OPEN SPACE, TRAILS AND RECREATION

Goal: “We aspire to be an active, healthy community that appreciates the outdoors, our connection to the natural environment and will continue to foster recreational opportunities within our mountain community for all ages and abilities.”

Parks and recreation facilities and programs contribute to the livability of a community by enhancing its quality of life. By providing options for recreation and relaxation, they promote good health, general well-being, and a strong sense of community. There are many benefits to having a vibrant and viable parks, trails, and recreation system. It provides diverse opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to engage in a healthy lifestyle, expand life experiences, and connect with others in the community. In addition, a strong parks and recreation system increases property values, draws new businesses to the city, and provides environmental benefits such as improving water quality, preventing flooding, and improving air quality.

EXISTING RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

As a tourism-oriented community, Idaho Springs has a wide range of recreational venues within a short distance of the city. Skiing, snowboarding, rock climbing, rafting, fishing, bicycling, hiking and hunting activities are readily accessible. Federal lands are a significant portion of the county’s total land area and the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests are near the city limits. Open mountain slopes are the defining feature of the area as over 80% of Clear Creek County is public lands.

In order to build an economic niche as an outdoor recreation destination, the city must have the infrastructure in place. Idaho Springs has additional opportunities to capitalize on its natural amenities to become more of a destination rather than a pass-through location for goods and services for travelers in route to the Summit County mountain resort communities. These opportunities and mechanisms for funding and maintenance could be explored through the creation of a Recreation Master Plan.

IDAHO SPRINGS RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Recreational resources in addition to those mentioned above within the City of Idaho Springs include:

1. Carlson Elementary School & Bob Leathers Playground
2. Citizens Park
3. City Hall complex Park (including locomotive)
4. Clear Creek (fishing, rafting, swimming, etc.)
5. Clear Creek County Greenway
6. Clear Creek Metro District Recreation Center
7. Clear Creek School District fields
8. Courtney-Ryley-Cooper Park
9. Shelly/Quinn Ball Fields (East End Ballfields)
10. Idaho Springs Visitor Center and Heritage Museum and Park
11. Hillside Park
12. Idaho Springs Cemetery
13. Idaho Springs Library & Memorial
14. Idaho Springs Skateboard park
15. Macy/Mill Park
16. Montgomery Park & fishing access
17. Mt. Evans Scenic and Historic Byway
18. Scott Lancaster Bridge & non-motorized trail corridor
19. Underhill Museum
20. United Center
21. Waterwheel Park

Locations of existing parks and trails as well as future opportunities are indicated on the City of Idaho Springs Parks, Open Space and Trails Map.

THE CLEAR CREEK METROPOLITAN RECREATION DISTRICT

The Clear Creek Metropolitan Recreation District was formed in 1979 to enhance the park and recreation amenities that would be available to Clear Creek County residents and to provide facilities that were beyond the capabilities of the individual cities and towns. The District covers most of Clear Creek County, including the City of Idaho Springs and the Towns of Georgetown, Silver Plume, and Empire. Within the City of Idaho Springs, the District maintains the Clear Creek Recreation Center - a state of the art facility containing two swimming pools, Jacuzzis, weight room, basketball and other sport courts and meeting rooms. The District also maintains the Shelly/Quinn Ball Fields, at the southeast portion of the City.

With the impending closure of the Henderson Mine, the District will be exploring creative ways to compensate for the loss of property tax revenue. It is possible the City will have to enter into additional cost-sharing and maintenance arrangements with the District.

RECENT RECREATIONAL PROJECTS

Clear Creek Greenway

The development of a 36 mile greenway for Clear Creek County’s residents and visitors has become a priority of the Clear Creek County Open Space Program, and a focal point of its 2003 Open Space Plan. Running alongside Clear Creek between Jefferson County and the Continental Divide, a greenway is envisioned to serve as the backbone of the County. It will tie together communities with a string of parks, recreational facilities, open space and commercial recreational opportunities. The Greenway will incorporate, enhance and create many types of active and passive recreational opportunities along Clear Creek. Those opportunities include kayaking, rafting, hiking, walking, biking, picnicking, camping and fishing. The non-profit Clear Creek County Greenway Authority (CCCGA) was established in 2013 to help facilitate the continued implementation of the project.
The Idaho Springs Greenway Segment

Current plans are underway to design and build a 14-mile segment from Hidden Valley to Empire Junction. This Greenway is planned to run directly through the City of Idaho Springs from Water Wheel Park and along the length of Clear Creek to the eastern City limits. This will provide a critical non-motorized connection that is currently lacking. At present, bicyclists and other recreationalists must navigate along unsafe, disconnected and often traffic-congested roads through Idaho Springs. The Greenway will provide safe passage and can serve as an artery to connect numerous other recreational and tourism-related projects. The City should continue to cooperate with the County and the Greenway Authority, and to explore how amenities can utilize this major greenway system.

Courtney Ryley Cooper Park

Courtney Ryley Cooper Park is the City’s main park, located toward the middle of the City limits at Twenty Third Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. The Park is presently undergoing expansion and eventual redevelopment in tandem with the Clear Creek Greenway and Colorado Blvd projects. This redevelopment includes shifting Colorado Boulevard to the south to double the size of the park, enhancement of the area surrounding the central shade structure to include a grass amphitheater, additional parking, new restrooms, better river access for rafting, new picnic areas, new pedestrian bridge crossing Clear Creek at the east of the park, and relocation and redevelopment of the community garden. The area and configuration of the park is being established as part of the Colorado Boulevard and Clear Creek Greenway project; actual development of the park will occur as separate funding becomes available.

Virginia Canyon Open Space

In 1994, Clear Creek County acquired approximately 424 acres of property from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. This land is generally the majority of the hillside north of the City. In 2003, the County transferred this property to the City of Idaho Springs. As part of the transfer agreement, Idaho Springs prepared a “Long Range Management Plan” for the site. This “Virginia Canyon Open Space Concept Plan” (also known as “Area 28”) was prepared in 2006 through grants with the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety) and the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG). Stakeholders involved in this early process included Clear Creek County, Colorado State Parks, and the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA). The Plan conceptualized 10-15 miles of trails, designed for mountain bikes, although at the time the project did not go forward.

Recent Developments with the Virginia Canyon Open Space

In 2016 there was renewed interest in the Virginia Canyon Open Space, driven by new leadership, design of the Greenway and potential Argo Mine and Mill redevelopment. In order to determine the political climate and actual feasibility, staff organized a meeting to discuss the project. This meeting
was well attended and included several members of the Colorado Mountain Bike Association (COMBA), Team Evergreen (both associations representing thousands of bicyclists), a local bike shop, 6 individuals with Clear Creek County (including two Commissioners), THK Associates, and the Clear Creek Tourism Bureau. The results of this meeting were overwhelmingly positive, with all individuals voicing their support for staff to move forward and a list of action items.

City Council Support

Recognizing the recreational and economic development potential of this potentially significant park within the City limits, in 2017 the City Council directed staff to continue to move this project forward as an open space for both hiking and mountain biking. Connection points are envisioned to include the Clear Creek Greenway and Virginia Canyon Road, with a future possibility to connect to Central City. The City should continue to cooperate with interested agencies and seek funding opportunities to make it a priority to develop this park.

OPEN SPACE, TRAILS AND RECREATION OBJECTIVES

Objective: Create a quality system of recreational facilities, parks, trails and pathways.

- Strategies
  - Develop a City-wide recreational master plan that addresses existing facilities, provides recommendations on new facilities, and addresses operations and maintenance.
  - Develop new trail connections and parks as indicated on the City of Idaho Springs Parks, Open Space and Trails Map.
  - Continue to look for additional sources of funding for acquiring open space lands and constructing trails.
  - Identify opportunities to create smaller public open spaces, such as neighborhood parks, plazas, pocket parks, courtyards and “parklets.”

Objective: Support continued development and improvement on the Clear Creek Greenway.

- Strategies
  - Develop and promote appropriate recreational development along and on Clear Creek.
• Explore opportunities to connect future developments and recreational facilities to the Greenway.
• Market and promote the Greenway as a major regional amenity.

**Objective: Develop Virginia Canyon Open Space for recreational uses.**

**Strategies**

• Complete the design and construction of the Virginia Canyon Open Space as a first phase of a City of Idaho Springs Recreational Master Plan.
• Identify and prioritize parcels for future acquisition of trail connections for the Virginia Canyon Open Space.
• Work with other agencies and volunteer groups such as the Clear Creek Greenway Authority, Clear Creek County, and COMBA to plan, fund, develop, and maintain the Virginia Canyon Open Space.

**Objective: Provide park amenities for residents of all ages and abilities.**

**Strategies**

Annually assess the needs of the community as demographics change to address and update park amenities as resources permit.

**Policy T.6.1:** Partner with Clear Creek County and the National Forest to expand, construct and maintain a continuous off-road pedestrian and bicycle system.

**Policy T.6.2:** Participate in local and regional trails planning and development efforts to promote multi-purpose trails.

**Policy T.6.3:** Develop trail heads which can accommodate user parking.

**Policy T.6.5:** A plan for a phased development of city components of the countywide trail system will be created with regular allocations of funding from the City’s Conservation Trust Fund used for trail enhancement purposes.

**Policy T.6.6:** Emphasize and establish trails along Clear Creek in the east end.

**Policy T.6.7:**

**Parks, Recreation & Open Space Goal PR.1:**
Collaborate with the Forest Service to develop appropriate recreational opportunities on the National Forests.

Collaborate with local organizations to expand the range of arts events and arts & music programming.

Balance resident and visitor recreational needs, facilities and investment.