

Floyd Hill Issues

We live in an unincorporated area. Mostly, that lets us live in peace and quiet.

But it also means that if anything comes around that would affect us, we are mostly on our own. The FHAPOA was formed a number of years ago, to give us some organization that could be used to protect our interests.

So just what are the kinds of things that come around?

Recently, we have been characterizing our issues by the old Greek elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Air

By air I mean the character of our neighborhood. There are 1100 people who live on our hill; our POA covers the central part of this population.

The formal county master plan for our area recognizes the character of our area as “Rural Mountain Residential.”

Most of the county seems to agree that this is the image that they would like to be presented at the entrance to our county. Back in 2013-2014, an organization called SOLVE conducted an informal petition. Over 500 people, from every area of the county, signed the petition to keep the area open. Most of the residents of the hill also agree.

Fire

Floyd Hill is recognized by the Evergreen Fire & Rescue people as one of the four most dangerous areas in the district they cover. This is because of the steepness of the hill, the amount of vegetation, and the number of people who live here.

About ten years ago, FHAPOA began investigating with the Fire District to look into the logistics of evacuating the hill in an emergency. We are still looking at ways to hold something like a community “Fire drill,” although that is proving to be difficult to organize. The bottom line is that we have been officially told that there is nowhere near enough road capacity to evacuate 1100 people in a timely enough manner. So improving evacuation capability remains one of our most important priorities for improvement.

The biggest step that FHAPOA has taken is develop a Community Wildfire Preparedness Implementation Plan (CWPIP), jointly with our neighboring POAs and the Evergreen Fire District. This is a formally approved document that not only outlines things that should be done to mitigate fire danger, but also to allow us to apply for grants to accomplish some of the needed tasks. It was the first such plan in the county, although there are now a few more, modeled on our efforts. Some work has been done by volunteers in the community, but this will be a continuing effort.

Water

We have no public water supply. All of the people on the hill depend upon wells.

Particularly in the middle part of the hill, that part covered by FHAPOA, there has been a disturbing pattern of wells going dry. It is not clearly understood how the water arrives at our wells. It all arrives at our wells through fissures in the rock, not through aquifers. However, it is pretty well agreed that significant new uses of water would make our water supply even more tenuous.

Most of the newer wells on the hill are very deep. Many of go below the level of the ground at the entrance to our neighborhood from I-70, and so are exposed to effects of any further extraction of water..

It is very expensive to drill a new, deeper well.

Earth

Earth can stand for what happens to the land on our hill. One important part of this are the roads in our area. Many are unpaved, and maintenance makes a big difference in how we can get in and out. The association has worked continuously over the years with the county's Roads & Bridges Department, both to help them prioritize maintenance activities and to keep Floyd Hill on their radar.

Another part of Earth is development. Although most of the residents, both locally and around the county, would prefer to see the meadow remain open space, the flat land is very attractive to commercial developers. Several of our county leaders have even promoted the idea of commercial development, in spite of the fact that the cost to provide new services to the area would greatly exceed any new tax revenues generated.

Development of the meadow would affect all three of the prior topics.

History

There is a tract of about 18 acres at the corner of I-70, just east of Homestead Road (the short road that crosses I-70). It is vacant now, but it is zoned Commercial, and it has already been approved (back in 2001) for development of an apartment building of 188 units plus 45,000 square feet of commercial. This development is to be based on additional wells, although there are some conditions around the drilling of those wells. Fortunately for our community, the market for this development never materialized. The owner (David Williams) let it go into receivership. It was bought from the bank in 2013 by a person (Ilya Klein, whose company is known as Snow Mountain) who seems to be a speculator, but he has not yet found a buyer for it.

In 2007, there was an attempt to get the meadow annexed to Idaho Springs. The stated intent was to promote commercial development in the meadow. It was approved by the City Council, but was overturned by the citizens of Idaho Springs.

There is also a Sales Office right on the county line, next to I-70. A few years ago, the county zoned small (1.5-acre) part of a 16-acre parcel to accommodate the sales office, in spite of a lot of public input from around the county that a partial rezoning of the lot was not a good way to go.

Current Situation in the Meadow

There are a number of small commercial enterprises along Beaver Brook Canyon Road near the high school. All of them have been built, with signage and landscaping to fit in with the residential nature of the area. They fit in so well, that many people do not realize that they are commercial buildings.

Of course, there is the high school at the edge of the meadow, built in 2002. It has a waste water treatment plant that is much larger than the school needs—built in anticipation of developing both the Williams/Snow-Mountain property and the rest of the meadow.

There is also a small park, with playground and tennis courts. This is owned and managed by the Clear Creek Metropolitan Recreation District.

The rest of the meadow consists of 3 parcels, ranging in size from 6 to 20 acres. All of these 3 parcels are owned by an entity called ESRI II. ESRE is controlled by descendants of the old Elmgreen Ranch that at one time included the meadow. All 3 of these parcels are currently zoned for Residential, using a category that is used throughout the county as a holding category—meaning it could be rezoned to anything else. There are 2 additional parcels over the line into Jefferson County, that extend the meadow to CR-65; these are also controlled by ESRE.

There is also a sub-regional master plan for the Floyd Hill meadow, adopted in 2009, based on the growth-oriented county-wide master plan that was in effect at the time. It was adopted over substantial objection from the public, as it promoted heavy development in the meadow. The county has just adopted a new county-wide master plan, that is based on improving quality of life rather than growth and development; but the sub-regional plan for Floyd Hill remains as it was.

CDOT is currently planning widening of I-70 westbound from Floyd Hill to Empire Junction. This is intended to have a tolled Express Lane for peak period usage, to relieve some of the congestion we already experience. Several alternatives will be studied in the next couple of years. Some of the alternatives would have little or no impact on our area, but at least one of them would involve routing considerably more through traffic including trucks, right through the point where congestion on our hill is the worst. This study is both a potential problem for us (if done wrong), and also a potential opportunity (if done right) to help us increase the evacuation capacity.

Reasons This is Important

Development in the meadow, particularly commercial development, would tend to create more congestion right at the point where road capacity for potential evacuation from the

hill is most limited. Furthermore, any development that uses water would have an adverse effect on the total water supply for all of our wells.

What We Need to be Doing

We need to keep following these developments, and educating each other on what things are being considered and what the impacts if those things would be on us. We need to be present at public meetings, and give informed input to decisions; in fact just the number of people showing up is a good indicator of public interest. In addition, there may be times when written input is possible, and we need to take advantage of those opportunities.

FHAPOA and the other POAs on the hill can have a vital role in facilitating much of these communications. There are other organizations that we can partner with, including SOLVE, MALT, and the Open Space Commission.