



Missoula county

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NEWS RELEASE

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Conceptual Master Plan for Marshall Mountain Park Available for Review

The City of Missoula and Missoula County announce that the conceptual master plan for Marshall Mountain Park is available for public review on engagemissoula.com. The document reflects years of community engagement, feedback and listening sessions from residents and specific user groups.

The conceptual master plan is a visionary document that explores aspirational, long-term development opportunities at the park, as well as more immediate improvements needed for safety and public access. Immediate improvements to the site include trailhead improvements, construction of a vault toilet, basic parking improvements and ADA access. Potential future development ideas identified in the conceptual master plan, such as a native plant demonstration area and a new base building, would be contingent based on securing outside funding resources and developing critical partnerships.

While the conceptual master plan will help guide the potential future development of the park, it remains flexible to allow for phased implementation based on available funding. The conceptual master plan is one of many plans and requirements that will inform decisions about the park; other factors include requirements placed on the project through grant funding, regulations, critical infrastructure needs, the development of programs and partnerships and availability of funding.

“The conceptual master plan illustrates our community’s long-term commitment to protecting public access at Marshall Mountain and charts an exciting course for continued public use and natural resource protection at the site,” said Chet Crowser, Chief Lands and Communities Officer for Missoula County. “If successfully acquired, Missoula County and our project partners are looking forward to making immediate improvements to open the park for public use, as well as finding creative solutions through fundraising, partnerships and external grants to potentially add additional improvements over time.”

Last month, Missoula County, in collaboration with the City of Missoula and several community partners, announced a new, lead role in community efforts to secure permanent public ownership of the 480-acre former ski hill near East Missoula. Since June 2021, Missoula County and the City of Missoula have collaborated with community partners and user groups to make plans for the potential ownership, management and development of the site by local government. Working in partnership, the County and City will be further analyzing a new model that considers having county ownership and management of a future Marshall Mountain Park. Under this proposal, both the City and County would share operational costs.

City Parks and Recreation Director Donna Gaukler said the City welcomes a Marshall Mountain partnership with Missoula County. “The City of Missoula enthusiastically supports the County’s leadership efforts in securing Marshall Mountain as a park for all. An all-seasons, all-mountain park that can host a wide variety of mountain-based recreation opportunities, enhance access, and provide unique opportunities is needed now and for future generations. We look forward to building on our ongoing and shared efforts to support residents across the County,” Gaukler said.

The proposed acquisition follows more than a decade of public engagement and concern that the base area would be sold privately and closed to the public. Acquisition is time-sensitive, as unexpected opportunities arose in recent years for conservation partners to temporarily secure ownership of the three parcels while a public ownership solution could be found. The estimated cost to acquire all three parcels is approximately \$2.4 million, which is a below market value, thanks to the generosity of the landowners. In addition to voter-approved Open Space Bond funds that already appear on property tax bills, Missoula County, the City of Missoula and partners are seeking nearly \$800,000 in state, federal and private grants to support acquisition of the park.

An extensive public process for both County and City agencies has begun. The City Open Space Advisory Council and the County Open Lands Citizen’s Advisory Committee are meeting in the coming months to discuss possible recommendations to City Council and the County Commission for acquisition funding. Additional meetings of the Missoula County Parks and Trails Advisory Board and the City’s Climate, Conservation and Parks Committee will inform decisions about potential ownership and management of a new park.

Potential county ownership would be supported by a long-term City-County partnership and interlocal agreement, as well as additional financial support of community partners. The Missoula County commissioners and the Missoula City Council will make final decisions regarding the acquisition funding, the conceptual master plan, and long-term ownership and management of Marshall Mountain later this year.

County and city residents are invited to comment on the conceptual master plan for the park on engagemissoula.com. The public is encouraged to follow the project on missoulacountyvoice.com and engagemissoula.com for further updates.

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