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Parks, trails up for comment

A review of the draft El Dorado County Parks and Trails Master Plan was the focus of Thursday's joint meeting of the El Dorado County Planning Commission and the county Parks and Recreation Commission.

Foothill Associates consultant Kate Kirsh presented an overview of the draft Master Plan, including the findings of public input from community workshops, phone and written surveys and interviews of sports leagues in the area. More comment from the public is being accepted through July 22.

The draft Master Plan identifies current recreational resources in the county, needed improvements to existing facilities and future recreational projects and needs.

"Connectivity between trails is very important, according to our public input," said Kirsh.

Foothill Associates also found the El Dorado County parks to be in good condition overall and frequently used. Walking and biking trails as well as more sports fields and parks, especially those with swimming and water spray facilities, are a top priority for the public.

While new development is targeted to provide for new parks in the county, a need for community and neighborhood parks in already developed areas exists, according to the findings. In the county's General Plan, 5 acres of parks per 1,000 residents should be provided in the form of neighborhood, community and regional parks. While the county has a surplus of community and regional parks, there is a severe deficit of neighborhood parks, the plan states.

"When I moved here in 1967," said Parks and Recreation Commissioner Bob Smart, "the rural thinking community had their recreational needs met by the mountains, Crystal Basin, the lakes. Now there are many more urban communities here and we need to take that point of view into consideration."

Proposed facilities such as the 6 acre El Dorado County Historical Railway Park in El Dorado, the 40 acre Bass Lake Regional Park, and the 26 acre Pollock Pines Community Park and the 62 acre Cronan Ranch Regional Trails Park were identified in the draft Master Plan.

Trails to link schools and parks were an identified need as well as more trailhead access, trail signage and regional trail connections to regional parks.

A county Website providing a single source for information about the multiple trail and park providers and an online reservation system are proposed to meet user needs in the plan. The possibility of joint use agreements with schools to expand the use of school sports fields to the community, the use of private/public partnerships to fund new facilities and the use of volunteers for maintenance of facilities and possible grant writing were identified as possible resolutions to meet operational, funding and development needs.

Absent from the draft Master Plan was mention of the part of railroads in multi-use trails and any

planning for the South Lake Tahoe area.

Kirsh prefaced the PowerPoint presentation by stating that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is responsible for planning in the Tahoe area so the Master Plan focused on the Western Slope, but at the end of the presentation, Alan Tolhurst, planning commissioner representing South Lake Tahoe, protested.

“We’re in El Dorado County too and we pay our taxes. The TRPA (Tahoe Regional Planning Agency) doesn’t have the funding to do everything. People come up from Placerville to play in the snow or to cool off on the beaches in the summer and we receive no county funds for our maintenance and operation.”

Placerville & Sacramento Valley Railroad volunteer and El Dorado Hills resident Raymond Retallack protested what he called the plan’s lack of acknowledgement of the projects and work the railroad volunteers have contributed to the county’s recreational resources.

“We have an excursion train operating in Shingle Springs and Folsom almost weekly and it is full-up,” said Retallack. “Almost every Saturday railroad volunteers are out there removing and replacing rail ties, cleaning drains and cutting brush ... to maintain the rail right-of-way.”

Several people spoke about grant funding that is available for some of the park and trail projects, but one county Parks and Recreation groundsman said that although there are many grants available, there is no staff to work on the applications.

The next step in the process of adopting the Parks and Trails Master Plan, according to Kirsh, is to continue to gather public input, make specific recommendations and recommended priorities and identify funding sources before putting the draft plan together with the California Environmental Quality Act document for public review in mid-October. Approval of the final plan is targeted in December.

Interested people may view the draft Master Plan on the El Dorado County Parks and Recreation Website at edcgov.us/Government/Parks/MasterPlan.aspx. Written public comment will be accepted until July 22.

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