-pronged intent: first, to educate the public on the process; second, to seek individuals to sign up for subcommittees; and third, to seek input and discuss ideas.

Although the Hogbacks issue has long been on the city’s radar screen, its importance was moved up this year because of a recent outcry by citizens who live nearby. Those who live there want the area purged of motor sports, while those who take advantage of the area as a sports park believe they are entitled to continue that use based on historical use.

“The impetus, years ago, was Lavelle Craig when he was mayor,” Hovland said. “He believed the city should target the Hogbacks to improve the aesthetics and protect the area.”

About eight years ago, the city initiated an action plan to try to acquire property still owned by private individuals. As the result of that plan, City Administrator Steve Rabe has been able to help the city purchase some of the land and negotiate a 99-year lease of another large parcel of acreage, owned by the Colorado Department of Corrections.

The Hogbacks still are broken up by three pieces of land controlled by individual property owners. Rabe is tasked with determining the motivation

for the remaining property owners to sell or lease that property and recommend funding sources for that action.

"Since Mayor Craig initiated city interest in this area, it has always been on our list of city goals," Hovland said. "Last year, we elevated it to one of our top five goals for 2008."

The possibilities for the Hogbacks are fairly limited, Rabe said. The city could create open space, create an official motor sports park, develop the land or a combination of those choices. Or, if all else fails, the final option is to leave the property as is.

"We have an open mind going into this," Rabe said. "We certainly understand it's going to be a hotly-contested issue. It's time to move forward and see what the city really wants to do with its assets."

Hovland said he also hopes to resolve the issue this year.

"It's time to stop ignoring it," Hovland said. "It's not going away."

The first public meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Jan. 31 at City Hall, 128 Main St. The public is urged to attend.

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