



Summary: Exploring Housing at the County Commons

Summit County is exploring the development of senior and locals' housing at the County Commons on a 6-acre parcel in unincorporated Summit County. The property, also known as the Fiester Parcel, is owned by Summit County government and encumbered by a conservation easement.

Parcel History

- In 1992, Summit County acquired 113.5 acres of USFS land to serve as the County Commons. A Special Use Permit had allowed Summit County and CDOT to utilize a portion of the land for public purposes.
- In 1995, the BOCC approved the PUD for the Summit County Commons Campus.
- At that time the BOCC identified the portion of land now known as the Fiester Parcel for housing due to its proximity to existing residential properties, utilities, public facilities and highway access.
- Bill's Ranch voiced opposition to the prospect of workforce housing adjacent to their neighborhood, due to unsubstantiated fears that the future development would bring negative impacts.
- A politically expedient but shortsighted decision made in the run-up to a hotly contested BOCC election campaign led to a shift in the workforce housing site and the placement of a conservation easement on 6 acres of County Commons land to create a buffer between Ophir Mountain Village and its residents and Bill's Ranch.

Parcel Location

- The Bill's Ranch and Ophir Mountain Village neighborhoods abut the parcel on its south, east and west sides; Highway 9 runs along its northern boundary. It sits directly across the street from the Community & Senior Center. (See map.)

Conservation Values

- The County has a robust open space program, protecting over 17,000 acres. The program focuses on lands with conservation values that most contribute to preserving our unique landscape and quality of life, including recreation, agricultural values, wildlife habitat and scenic views.
- The Parcel wasn't purchased with Open Space funds and isn't part of the Open Space Program.
- Conservation values are extremely limited. It's a suburbanized parcel flanked on all sides by development, including a busy state highway.
- The easement itself doesn't articulate substantive conservation values, merely citing some moderate buffering benefits to a private neighborhood, a

"relatively undisturbed view corridor" from two roadways and a "relatively undeveloped" forest condition, which has since diminished as a result of the pine beetle epidemic.

- Hwy. 9 widening in 2020-21 will further deplete those limited conservation values.
- The parcel does not have any contiguity with USFS lands, and it does not include the Miners Creek Trailhead or the Recpath which are not being considered for development.

Local Housing Needs

- A 2016 workforce housing needs assessment identified a shortage of 3,035 homes throughout Summit County – 1,010 in the Tenmile Basin.
- Summit County has no dedicated senior housing, and local seniors advocate strongly for its development based in part on third-party needs assessments.
- The Fiester Parcel is an ideal location for senior and workforce housing because of its proximity to the Community & Senior Center, Summit Medical Center, existing neighborhoods, transit service and commercial services.

A Transparent Approach

- Summit County has repeatedly offered to transfer the conservation easement to other County lands with higher conservation value.
- The BOCC has committed to Bill's Ranch and other neighbors that it will incorporate a natural landscape buffer between the neighborhood and any development.
- Representatives from Summit County have repeatedly discussed the issue directly with Bill's Ranch residents. In August 2019, Summit County organized a meeting with Bill's Ranch, in which County leadership clearly laid out its intent to remove the easement and develop housing.
- The extinguishment of this conservation easement is not precedent setting. It simply follows the procedures currently in place that allow for the removal of all or part of a conservation easement.
- Locally CDLT transferred an easement to allow the realignment of Hwy. 9 between SHS and the medical campus.

Legend

-  Paved Recreational Pathways
-  County Commons PUD
-  Open Space and Other Permitted Uses
-  Open Space
-  White River National Forest

