

Mayor Hancock Proposes Destruction Of More Valley Open Space



Going, Going, Gone?: With little or flawed public notice, the Hancock administration is attempting to do away with a major portion of Paul A. Hentzell Park near Hampden Avenue — a precedent that could endanger parks and open space throughout Denver.

Your Guide To 25 Valley Holiday Season Events

by Glen Richardson

It's a disappointing truth that good cheer can be difficult to come by during the holidays. Even in the best of times this season can be one great big roller-coaster ride. But you don't have to give in and be a Grinch because during the holiday season the Cherry Creek Valley becomes a winter wonderland of things to do and places to go.

Few places offer a greater variety of dazzling displays, special events and concerts than you'll find here. Furthermore there's a wide array of performing arts, dance and theater to enjoy. From an ice skating rink to glittery New Year's Eve ball drops and spectacular fireworks, here are 25 ways to enjoy good times and have wonderful memories of the season.

Lighting Displays & Events

LoDo Aglow, Through Dec. 31

The LoDo District Inc.'s *LoDo Aglow* window design contest sees local business owners, designers and art students letting their imaginations run wild in creating holiday themed window art in lower downtown.

Blossoms Of Light

Denver Botanic Gardens, Through Jan. 1

Embrace the holiday season by taking the family to the *Blossoms of Light* at the *Denver Botanic Gardens* (York St.). More than one million colorful lights draped in elegant designs highlight the Gardens' winter beauty. Romantic and popular kissing spots will return, as well as the always-anticipated HoloSpex glasses, which magically transform the lights into shimmering 3-D shapes. Warm drinks and tasty treats are available along with entertainment on select evenings.

City & County Building,

Through Jan. 2013

The largest lighting display in Denver comes on nightly at 6 p.m. at the *City & County Building* where 600,000 lights deck

Almost Half Of Hentzell Park To Be Swapped For DPS Building

by Laura Lieff

The long-rumored lack of commitment to Denver's parks and open space by Mayor Michael Hancock and his Parks and Recreation Manager Lauri Dannemiller appears to be confirmed by a proposed land swap. Nearly half of *Paul A. Hentzell Park* in southeast Denver's *Hampden Heights* would be exchanged for a *Denver Public Schools* (DPS) building on Fox Street. DPS would then build a school on the former parkland while Hancock would open a domestic violence center in the old building.

The *City of Denver* could simply have purchased the Fox Street building and DPS could have taken the funds and bought available land but using a public park and

open space for commercial and business purposes appears to be becoming increasingly common. An example of this is when the *City of Denver* sold 80 acres of open space at *Lowry Vista* to a developer for \$10 for a high-density, mixed-use development quixotically claiming the 80 acres was too polluted for use as open space but not for townhomes and retail businesses.

The land in question this time is 11.5 acres of Paul A. Hentzell Park, located at 10300 E. Yale Avenue, near *Cherry Creek Country Club*. Nine of the 11.5 acres are part of a designated natural area and those who are against the swap and against Denver losing more open space are not happy.

Last month over 20 residents showed

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Elegant Presentation: Displaying more than a million colorful lights, the *Blossoms Of Light* at the *Denver Botanic Gardens* is one of many spectacular events taking place this holiday season.

the neo-classical building. The bell tower plays carols nightly as well.

16th Street Mall, Through Jan. 2013

Denver's mile-long pedestrian promenade, the *16th Street Mall*, is decorated with more than one million white lights. *Skyline*

Park, located at 16th and Arapahoe, features nearly 26,000 lights and a 22-foot tall Christmas tree complete with LED lights choreographed to a variety of holiday songs. Denver's historic *D & F Tower*, at the

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Brauchler Wins Arapahoe County District Attorney Race

Gallagher/Sullivan Group Defeated At Ballot Box For First Time In Almost 50 Years

by Glen Richardson

George Brauchler, former Jefferson County Assistant District Attorney and army reservist, defeated former county court judge Ethan Feldman in a close and hotly contested race for District Attorney for the 18th Judicial District. The District covers Arapahoe County as well as Douglas, Lincoln and Elbert counties and includes almost a million people.

Feldman actually won in Arapahoe County but could not overcome the lead Brauchler built up in Douglas, Lincoln and Elbert counties with Brauchler winning overall 53 percent to 47 percent.

The victorious Brauchler pointed out that this is the first election in almost 50 years where an outsider was able to prevail.

Long rumored accusations of corruption in the Arapahoe County justice system dramatically increased after former longtime Sheriff Pat Sullivan was arrested and convicted of providing illegal drugs to young men in return for homosexual sex. Sulli-

van's plea bargain and light sentence of only 30 days increased the complaints about the Arapahoe County justice system.

Bob Gallagher and Pat Sullivan controlled the justice system for most of the latter 20th century. Gallagher was first elected D.A. in 1968 and was re-elected seven times until 1997. Sullivan became Arapahoe County Sheriff in 1984 and won every election until he retired in 2002. His second in command Grayson Robinson has controlled the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office ever since then. Only individuals who worked with and under Gallagher have served as the District Attorney for Arapahoe County since his retirement.

At first it appeared that the justice system would remain in the same hands. Highly controversial Gallagher protégé Carol Chambers was term-limited as District Attorney but her chief deputy, Leslie Hansen, was the favorite on the Republican side and promised to keep Chambers on

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New D.A.: Reform candidate George Brauchler beat out the political cabal that has controlled the 18th Judicial District since 1968.

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up at an under-publicized *Denver Parks and Recreation* Advisory Board meeting to weigh in on the de-designation and the swap that would follow. Attendees included attorney and park advocate Joseph Halpern and citizen activist Dave Felice who have been involved in many park issues over the years.

"If it were not for Denver Parks and Recreation's own rules only a few people inside city government and the school district would know about the trade," Felice asserted.

Halpern was frustrated by the lack of notice concerning the swap and voiced his opinion at the meeting. He also successfully argued that under Natural Areas Rule 3.E, "written comments shall be accepted ... for 30 days following the public hearing."

According to Felice, "Parks and Recreation Manager Lauri Dannemiller complained that this rule didn't require the Board to delay its vote," but members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board decided they did not have enough information and that the decision on the property swap would be postponed until December 13.

Dangerous Precedent

During the 30-day extension, the Advisory Board will allow further written public comment and live comments at the next regular public meeting. Before the proposal goes to City Council, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board must recommend that the site should lose its natural area designation. The recommendation then goes to Dannemiller who ultimately decides whether to remove the designation.

But parks and open space advocates

point out that the Hancock Administration has begun filling the Advisory Board with developer point men such as Marcus Pachner. Mr. Pachner represented the developer who was given 80 acres of open space for a high density development at Lowry Vista. Pachner also represented *Fuqua Development* in its attempt to obtain tax breaks to lure Walmart to 9th and Colorado against adamant neighborhood opposition. "Talk about putting a fox inside a hen house," declared Valley resident Chris Cater.

Also on the Advisory Board is James Allen, Director of the Bond Program and Construction Services for Denver Public Services. Some wonder how an employee of DPS can be allowed to sit on the decision that directly affects DPS. "It's a clear conflict of interest," stated Dave Felice.

Even if the Advisory Board recommends against lifting the designation the decision then goes to Dannemiller who ultimately decides whether to remove the designation. If the comments made at the public meeting were any indication, it appears that Dannemiller has lost the trust of some parks and open space advocates.

"An exchange of Denver parkland for an office building sets an extreme precedent," Felice said. "Once the land is traded for a school the land is gone forever and cannot be replaced."

Felice said that while there were only two public speakers in favor of the land swap proposal, there were many speakers present at the meeting who were against it. Representing the *Audubon Society*, Polly Reetz emphasized the importance of the natural park land, the actual value of a prairie dog community and the diversity of wildlife. Hampden Heights homeowner Steve Waldstein said he intentionally purchased his family home adjacent to the open space 13 years ago because the land provided a desirable natural environment. Attorney and Capitol Hill resident Brad Cameron said, "the property trade would



Fox In The Hen House: The Mayor's appointment of developer pitchman Marcus Pachner to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board both shocked and disappointed many parks and open space advocates throughout Denver.

be a dangerous precedent."

Residents Feel Blindsided

In addition to the "for and against" arguments about losing designated open space, Halpern points out the lack of communication and misleading information surrounding the controversy.

"Denver Parks and Recreation chose to provide email notice only to Hentzell Park Neighbors and posted a signboard in the natural area," said Halpern. "No notice was sent to Denver's more than 200 Registered neighborhood organizations or even to persons like me who have made a standing request to receive emails regarding Denver Parks and Recreation public meetings and hearings. (However, Denver Parks and Recreation always has my email address handy to send me its promotional emails and newsletters)."

He continued, "In its haste, Denver Parks and Recreation also gave false information in its email, on its signboard and on its website, asserting that only 5.7 acres of the

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natural area (as opposed to the correct nine acres) would be divested. No corrective email was sent and the signboard posted on the property was never corrected. The error was silently corrected on Denver Parks and Recreation's website shortly before the public hearing held before the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board on November 8, 2012."

Halpern calls attention to the fact that as of October 31, 2012 — eight days before the scheduled public hearing — no effort had been made to correct the public posting. He also notes that photographs taken by park activist Nancy Stocker show that the erroneous sign remained on the site even after the November 8 public hearing.

Another source of frustration for Halpern is how the city is treating the land swap "as a fait accompli" — as if it's already a done deal. Halpern discovered on the website of the *Rose A. Andom Center*, which is the name of Hancock's victims assistance center, an announcement that they have already secured a home even though the next public hearing hasn't happened yet. The website states:

"The Center is named in honor of successful Denver entrepreneur and McDonald's franchise owner, Rose A. Andom, and her lead gift of \$1 million. A building at 1330 Fox Street has been secured by the City of Denver for The Center. The Center has a long-term lease for use of the building and will be responsible for raising all renovation funds and reimbursing the City for ongoing occupancy costs."

It then goes on to list the building's features and advantages which include proximity to courts, jail, mass transit, 23,000 square feet with space for expansion, secured entry on ground floor for victim safety, space for amenities identified in focus groups and more.

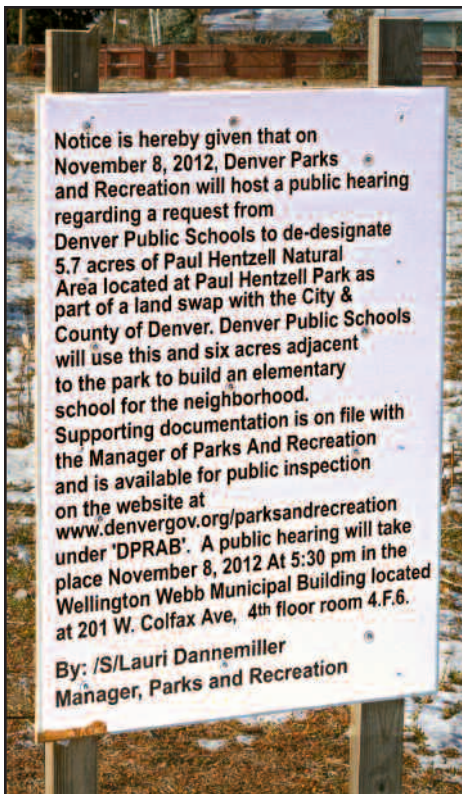
Park And Open Space Disappearing Act

In addition to residents being frustrated over a deeply flawed process, some residents believe that Dannemiller has shown a lack of concern for parks and open space.

"Denver Parks and Recreation has abandoned its role as stewards of our scarce parkland and has instead shown a disturbing willingness to make deals with anyone who proposes a money-making scheme involving parkland," stated Joe Halpern.

Also, Felice points out that Parks and Recreation Community Relations & Marketing Specialist Angela Casias sent an email out to "Hampden Heights Neighbors" about the land swap controversy on November 15 — a full week after the public hearing by the Advisory Board.

"The Parks Department and the school district still refuse to acknowledge this is a matter for ALL residents of Denver and continue to confine the 'public outreach' to the small section of southeast Denver," Felice said. "Many of the people most vital-



Incorrect Information: The signboard posted on the Hentzell Park property states that only 5.7 acres of natural area would be divested even though the correct number is nine. The inaccurate sign remained on the site even after the November 8 public hearing.

ly concerned with the preservation of the natural area open space are residents of central Denver who use the trails and enjoy observing the wildlife in the area."

The Bigger Picture

In addition to the overall controversy, Felice and other neighbors are wondering why establishing a domestic violence center on Fox Street has anything to do with destroying a designated natural area.

"Denver Parks and Recreation is being asked to give away scarce natural habitat for uses that have nothing to do with parks and recreation," Felice said. "This 'de-designation' only follows the letter, but not the spirit, of the law intended to keep open space in a city already severely deficient in the amount of parkland."

Felice also feels that "city communication with neighborhoods is poor" and "communication from Denver Public Schools is all but non-existent."

Stocker has created the website www.denvernature.net that provides information and updates concerning this proposal.

The next Advisory Board meeting is on December 13 at 5:30 p.m. at the *Wellington Webb Municipal Building* located at 201 W. Colfax Avenue, 4th floor, Room 4.F.6. In the meantime comments can be emailed to parksandrec@denvergov.org (mention Hentzell Natural Area in the subject) or mailed to Manager Lauri Dannemiller, 201 W. Colfax Ave., Dept 601, Denver, CO 80202.

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