

*“Buy land, they’re not making it anymore.”
– Mark Twain*

POPS – Protect Our Parks

What is it?

POPS is a proposed Colorado Springs City Charter amendment that would require voter approval of any conveyance (i.e., sale, trade, donation, etc.) of any city-owned parkland to a private entity.

Currently, under city regulations as outlined in its Real Estate Manual, parkland can be conveyed to private entities by the City Administration with a simple majority vote of approval by the City Council.

Why is POPS needed?

Colorado Springs is blessed with one of the most spectacular natural settings of any city in the country. This is one of the main reasons people choose to live here.

Our parklands and open spaces provide a critical means and venue for the city’s citizens to enjoy and recreate in this special environment.

Our parklands belong to the citizens, not the Parks Department, a particular City Administration or City Council. This truth was recognized by city founder General William Palmer when he specifically made his early and generous bequests of parkland to “the citizens” of Colorado Springs.

One hundred years later, the authors’ of the TOPS parks, trails and open space acquisition program reaffirmed this truth with the requirement that any parkland/open space acquired with TOPS funds could only be sold or otherwise disposed with the approval of a majority of the city’s voters.

When parkland is lost, it is lost forever.

For this reason, most Colorado municipalities give added protection to their parklands with the requirement that any sale, trade or other conveyance of parkland can take place only after approval in a vote by the electorate.

This is true of all “statutory” municipalities – about 2/3 of total municipalities in the state – which are governed by state statute which requires a vote of the citizenry to approve any parkland transfer.

Likewise, most “home rule” (the other third) require a vote of their citizens for any parkland conveyance. This list includes many of our larger neighbors to the north such as Denver, Boulder, Aurora, Lakewood, Arvada, Longmont and Greeley – and smaller immediate neighbors Manitou Springs and Woodland Park.

Finally, it must be noted that we were unable to find any example of where a vote of the people requirement imposed any undue burden on a city or caused it to miss out on an “exciting opportunity.” Indeed, a sentiment we heard more than once officials in other municipalities was that the “vote of the people” requirement kept them from doing “stupid stuff.”

In this latter regard, POPS is a barrier against parkland being sold or traded because of economic or political vagaries. During the 2007-2009 Great Recession proposals were floated among the El Paso County Commissioners about selling off county parks – including the immensely popular Bear Creek Park. Likewise, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the 2016 “Strawberry Fields” land swap was facilitated by the considerable political and economic clout of the Broadmoor hotel and its multi-billionaire owner.

We live in the town that was the birthplace of TABOR – the “Taxpayers’ Bill of Rights” – which requires a vote of the electorate for tax increases. A tax increase can be rescinded (and the scoundrels thrown out). But, to repeat, parkland conveyed to another party is parkland lost forever.