

MEMORANDUM

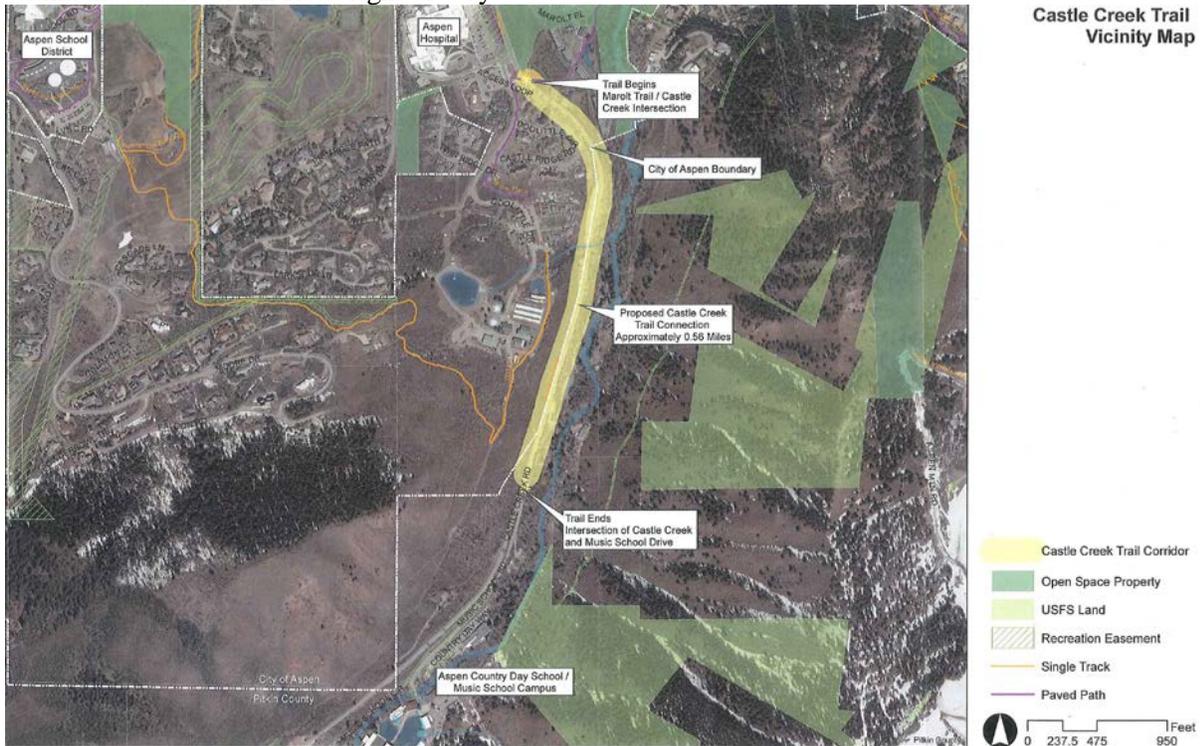
TO: Pitkin County Planning and Zoning Commission
FROM: Tami Kochen, Planner
RE: Castle Creek Corridor Improvement Project - Location and Extent Review
DATE: February 19th, 2019

SUMMARY OF REQUEST: The Applicant is requesting Location and Extent Review approval to construct a 3,104 foot long pedestrian/bike path along Castle Creek Road known as the Castle Creek Trail. Proposed improvements include a 6' hard surface trail on the east side of Castle Creek Road, safety signage, speed tables, a widened shoulder on the west side of the road, rockfall mitigation, landscaping, and revegetation activities.

APPLICANT: Pitkin County Open Space and Trails (“OST”)

REPRESENTATIVE: Jessie Young, Pitkin County OST Environmental Planner

LOCATION: The trail will begin within the City of Aspen where the Marolt Trail intersects with Castle Creek Road. (The Applicant has obtained the appropriate approvals from the City of Aspen for this segment). The trail will enter the County approximately near mile marker 0.7 and will terminate where Music School Road intersects with Castle Creek Road. The total length of the trail is 3,104.4 feet of which about 20% is within the City of Aspen. The entirety of the trail improvements within the County are located within the Castle Creek Road right-of-way.



BACKGROUND: In 2016, in response to community concerns regarding safety of all users of Castle Creek Road, the County and City Open Space Boards met to discuss prioritizing the area's issues for planning in 2017. On July 24, 2017 an open house was held to solicit public feedback on the opportunities and challenges associated with improving pedestrian and bicycle safety along Castle Creek Road. Notice of public meetings regarding project planning included mailings to residents along Castle Creek Road, ads in the Open Space and Trails newsletters, as well as ads on radio, newspaper and social media platforms. Public comments were solicited July 2017 through the end of September 2017 through online surveys, letters, emails, website comment submissions, comments collected at the kick-off meeting and various meetings with stakeholder groups. Common comment themes included the recognition for safety improvements for all users between the Marolt housing and the school campus, maintaining natural aesthetics, separating vehicles from other modes of transportation, and financial considerations. Comments from the first round of public input are included in the Appendix of the application. Additionally the Applicant collected user counts along the road between August and September to further inform the planning process.

Based on the collected data and comments, consultant engineers drafted 3 trail concepts. The 3 concepts were presented to the County and City Open Space Boards on November 2, 2017 and a public open house on November 15, 2017. Again, through a public process, comments were solicited on the 3 alignment concepts. It was found that the east-side concept alignment with modifications was the most favorable by the public and the BOCC and the Aspen City Council. A rockfall mitigation plan using anchored wire mesh and an associated maintenance plan was added to the scope of work.

EXISTING CONDITIONS: The proposed trail includes numerous physical constraints that contribute to the safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. The constraints include the narrow, winding roadway, steep grades on each side of the road, poor sightlines, and minimal shoulders. These conditions are further highlighted due to a continued increase in use by vehicles, recreational users and year-round operations of the Music School/ Aspen County Day School.

PROPOSAL: In an effort to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists moving between the City of Aspen trail system and the Music School/ Aspen Country Day School campus, the Applicant is proposing an approximately 6 foot wide hard surface trail east of Castle Creek Road stretching 3,104 feet. It will begin where the Marolt Trail intersects with Castle Creek Road and terminate where Music School Road intersects with Castle Creek Road. Where possible, the trail will be separated from the road with a buffer space. Where the trail is adjacent to the road, removable bollards will be installed to delineate the trail. To improve safety for cyclists, the road shoulder will be widened along the uphill vehicular travel lane. Speed tables and safety signage before and after the school campus entrance will be installed. Road cuts prone to rockfall will be mitigated using an anchored wire mesh.

The project will be managed by the Open Space and Trails Department and the County Engineer.

APPLICABLE MASTER PLAN: Maroon/Castle Creek Master Plan

PROCEDURE/PROCESS: C.R.S 30-28-110(1) and Land Use Code Sec. 2-30-30(h)(10) provide that the Planning Commission shall review the location and extent of public projects proposed by a governmental entity in the unincorporated area of the County for conformance with the applicable comprehensive plan or master plan. The Planning Commission's action on a Location and Extent

proposal is essentially “advisory”, as disapproval may be overruled by the governmental jurisdiction making the proposal. No other land use review is required.

REFERRALS: The application was referred to the Attorney and the Castle Creek Caucus. No comments were received.

STAFF COMMENTS: The Maroon/Castle Creek Master Plan (“Master Plan”) adopted 2003 by the Planning and Zoning Commission is the applicable Master Plan for this review. In general, the Master Plan’s objectives include protecting the rural character and experience of the natural environment. Although the Open Space, Trails, Recreation, Tourism section of the Master Plan does not contemplate the specific Castle Creek Trail proposed, the Applicant has correctly identified and addressed the applicable Land Use Goals and Objectives section and the proposed plan shows general consistency as outlined below:

Water Use, Quantity and Quality:

Objective:

Strict protection of all creeks and tributaries, and of all adjacent wetlands and riparian areas, is a priority against which any development activity and every development application should be measured. Preservation of water quantity, including established minimum instream flows, and protection of water quality are equally high priorities. Efforts should also be made to promote the preservation of fish and other aquatic habitat, shoreline integrity and vegetation.

Implementation Measures:

Protect Maroon and Castle Creeks and other streams within the Planning Area by seeking an amendment to the required minimum stream setback, contained in the Pitkin County Land Use Code, to require a minimum of 50 feet from the ordinary high water mark. The amendment should include a process by which the stream setbacks can be altered pending a determination of the County Engineer and the County Wildlife Officer.

Staff Response: The existing road platform is at least 50’ from the high water line of Castle Creek. Approximately 30% of the length of the trail will extend minimally beyond the existing edge of pavement. The improvements will occur next to the existing road surface in areas largely already graded in association with the road. In sections where the corridor width will need to increase, the road will be moved to the west away from Castle Creek. The Applicant has committed to utilizing best practices during construction, revegetating with native species, and does not plan to remove more than six trees over 4 inches in diameter along the east side of the road.

Air Quality:

Objective:

Preserve the current air quality in the Planning area, which is among the best in the State of Colorado.

Staff Response: The primary intent of the project is to provide a safe means to commute from the City trail and mass transit network to the school campus. By providing a safer and more enjoyable route, the Applicant anticipates the number of users utilizing non-motorized modes of transportation will increase thereby decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Roads:

Existing Conditions:

Safety Complaints regarding roads in the Castle Creek area generally consist of problems with rock fall, the need for wider shoulders and passing lanes, and conflicts with bicycle traffic. There is a significant amount of bicycle traffic on both Maroon and Castle Creek Roads. Due to the narrow, winding nature of the rural roads, there is a substantial risk for auto/bicycle conflicts. While residents don't want significant changes made to the road width, safety improvements such as guardrails, signs and the addition of a shoulder (where feasible), and paved pull-outs are recommended.

Objectives:

Keep the rural character of the Planning Area intact by maintaining the County roads in their current condition allowing minimal improvements as necessary for safety.

Implementation Measures:

- *Investigate the cost and feasibility of installation of a wider shoulder or path along Maroon and Castle Creek Roads for bicycles to improve safety in critical areas, and reduce bicycle/vehicle conflicts, but don't improve/widen the road to the extent that rural character is changed and/or vehicles travel faster because the road is wider.*
- *Consider the feasibility, expense and effectiveness of installing a limited number of educational signs on Castle and Maroon Creek Roads to improve safety and to make cyclists and drivers more conscious about each other's presence.*
- *Minimize public signs and prohibit all advertising, security and real estate signs within public rights of way.*

Staff Response: Through the public planning process, the Applicant evaluated various alignments and design options. The financial implications of each concept was considered and balanced with the design benefits. The shoulder on the west side of the road will be widened for uphill bicycle traffic, while the east side of the road will accommodate all modes of non-motorized traffic on the 6' wide trail with a buffer space between the trail and the road. Due to the slope constraints in various sections, retaining structures will be required but will be kept to the minimum amount practicable.

The Applicant also proposes to install safety signage and speed tables near the school campus entrance. Rockfall hazards will be mitigated with anchored cable netting and wire mesh. These devices were the most supported by the public due to the lower visual impacts and cost.

Scenic Quality:

Objective:

The natural environment and scenic character are among the greatest assets of the Maroon and Castle Creek valleys and are the reasons many people choose to visit and make this area their home. Therefore it is the goal of this plan to preserve, for generations to come, the natural beauty and unspoiled scenic character of the landscape within the Planning area, particularly the spectacular views of the mountains

and ridgelines, but also the more intimate views of the streams with their riparian corridors, and historic structures. It is also important to preserve the dramatic views of the night skies made possible by limiting the use of outdoor lighting. The predominant visual character of the area should remain one where the rural open space feel dominates, with pockets of development remaining subordinate to the natural surroundings.

Implementation Measures:

Minimize public signs and prohibit all advertising, security and real estate signs within public rights of way within the Planning Area.

Staff Response: The Applicant has committed to preserving the valley’s scenic qualities by utilizing best practices to minimize disturbance, revegetate with native species, install signage only where required for the safety of trail users and motorists, and not to install outdoor lighting.

Steep slopes along the road in certain sections will require the need for retaining structures. The Applicant has not finalized the design or materials of these structures, however they have stated, “...the retaining walls will strive to resemble the natural landscape and complement the valley’s rural character and aesthetic qualities.” Where practicable, boulders will be utilized instead of constructed walls.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission find the Castle Creek Trail Location and Extent Review in conformance with the Maroon/Castle Creek Master Plan, subject to the attached Resolution.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Application

**RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION OF PITKIN COUNTY,
COLORADO, FINDING THE CASTLE CREEK CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
LOCATION AND EXTENT REVIEW IN CONFORMANCE WITH THE MAROON/CASTLE
CREEK MASTER PLAN**

Resolution No. PZ-___-2019

RECITALS

1. The Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Department (“OST”) (hereafter referred to as the “Applicant”) has applied to the Planning and Zoning Commission of Pitkin County (“Planning Commission”) to obtain approval for Location and Extent Review to construct a 3,104 foot long pedestrian/bike path along Castle Creek Road known as the Castle Creek Trail. Proposed improvements include a 6’ hard surface trail on the east side of Castle Creek Road, safety signage, speed tables, a widened shoulder on the west side of the road, rockfall mitigation landscaping, and revegetation activities.
2. The trail will begin within the City of Aspen where the Marolt Trail intersects with Castle Creek Road. The Applicant is pursuing the appropriate approvals from the City of Aspen for the segment within the City of Aspen. The trail will enter the County approximately near mile marker 0.7 and will terminate where Music School Road intersects with Castle Creek Road. The entirety of the trail improvements are within the Castle Creek Road right-of-way.
3. In response to community concerns regarding safety of all users of Castle Creek Road, and with the support of the County and City Open Space Boards, the BOCC and the Aspen City Council, the Applicant conducted an extensive public planning process, which resulted in the design of a trail alignment on the east side of Castle Creek Road.
4. Pursuant to C.R.S 30-28-110(1), and Land Use Code Section 2-30-30(h)(10), Location and Extent Review for the proposed Castle Creek Trail is the applicable review for the proposal.
5. Pursuant to Land Use Code Sec. 12-20-40(4), Pitkin County is exempt from the Regulations for Areas and Activities of State Interest.
6. The Planning Commission reviewed the application at a duly noticed public hearing on February 19th, 2019 at which time evidence and testimony were presented with respect to this application.
7. The Planning and Zoning Commission finds the proposed improvements provide increased safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, maintain the scenic character, minimize disturbance outside of the road corridor, and are in conformance with the 2003 Maroon/Castle Creek Master Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Planning Commission that it hereby finds that the Castle Creek Trail Location and Extent Review is in conformance with the 2003 Maroon/Castle Creek Master Plan, subject to the following conditions:

1. The Applicant shall adhere to all material representations made during the application process or in public meetings or hearings and shall consider those representations to be conditions of approval.
2. The Applicant shall apply for, and obtain the applicable County permits for the improvements.

3. Failure to comply with these conditions of approval may result in revocation of this permit or any subsequent permits related to this property or vested rights associated with this property.

NOTICE OF THE PUBLIC HEARING PUBLISHED IN THE ASPEN TIMES WEEKLY ON THE _____ DAY OF _____ 2019.

FOUND IN CONFORMANCE WITH THE MAROON/CASTLE CREEK MASTER PLAN by the Planning Commission this 19th Day of February, 2019.

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
OF PITKIN COUNTY, COLORADO

Joseph Krabacher, Vice-Chair

Date

ATTEST:

Bonnie Shiles, Administrative Assistant

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

APPROVED AS TO CONTENT:

John Ely, County Attorney

Cindy Houben, Community Development Director