

Red Rocks Working Group Meeting, January 6, 2016

This report contains the following parts:

- this **introduction** - including Red Rocks working group participants and next steps.
- **my assessment of issues and my recommendations.**
- **relevant documents**, including the meeting agenda, a handout provided by Scott Gilmore, and other pertinent information. I provide a list here & send the documents separately
- **a report of the discussion** as I recorded it in my notes. I've done my best to provide a comprehensive record of what transpired. I've put it in a separate document so that you have this record, but I'm not sure that we'd want to distribute it beyond the INC PARC chairs.

Attendees:

Denver Mountain Parks Foundation:	<i>Bart Berger, Fabby Hillyard</i>
Denver Parks & Recreation:	<i>Scott Gilmore, Brad Eckert</i>
Denver Arts & Venues:	<i>Tad Bowman</i>
Denver City Council:	<i>Debbie Ortega, at large</i> <i>Mary Beth Susman, District 5</i>
Parks and Rec Advisory Board (PRAB):	<i>Shane Wright, appointee of at-large Council member Robin Kneich</i> <i>Noel Copeland, appointee of District 1 Council member Rafael Espinoza</i>
Community Planning & Development:	<i>Barbara Stocklin-Steely, Landmark Preservation</i>
Anderson Hallas Architects (Landscape):	<i>Nan Anderson</i>
Wenk Associates (Landscape Architects):	<i>Bill Wenk</i>
Friends of Red Rocks (FORR):	<i>Steve Good, Rusty Lea</i>
Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC):	<i>Nancy Francis</i>

Next Steps:

The Working Group will continue to meet to explore the issue of expanding Denver Landmark designation for Red Rocks Park to conform to the boundaries of its National Historic Landmark designation. To support that discussion, the following steps will be taken.

1. DPR will compile all of the existing documents that could provide input to the process of producing Guidelines for the park - such as the NHL application, HALS survey, existing Master Plans, etc. Members of the group, in particular, FORR may submit documents for this effort. DPR will prepare, using these documents, a list of identifying features and park elements that would likely be included in Guidelines.

DPR committed to complete & distribute its list to the Working Group, along with a list of source documents, within 6 weeks, or by approximately mid-February.

2. The Working Group will meet again in about 8 weeks, or approximately early March, to discuss the inventory produced by DPR, and, using that information, consider how Guidelines and Landmark designation might function in both the protection but also in the operation of the park.

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Assessment:

Most of the time, **Arts & Venues** has its way with Red Rocks. And, as it is currently configured, **Parks & Rec** is unequipped to challenge Arts & Venues, even if it cared to do so. Providing a check that considers preservation of the character of the park should fall to the **Denver Landmark Preservation Commission**, but this group is primarily focused on and has expertise for buildings in the City and County of Denver. And their reach is limited to the two structures in Red Rocks that have been given Denver Landmark Status: the Amphitheater and the Trading Post. Raising public awareness and creating political pressure to preserve Red Rocks has pretty much been left to the public interest group **Friends of Red Rocks**.

Sometime during 2015, the public's attention was drawn when "somebody" placed a flier in the Trading Post which included a rendering of a proposed building for the **Colorado Music Hall of Fame (CMHOF), presented by Comfort Dental**, along with a tip jar for donations to the building. The rendering showed a large, imposing building in a modern style flush with the existing Trading Post. While apparently Lauri Dannemiller, then Executive Director of Parks and Recreation, had approved the CMHOF as a "valid park use" in Red Rocks, it's unclear who released the rendering. A sign was also made, in the style of the existing Trading Post, and hung over its entrance, proclaiming "Colorado Music Hall of Fame, Presented by Comfort Dental."

During this same timeframe, the National Park Service was completing an eight-year process that resulted in the **designation of Red Rocks Park as a National Historic Landmark**.

These two events - NHL designation and CMHOF, presented by Comfort Dental - provided a tipping point to shine public attention on Red Rocks. There were, however, other issues brewing that probably wouldn't have gained attention otherwise. There were **plans to reconfigure roads and pave parking lots**. Local experts had made an extensive - and pleading - case to reconsider the road plans in light of the historic character of the roads and in light of drainage concerns. These pleas have been ignored and the road project is already underway (I saw the earth movers on January 4). There was also a **plan to remove trees from the planter boxes in the amphitheater**. Visibility has at least slowed this plan, but it's unclear what is going to happen there.

And there is a **parks designation question**. Four parcels of land that were purchased within the past 15 years or so are not "designated by ordinance" as part of Red Rocks Park. This is part of the tedious backfill in which parks all over Denver are being "designated by ordinance" to address the loophole exploited to swap parkland without a vote. It has been claimed that the parcels "belong" to Arts & Venues, and shouldn't be part of the park. Leaving them out gives the City a place to build CMHOF or whatever they want - or even sell or swap the land - with no public input or recourse.

The press and community attention shining on the LPC, Arts & Venues, and DPR resulted in an offer by **Denver Mountain Parks Foundation** to help out. DMPF **convened a "working group"** which it has assiduously declared is an informal process - not subject to Open Meeting requirements or any other mechanism. DMPF has also stated that the group's sole purpose is to educate the participants on the existing communications processes internal to the city. In the initial meeting on January 6th, FORR succeeding in pressing the issues sufficiently that the consensus was to continue discussions, and focus on implications of extending Denver

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Landmark status to the boundaries of the NHL designation (which does not include the undesignated-as-parkland parcels). The plan is to try to gain an understanding of the features and elements of the park that would be included in a set of Guidelines and a Process agreement that the LPC would need to have developed in order to implement Landmark protection. Design Guidelines for Red Rocks Park would need to be produced by professionals, but much of the work has been done and is documented in several places, notably including the National Historic Landmark application, the Historic American Landscape Survey, and the Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan.

I think that the public should want to see:

- “Designation by ordinance” as parkland of the remaining Red Rocks parcels.
- Creation of a Denver Landmark Historic District that encompasses the entire park. It seems as though this should be a straightforward decision. As Susan Baird stated in a letter to the Planning staff:

If, after eight years of research, the National Park Service and federal government found the entire park nationally significant and worthy of protection, why wouldn't Denver simply follow suit?

- A process for designing any new structures, such as CMHOF, that includes both LPC and public input.

I'll also be honest here. From what I've learned and seen, it is my personal opinion that the City and County of Denver needs to reconsider whether it is the appropriate entity to own and manage the Mountain Park system. These parks are different and they're outside the attention of the average citizen of Denver: a Mountain Parks “Vision” document from 2013 says that 68% of Denver residents visit a Mountain Park once a year. Friends of Red Rocks includes people from all over the Front Range. With the pressures of growth and increasing density, we have enough trouble deciding what we want our parks to be and how to manage them within the city. Furthermore, it seems that executive branch appointments are based on political considerations rather than expertise. The problem there is that we're not building competencies or public trust that city agencies will do the right thing. I don't expect anything to change, but it's this perspective that I bring to the issue.

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Documents to accompany this report:

January 6, 2016. Red Rocks Working Group Meeting Agenda

January 6, 2016. Denver Parks & Recreation Handout to Working Group

January 4, 2016. Letter from Susan Baird to Barbara Stocklin-Steely: Boundaries and Guidelines for Red Rocks Park

May 18, 2015. Letter from Kevin Lyles to Landmark Preservation Committee regarding Red Rocks road projects

January 15, 2016. Bart Berger's summary of the January 6 Working Group meeting

Note: Friends of Red Rocks had previously sent documents to INC PARC regarding the planter boxes and related issues. I can send these to you again if necessary.

Susan E. Baird
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January 4, 2016

Barbara Stocklin-Steely | Principal Planner-Landmark Preservation
Community Planning & Development | Planning Services
201 West Colfax, Webb Building
City and County of Denver 80203

Dear Barbara:

I understand that your office has some specific concerns about whether the proposed preservation tools (the extent of a Red Rocks Denver Historic Landmark District, planning and design guidelines, and Landmark Preservation Commission/LPC review) are appropriate for open space and the entirety of Red Rocks Park. As former Denver Mountain Parks Planner and an author/manager of the *Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan*, I'd like to offer my perspective to you and the working group. Again, as I've said in many meetings and letters, I believe it is critical that Red Rocks Park, especially now as a National Historic Landmark, be protected in its entirety, with local historic landmark boundaries matching those of the NHL, and with specific Design and Planning Guidelines to aid the staff and the LPC Board.

Importance of local designation and boundaries. Discussing boundaries and types of guidelines may seem almost too technical and detailed to some of the working group. Most people understandably don't realize that the 2015 NHL designation provides no protection, no review of proposed changes to Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre. Only local Historic Denver Landmark status can. So, the boundaries used to create that local landmark district matter. Will the whole park be protected or only certain sections? If, after eight years of research, the National Park Service and federal government found the entire park nationally significant and worthy of protection, why wouldn't Denver simply follow suit?

Open space and landscape. Your office has expressed concern about including the entire NHL in a local district for LPC review. Making future decisions for Red Rocks (as for any major park) would strongly emphasize preservation of what makes that park unique and worth preserving. And, in a park, that is primarily open space, landscape and vegetation, geology, structures and the spaces created by those structures, trails, and roads. It includes natural and man-made landscape features as well as the buildings. It is the park as a whole, all pieces and relationships between them creating that whole. The open meadows, geology, view planes, circulation, and landscape details are the backbone of the park. The NHL nomination explains this well and the boundaries used in the designation reflect that.

Until recently and understandably, most review guidelines and Boards were geared towards architecture. Fortunately the National Park Service has created Standards, guidelines, and examples to help staff and reviewers understand how to approach protection and change in cultural landscapes, like Red Rocks Park. Denver Parks and Recreation has researched and created guidelines for its Denver Historic Landmarks, like the City Beautiful Parkways Historic District and Civic Center. Your concerns reaffirm the need for Red Rocks Planning and Design Guidelines to help city staff, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board members, and LPC members make decisions for Red Rock's historic buildings and landscape. Red Rocks Park guidelines logically would build on existing work: the Historic American Landscape Survey

(2015), the Denver Mountain Parks general Design Guidelines (2010), and the 1995 Red Rocks Master Plan. Both the State of Colorado and the NPS have offered to help in funding a contract for the creation of new Red Rocks planning and preservation tools.

Types of Projects. You asked what type of project would trigger a LPC review process. In my opinion, any *new* feature anywhere in Red Rocks Park, from a trail to a park structure, would have a major impact and should be cautiously and carefully planned, designed, and reviewed. And, any major *change* to an existing, historic (and NHL contributing) feature can also seriously damage the character of Red Rocks and warrants review. I assume routine maintenance *would not trigger a review*. And, I assume that staff would have the tools to make major capital repairs with Planning and Design Guidelines. For example, guidelines would offer techniques and appropriate materials for replacing a historic roof. Guidelines could also address larger land use decisions: where new park structures could or should not be built in the park, what types of public events are appropriate and not damaging to natural resources, how to handle drainage and functional issues in a historic property, etc.

In summary, I'm very concerned that the three current boundary proposals (yellow borders) exclude much of the park and many important, NHL contributing features. And I strongly think Red Rocks Park should be treated with the level of respect and protection that all other NHL properties throughout the United States and other Denver Historic Landmark Districts receive, with its own specific Planning and Design Guidelines for the entire park and each significant building. Places can lose their original character and uniqueness through small, incremental change. As a staff member, I was an advocate for progress, so I know that we can keep Red Rocks as a premier concert venue and tourist attraction while protecting it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Edwards Baird, ASLA, Ph.D
Retired Denver Parks and Recreation Planner

cc: Red Rocks Working Group