



Legislation Details (With Text)

File #: 15-00342 **Version:** 1 **Name:**
Type: Informational Report **Status:** Filed
File created: 6/9/2015 **In control:** City Council Work Session
On agenda: 8/24/2015 **Final action:** 8/24/2015
Title: Pikes Peak - America's Mountain Summit Complex Project Update

Sponsors:

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. Pikes Peak Summit City Council Pres Aug 24 2015

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
8/24/2015	1	City Council Work Session	received	

Pikes Peak - America's Mountain Summit Complex Project Update

From:

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Summary:

Pikes Peak - America's Mountain (PPAM) is one of the most visited mountains in the world and a top tourist attraction for the State of Colorado. Annually, more than 600,000 people reach the summit via the Pikes Peak Highway, the Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway (Railway) or by utilizing one of the hiking trails including Barr Trail. Pikes Peak is an American icon with tremendous history; it is a National Historic Landmark (NHL) and has deep meaning to numerous people.

The new Summit Visitor Center should provide a quality visitor experience that demonstrates the significance of and a sensitivity of Pikes Peak - America's Mountain. The design should be mindful of the attraction that it serves, social need and reflective of the setting. The completion of this project should restore the summit to its natural settings and preserve the visitor experience.

The current summit house was built in the 1960's and there are three additional support facilities on the summit of Pikes Peak including a utility building (Plant) to support the summit house, a communications building operated by the Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU) and a building operated by the United States Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM). All buildings have exceeded their useful life and need to be replaced.

The USFS approved the project in 2014 and the stakeholders have worked together to begin the Environmental Assessment process and the Design process. In 2015, the City of Colorado Springs solicited and awarded a contract to EDM International to facilitate the environmental process and awarded a contract to RTA Architects for the design of the new Pikes Peak Summit Complex

facilities.

Previous Council Action:

N/A

Background:

Pikes Peak is one of the principal landmarks in the western United States. The mountain is contained within the Pike National Forest and was first mapped by Zebulon Montgomery Pike in 1806. By 1859, Pikes Peak was the symbol for western expansion brought about by the gold rush. Ambitious prospectors crying “Pikes Peak or Bust” fueled a regional population boom into the late 1800s.

In 1889, a toll road was built to accommodate the horse drawn carriages which traveled the mountain on a regular basis. The winding road to the 14,110 summit quickly became well-known across the country for its incredible views of the eastern plains of Colorado and the surrounding peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Not surprisingly, Katherine Lee Bates penned “America the Beautiful” after a trip to the summit of Pikes Peak.

Visitors have ascended the road via automobile for nearly 100 years, and maintenance of the road has been problematic for almost as long. The first auto road was constructed in 1915 and was operated as a private enterprise until 1935 when it was relinquished back to the U.S. government. Because the United States Forest Service (USFS) could not afford to maintain the road, it was added to the State’s highway system and maintenance was funded by a gas tax. In 1947, an amendment to the state gas tax statute cut the availability of funds for the Pikes Peak Highway and in 1948, maintenance of the road ceased. Both the City and the USFS recognized the importance of the Pikes Peak Highway as a tourist attraction and an economic driver, but neither the City nor the USFS had sufficient funding to operate and maintain the road. At that time federal regulations prohibited toll roads on USFS lands; however, in 1948, the City was granted a special use permit by the USFS which allowed the road to reopen as a toll road.

Each year approximately 120,000 vehicles carrying over 300,000 visitors travel the Pikes Peak Highway which is paved to the summit and extends through Pike National Forest from Cascade, Colorado to the summit. The highway is open year round, weather-permitting.

Highlights of the Term Special Use Permit include:

- Issued by the United States Forest Service (USFS)
- Term refers to the fact the Permit is time-limited. In this case, the permit is good for thirty years, from 1990 through 2020
- First issued by USFS in 1948
- The USFS has final approval authority for all construction projects
- Highway and all structures are owned by the United States under the administration of the USFS (except for the Maintenance Garage and the Crystal Reservoir Visitors Center)
- Permit is not transferable; holder may sublease use of land, concessions, etc.
- All income derived from permitted activities must be used for funding the Operating Plan and budget of Pikes Peak-America’s Mountain.

Pikes Peak-America’s Mountain is an enterprise of the City of Colorado Springs. The enterprise operates the Pikes Peak Highway and the associated visitor’s facilities (Summit House, Glen Cove Inn and Crystal Reservoir Gift Shop) as well as the recreational corridor (hiking, picnic grounds, and interpretive trail) according to the Term Special Use Permit issued by the U.S. Forest Service.

Revenue is generated from Gateway revenue and concessionaire fees. This revenue is used to provide visitor and Ranger services, highway and facility maintenance, construction, interpretive and educational services and special project funding such as the Pikes Peak Summit Project.

Financial Implications:

The preliminary estimated cost for this project is \$20-\$25 million which includes design of the entire complex, environmental studies needed to comply with the NEPA requirements, and the construction of the complex. USARIEM will contribute \$3.5 M for their portion of the project, including the HARL and a share of the Plant building. CSU will provide in-kind environmental services in lieu of design and environmental funding, but will contribute their share for the construction costs associated with the communications necessary for their operation. PPAM will be responsible for the project costs associated with the Visitor Center and the share of the Plant building.

Funding for PPAM costs will come from various sources including PPAM Enterprise Funds, donations/contributions from private sources and LART funding. (Note: In 2015, PPAM received \$250,000 for design of the Summit Complex as part of a \$1M request.)

Board/Commission Recommendation:

Pikes Peak - America's Mountain staff have presented to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board a project update in February 2015 that provided an update on the project and a review of the enterprise operation.

Stakeholder Process:

The public process for the design and the environmental process will kick off on August 25th at the first public scoping meeting being held at Library 21C from 3pm to 7pm. There will be several opportunities for stakeholders to comment.

Alternatives:

N/A

Proposed Motion:

N/A

N/A