

Plans for Coeur d'Alene's western gateway take shape

Armed with input from more than 30 user groups, officials are poised to take the next step toward transforming the western gateway into Coeur d'Alene along Northwest Boulevard into a more pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing corridor.

Following a series of community meetings over the past several months involving state, federal and local entities, the city's Parks and Recreation Commission next month will hold an open house to share the ideas gathered to improve the so-called Four Corners area.

Though not yet clearly defined, Four Corners generally stretches along Northwest Boulevard from Riverstone on the north end nearly to Independence Point near downtown.

"We hope to put together a strong consensus from all the information gathered and then formalize a recommendation to go to the City Council," city parks consultant Doug Eastwood told the Parks and Recreation Commission during a workshop this week.

After considering input from the commission, it will be up to the council to decide whether to move ahead with hiring a land use planner to develop a master plan for the corridor.

Eastwood said officials have been considering public improvements along the heavily traveled stretch for more than a decade. Much of the area includes land owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management. In order to proceed with any transition in use, the BLM requires a master plan be adopted for its consideration. Any development within the BLM land, which would be leased to the city, would be required to be for public use.

Project organizers, community leaders, stakeholders, and interested neighbors have offered dozens of ideas for upgrades—ranging from improved trail access and educational interpretive posts, to improving the campus around Memorial Field and even a community garden, said Scott Cranston, Chairman of the Coeur d'Alene Parks and Recreation Commission.

Proponents of the transformation, whatever that ends up looking like, said improvements are badly needed along the blighted stretch, sandwiched between the appealing Riverstone development, newly constructed Higher Education Campus, and downtown.

Upcoming meetings

Monday, January 13. Open House at 5:30 at the Coeur d'Alene Public Library Community Room. Information on ideas for the corridor will be presented.

Monday, January 27. Parks and Recreation meeting, 5:30 p.m. Four Corners presentation. A recommendation is expected to be forwarded to the city's General Services Committee.

Among other priorities listed by user groups is the development of a pedestrian/bike trail to provide a better connection with downtown and McEuen Park. “We need to build better connectivity to the downtown,” Eastwood said.

Development of the Higher Education Campus included two new ingress/egress routes to the Fort Grounds area so there has been discussion about scaling back motorist use of Mullan Avenue to make it more pedestrian friendly, Eastwood. Due to those new access routes, Eastwood said, traffic on Mullan has decreased by about 70 percent.

Funding sources for the land use planner and development of a master plan for improvements along the corridor include community grants, private donations, the city of Coeur d’Alene and the Lake City Development Corporation (LCDC).

Eastwood said while the process is moving forward, actual improvements to the corridor will not happen anytime soon.

“It’s going to be a long, long term project” Eastwood said. “The goal would be to develop a master ... and then, hopefully, by the end of next year, you’re ready to rock and roll.”