

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

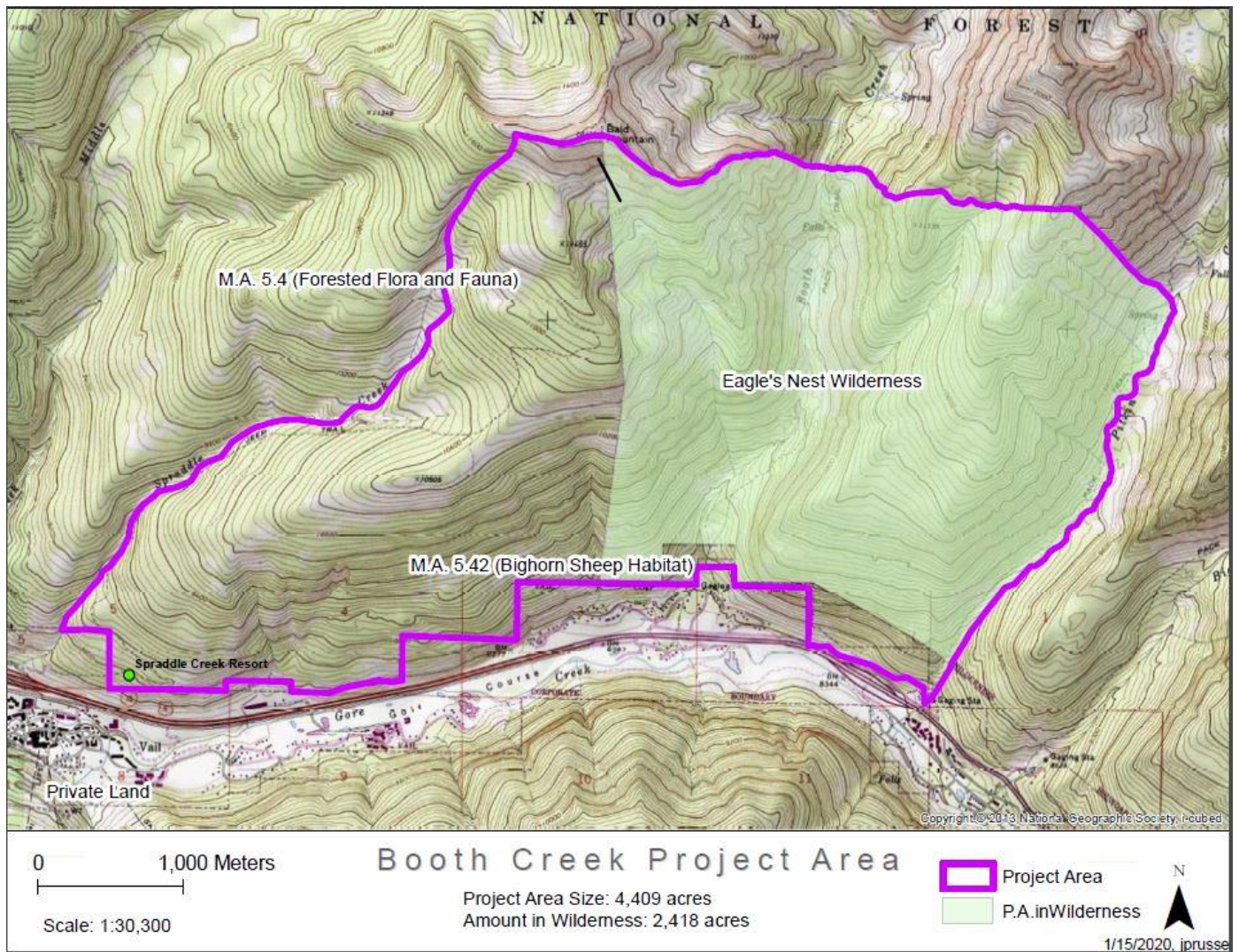


Update on the Bighorn Sheep A New In-Door Sports Facility? February 11, 2020

Positive Action on the Sheep

Recent events portend good things for the bighorn sheep, although it's not yet time for any celebrating and many details remain to be resolved. Following the Town election, the VHA advocated for both a task force approach to the management of the sheep and for the Town to [find a way to acquire the Booth Heights property so it would not be developed](#). The Town has taken action on both those points.

First, the Town created a task force to coordinate with federal and state authorities to develop a management plan for the sheep. That has already born fruit. The USFS is preparing a proposal to treat 4,400 acres of its property in the Booth Falls area. When taken together with the TOV property in the area, this will result in a comprehensive plan to cover the entire sheep habitat, from Spraddle Creek to Pitkin Creek.



The USFS project alone will be a huge undertaking which could have enormous positive benefits for the sheep. It will be a multi-year project that will involve a combination of prescribed burns and mechanical and manual pruning. An added benefit is that it will reduce wildfire potential by eliminating accumulated fuels and over-mature plants. It will require an Environmental Assessment before work can begin, but the USFS is moving forward to get that process started.

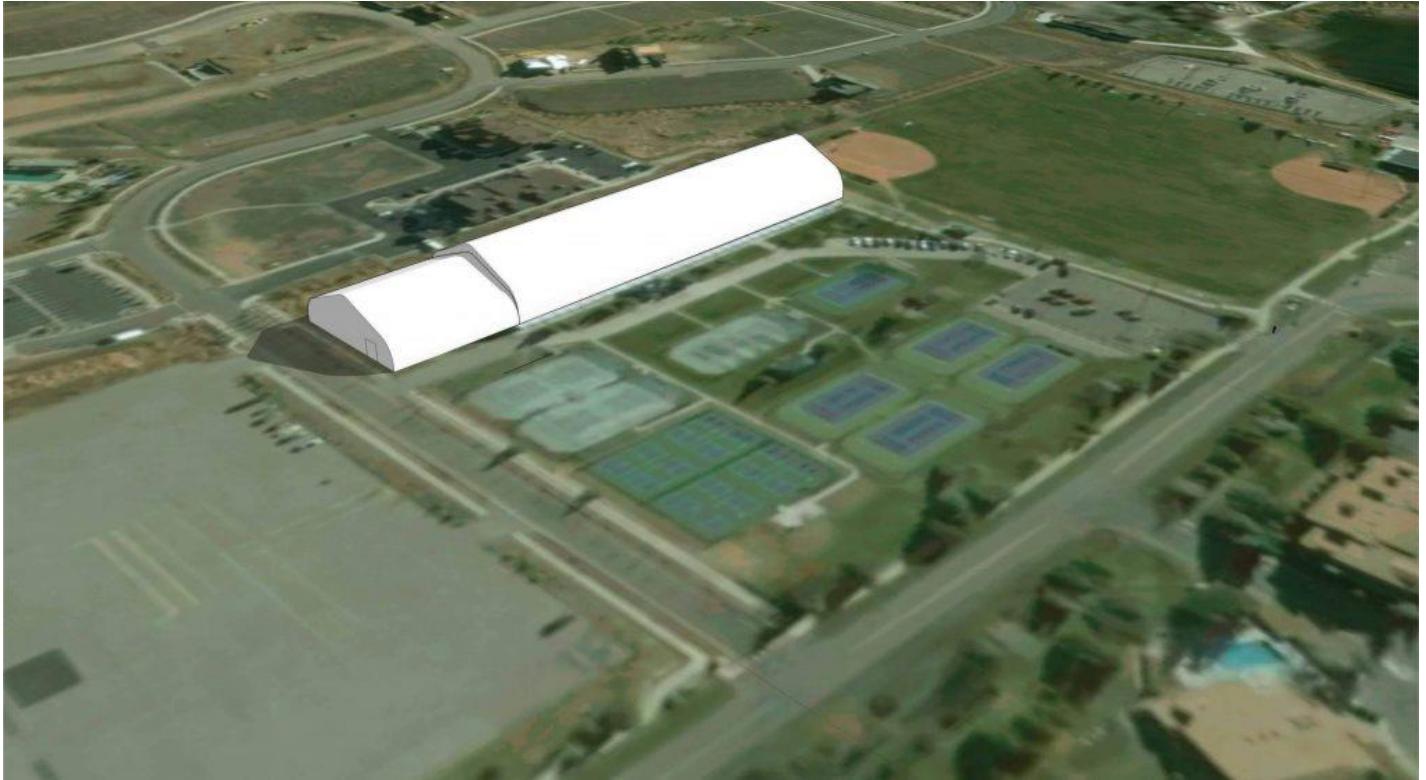
At the same time, the TOV will be moving forward with habitat enhancement on its own property. Together this work will be a huge boost for the sheep. Still under consideration is a GPS collar study of the herd.

Second, the Town has initiated negotiations with Vail Resorts and Triumph Development to find alternative sites for affordable housing so that the Booth Heights property can be preserved as open space. This is a complicated undertaking and, while there is nothing to report as yet, discussions continue.

The Town will also, once again, host a wildlife forum in March in conjunction with Vail Symposium. While the sheep will not be the primary focus of the forum, this commitment makes clear that protection of the natural environment will remain a key priority of the Town's agenda.

The VHA urges the Town to continue moving forward on these initiatives and to provide the necessary resources to see them through to a successful conclusion. Going forward, the VHA will continue to monitor developments and report as necessary.

Plans for an In-Door Sports Facility



Is a facility like this in the future for Ford Park?

For several months a select committee has been quietly studying the feasibility of building a winter in-door sports facility at Ford Park. Other locations were initially considered but appear to have been rejected as Ford Park is now the “preferred” location. The motivation for this facility seems to come from pickleball enthusiasts who desire a facility that will allow year around play, although other uses for the facility that could offset operating costs are under consideration. Also under consideration is the potential redevelopment of the tennis center building and/or the concession building. The Town of Vail is supporting this endeavor with a \$10,000 grant for the feasibility study.

Current plans are to take the four northeast tennis courts at Ford Park and cover them with a metal building known as a sprung steel structure. These structures tend to look like industrial warehouses, and the committee has recognized that this could be a matter of public concern.

The proposed building would accommodate one tennis court, six pickleball courts and one dual purpose court; at least that is the current plan. Pickleball would, however, only be a winter use; in the summer, the courts would be used for tennis. The building would also be able to host other activities such as dance rehearsals for the summer VVF dance program or sport activities of Eagle County schools, although there are currently no specific requests for such a facility from either the VVF or the Eagle School District.

The facility would, of necessity, be a high profile, high visual impact structure with a large footprint and heights of probably two-stories at the sides, reaching up to three-stories at the top of the roof. And, due to snow shedding requirements, the building could probably not be buried or tucked into the ground and more likely will have to be elevated, making it even more visible.

While there are not yet any cost estimates for the project, an early “guesstimate” has been presented to the committee of around \$10.5 million.

While no schedules have been announced, the VRD committee has already established sub-committees and is planning on a community survey to gauge support for the project. Also under consideration are site visits to other communities that have similar in-door sports facilities. And the committee has projected a target for construction in the winter of 2020 with a projected summer 2021 opening.

Questions to be answered. This proposal raises a host of questions: ranging from is a large in-door facility a proper use for Ford Park, to is this permissible under the Park Master Plan or will it need to be amended, to how will the facility be paid for, to will such a facility be economically self-sustaining, to who are the intended beneficiaries of the facility, to whether such a facility will conflict with other uses of the park, to whether there is sufficient parking to support such a facility. To date, there are no answers to any of these questions, but it would seem that all must be answered before any such proposal can be approved by the Town authorities and the community at large.

Is this a proper use for Ford Park? Apparently, the VRD committee has concluded that the answer to this question is “Yes” since they are proceeding ahead with their plans. But, given the history of other proposals to build large buildings in the park, that isn’t necessarily so. And, since this is a threshold issue, it would seem sensible that this should be question number one to be answered.

A bit of history is informative. Large structures in the Park have been consistently opposed, and plans to build them have had to be withdrawn or were defeated at the polls. The original plan for Ford Park included a large in-door sports facility that would house an indoor ice arena. But there was so much public opposition that it was ultimately determined that Ford Park should be largely open space while the civic center should be the location of meeting buildings and enclosed sport facilities. As a result, the ice arena was relocated to the present location of the Dobson Ice Arena.

The idea of a large sports facility in the Ford Park came up again in 1985. As part of the Master Plan for Ford Park, a large swimming pool complex was proposed for the Park. It too met with large public opposition and ultimately, in 1989, the Town voters rejected it in what was the most one-sided public vote in Vail’s history.

Then in 1997, a management plan for the Park considered whether it should be the location of additional public parking. After a comprehensive review, that proposal was rejected. That issue was again revisited in another study in 2008-2010 when there was a proposal to build an underground parking structure under the ball fields at the park. Again, parking was rejected in favor of maintaining the character of the Park as a public amenity.

In 2012, the uses of the park were again revisited when plans were proposed to build a large party/event building next to Gore Creek, an open-air entrance to the Amphitheater and the Betty Ford Vail Alpine Garden visitor center. The large event facility was rejected as being incompatible with the park’s purposes. While the visitor center and amphitheater entrance were approved, there was a major effort to have them blend in to the existing facilities and to maintain the aesthetic beauty of the park’s open spaces.

So now, if this proposal goes forward, the town officials and the community will once again face the question of what is an appropriate use of the park and whether a large in-door sports facility is compatible with those uses, especially one that will be a high profile, high visual impact structure.

Does the Park Master Plan need to be amended? It would seem that the Master Plan and its amendments, as well as the way the 2012 improvements were handled, would require an amendment for a large, high profile structure such as is being proposed. Neither the 1985 Master Plan, the 1996 Management Plan nor the 2012

Master Plan Update authorize in-door tennis or pickleball courts. Those plans all had extensive public input, and a clear reading is that no large structures are to be allowed without first amending the plans. That is what was required for the 2012 improvements. As the plans make clear, the first goal of any proposed changes in those plans is to preserve and protect the character of the Park. That is why design criteria require that building materials and detailing must fit the Park’s environment, and only low-profile structures that can be set into the ground to reduce vertical dominance should be considered. It would seem that this also is an issue that is best addressed sooner rather than later.

How will the facility be paid for? Without question, building such a facility, even as a simple metal building, will be a costly venture. While reliable cost estimates have yet to be made, it is clear that this will be a \$10 million or more project. The Master Plan documents require that any improvements of leasehold property—the VRD operates the tennis center under a lease from the TOV—must be paid for by the lessee. However, the VRD operates on a break-even budget, and, while it has some reserves, they are needed to backup current operations.

The committee envisions the possibility that the VRD will issue revenue bonds to cover the cost of construction. However, an examination of the VRD budget over the last four years shows that there is no capacity for long-term financing. And, while the facility would generate revenue, given the history of similar facilities both in Vail and elsewhere, it is highly unlikely that there would be excess revenue to finance any bonds. It seems, therefore, that if this project is to be built, the TOV will have to pay for it. While the Town is currently economically strong, there are a number of other major funding projects that are vying for support: not the least of which are affordable housing, the proposed civic center and needed major infrastructure improvements. Whether the Town can afford such a facility, even as a matter of long-term financing and how this proposal might fit into the Town’s budgetary priorities are matters that should also be considered sooner rather than later.

Will such a facility be self-sustaining? As yet, there is no business plan for the proposed facility. The committee has deferred preparing such a plan until it first determines the programming for the facility. This is, nonetheless, a key consideration for such a facility. Unfortunately, the community’s history with in-door facilities is not encouraging. In Vail’s early years, the Vail Run condominium erected a bubble over two of its tennis courts; when it shortly thereafter collapsed, it was never re-erected, apparently, because the economics didn’t work. Then the Vail Racquet Club erected a bubble over two of its tennis courts, but it failed to generate enough income and, after the first year, it was abandoned. More recently, the Vail Cascade indoor tennis courts have been switched to parking. And in 2008, the “Vail Ice Dome” was erected on the golf course to cover an ice rink. When operating costs soared, the bubble was taken down and sold. There is, therefore, reason to be concerned that this facility may not be self-sustaining, and the business plan should propose solutions for any shortfall in revenue.

Who are the intended beneficiaries of the facility? The TOV would have to undertake a large financial investment to build this facility. As part of its consideration, there should be a study of who will be the users of such a facility. That will help inform the question of whether this is a worthwhile investment for the Town to undertake.

Will such a facility conflict with other uses of the park? To avoid the costs of air-conditioning for summer use, the ends and the south side of the facility (facing the amphitheater) are to be removable or retractable. That would pose a potential noise and lighting conflict with all summer programming at the amphitheater. As part of any consideration of such a facility, a plan must be developed to manage the facility so that noise and light interference from its use does not interfere with events at the amphitheater.

Is there sufficient parking for such a facility? As a result of the several parking studies of the Park, parking at the park was restricted to 200 spaces. Adding courts will increase the need for parking for those using the courts as well as those who have just finished and those arriving for court dates. More parking cannot be added at the Park which raises the question of whether the current 200 spaces would be adequate to serve both the indoor facility as well as other Park users and, if not, whether the lack of parking will affect the use of the facility and impact revenues.

No position as yet. The VHA has posed these questions to the committee. Pending an answer to these questions and further information about the project, the VHA has not taken a position on whether such a facility is an appropriate use of Park property or a prudent investment of TOV resources. We will continue to monitor developments and evaluate the answers to these questions and additional information as it becomes available. We will also report further developments as they occur.

If these are matters that concern you, we invite you to join VHA. Together, we can make our voices heard and make a difference for the good and the future of our community.

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