

Town of Avon: Buck Creek PUD Make-Over



What is a “PUD Make-Over”? Planned Unit Developments (“PUDs”) were popular in the 1970’s through the 1990’s due the flexibility that was offered. The “make-it-up” zoning technique allowed projects to offer a mixture of uses and meet the investment and marketing needs of a developer. However, the extensive use over time left many communities with many long-term PUDs that did not follow the zoning codes, were separate from comprehensive plans, and which created tension between old approvals and land use regulations. PUDs that did not develop created even more challenges with comprehensive plan updates and evolving visions of a community’s future.

The Town of Avon has a strong legacy of PUD approvals. The Buck Creek PUD (on the north side of the I-70 interchange) was originally approved in 1985 to include a 150 room hotel, accessory commercial uses, and 50 multifamily residential units on 15.7 acres. For more than 15 years, the Buck Creek PUD property sat vacant and undeveloped. In 2009, the Eagle River Fire Protection District purchased 2 acres of land for a future regional fire station and Walking Mountains Science school purchased approximately 5 acres for a creek side school. During the Great Recession, only the Walking Mountain Science School proceeded with construction of its science school campus. The remainder of the property lay dormant.

And this is where the story of innovative and collaborative partnerships begins. In the end, this PUD property would become the site for the much needed Buck Creek Medical Center, a 48,000 medical office and emergency care facility; a \$12 million Joint Public Safety Facility owned by the Town of Avon and the Eagle River Fire Protection District; and open space preservation of over 100 acres of land in and around the Buck Creek PUD. The path from the original Buck Creek PUD of a commercial hotel complex to the new essential community uses, environmental science school, and land preservation is the result of numerous innovative and collaborative partnerships. The partners include the Town of Avon, Eagle River Fire Protection District, NexCore Group, Eagle County, Eagle County Open Space Advisory Committee, and Walking Mountains Science School.

Most notably, the medical center, joint safety facility and science school were not planned, at least not in the Town of Avon’s Future Land Use Map, a traditional component of a Comprehensive Plan that identifies the future land uses desired by the community. Rather, Avon’s community leaders responded to investment interests and opportunities by

recognizing the needs of the community, understanding the general Planning Goals in the Comprehensive Plan, and exercising steadfast commitment to success. The “no is not an option mentality” was paramount in the countless negotiations which could have easily ended and stopped the projects many times.



Buck Creek Medical Plaza: Virginia Egger, Avon Town Manager, assisted the NexCore Group in evaluating property in the Town of Avon for a much need medical center. Ms. Egger played a quiet and significant role in helping NexCore Group find a site that could work and secure a purchase contract for the property. An overarching and compelling impetus for the Buck Creek Medical Plaza project is that Eagle County is among the counties with the highest health care costs in the nation. See Denver Post Article:

Denver Post - Feb 8, 2014 - Colorado mountain towns pay highest health premiums in U.S.

<http://www.nexcoregroup.com/projects/2016/buck-creek-medical-plaza>



Joint Public Safety Facility: At the same time as the Buck Creek Medical Plaza project was proceeding, the Town of Avon and the Eagle River Fire Protection District were discussing the possibility of a joint public safety facility that could house a new Town of Avon Police Station and a new and expanded regional fire station. As a result of collaborative site analysis and preliminary design by NexCore, the Town of Avon and the Fire District, a plan was formulated whereby the Fire District swapped its parcel with the adjacent parcel to be purchased by NexCore which better suited the needs of each facility, especially the drive-through needs of a regional fire station. The land swap also resulted in a debt savings of over \$1.2 million for the Fire District

The Town and Fire Districts formed a “Working Group” to explore a partnered design process, financing approvals for both entities, and the execution of a Intergovernmental Agreement that addressed design, financing and construction of the joint facility. Ultimately, financing approval was referred to the voters of the Town and the Fire District area in spring in 2016, which was strongly approved.

Apr 11, 2016: Avon Factual Summary for Voters



Walking Mountains Science School Open Space: To complete the PUD area, Walking Mountains Science Center sought to purchase the remaining Buck Creek PUD property to allow for future expansion of the campus, on-site housing for employees and visiting teachers, and to preserve additional areas along Buck Creek. Walking Mountains sought \$1 million in funding support from Eagle County Open Space and the Eagle Valley Land Trust to assist with purchasing the remaining 5.8 acres. From the County's perspective, the small amount of open space preservation did not warrant the funding request. The Town of Avon proposed to place a conservation easement on 95 acres of Town land adjacent to and surrounding the Walking Mountains campus so that the open space funding request was more attractive. This allowed the Walking Mountains open space funding application to meet the County's eligibility criteria, secure the funding, and close on its acquisition.

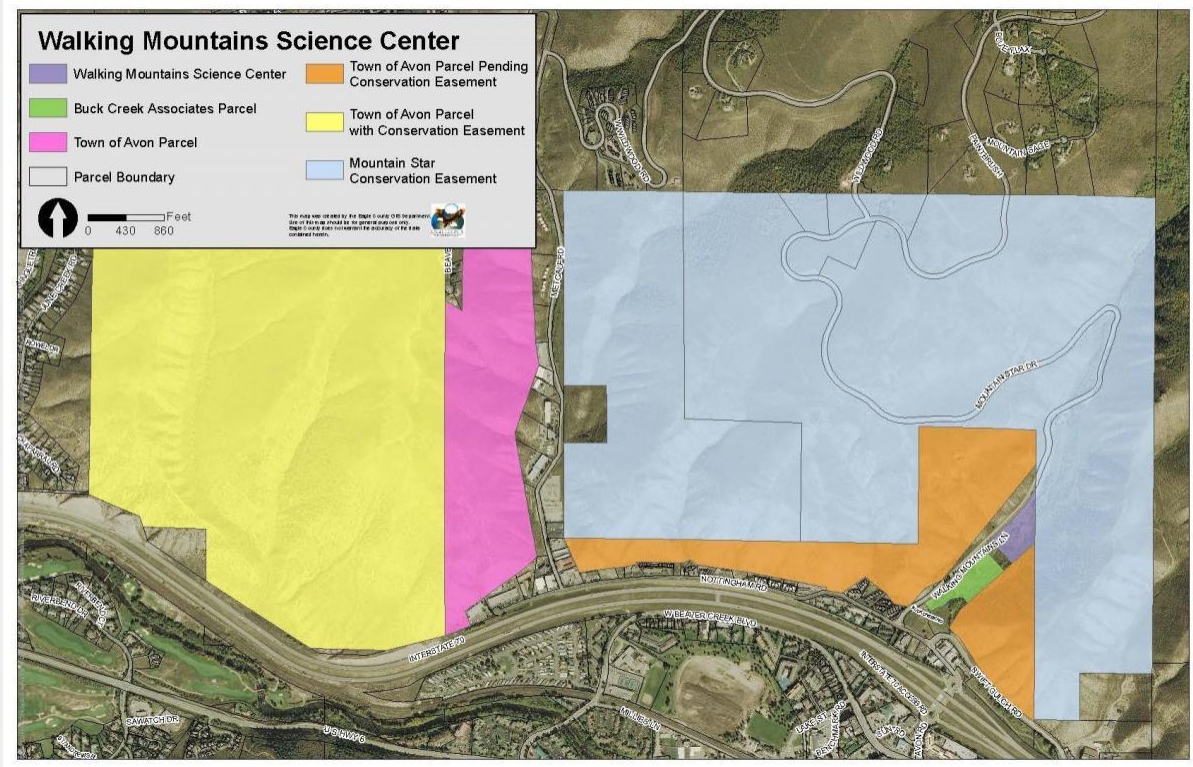
Jan 2016: Countywide Collaboration Creates 100 Acre Conservation Easement

Walking Mountains Science Center – Open Space Preservation:

Existing Campus surrounded by undeveloped land. Hillsides owned by Town of Avon and placed into conservation easement.



Avon Conservation Easement in ORANGE, Buck Creek Associations Parcel Acquired by Walking Mountains in Green.



So, in the end, the Buck Creek PUD went from a large hotel and considerable multi-family residential development to a regional public service oriented development including a medical center, regional fire station, police station, environmental science-center and open space. Little of this was “pre-planned”; however, through appreciation of public benefit opportunities when presented, collaboration with all parties, involvement of the public, perseverance in negotiations, and a pragmatic view of the Avon Comprehensive Plan goals, the entire Buck Creek PUD was transformed into a legacy project that will serve the Avon regional community for many generations.