

IMAGINATION NEEDED FOR GREENWAY

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THE GAZETTE

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BY DAVE HUGHES

YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

Imagination needed for Greenway One offshoot of the proposed \$250 million upgrade and expansion of Highway 24 between 1-25 and Manitou Springs is a sub-project called, loosely, the “Greenway” Project. The Greenway is the name CDOT has given to plans for what the Fountain Creek corridor on both sides of US 24 could be like in the future. I agreed to be the OWN Board representative in a collaborative effort with a number of stakeholders from the city, parks, county, Manitou Springs, Trails and Open Space Coalition, Friends of Red Rock Canyon, OWN, OCCA — and westiders — to formulate what that area could look like and how it could serve. I’m very skeptical about the whole costly CDOT planning exercise for both the highway and the Greenway Project. However, I am willing to suspend disbelief and go through the independent Greenway planning process itself for one big reason. If Highway 24 is changed under any of the schemes being debated, sooner or later there must be an accompanying plan carried out for how to handle the myriad issues — the 100 year flood plain for example — before anything can change drastically. I’d like to see a plan implemented ‘with public imagination and input, a plan that satisfies the soul.

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Few west siders knew they dodged a bullet in 1973 when the city, reflecting only a technical solution, made a plan for Fountain Creek and its flooding problems that would have constructed one big, ugly concrete ditch from Manitou to Monument Creek. Somewhat like the Camp Creek ditch through Pleasant Valley. Functional but unappealing. It was never built. Some of this stretch could become wooded walkways, even fishing ponds, wetlands. uncontaminated water, or in con?ned areas, a creekwalk - all accessible by foot, hike or vehicle. But we still have a Fountain Creek full of tires and beer bottles, grass- less medians, and the remains of Colorado City's unappetizing, if historic, industrial past. It's an ugly approach to Colorado Springs from the mountains, or from 1-25 to the mountains, for a "beautiful" city at the base of Pikes Peak.

I tried to get some "beautification" of that corridor through OWN some 20 years ago. Some things were done and the first "Midland Plan" was drafted. But there is no comprehensive vision and little was done. The Greenway meetings have produced three broad citizen-generated themes: Restoration, Gateway, or Creek Walk. Or combinations ' of these. Greenway planning is some-what independent of the Highway 24 planning itself. Parts of the Green- way, funded by very different entities, public or private, may be implemented before, during, or after the high- way's modified. Some of it already has been — such as the Midland Trail along the old railroad right-of- way. In all cases, Fountain Creek has to be dealt with for its flooding and water-quality potential. Some of this stretch could become wooded walk- ways, even fishing ponds, wetlands, uncontaminated water, or in con?ned areas, a creekwalk - all accessible by foot, bike or vehicle. The area's history could be told with interpretive signs, or perhaps with solar-powered short-range Wi-Fi broadcast stations that can, through web illustrations, tell the story of the great Golden Cycle and other gold mills, the legendary Midland Railroad, the Czechoslovakian green-Glass Factory and the Hassell Decorative Iron Works. I believe that the ugly industrial corridor can, with public art, imaginative. treatment of necessary metal work or cement walls, celebrate and highlight the unique industrial history of Colorado City and the west Side. Certainly signage will be important, which also invites those on the highway to turn off, park, picnic, and sample the business heart of Old Colorado City and its lodgings. It just takes vision and will. Meanwhile, west siders, dream a little and offer your own suggestions.