

From: Gaebler, Jill

To: Palus, Karen

Cc: Skorman, Richard; Strand, Tom; Williams, Wayne; Murray, Bill; Avila, Yolanda; Knight, Don; Pico, Andy;

Geislinger, David; Greene, Jeff H.

Subject: Closing Roads in our Parks

Date: Friday, April 10, 2020 8:55:07 PM

Hi Karen,

As a precursor to your presentation at next Tuesday's council meeting, I would like to offer a creative option to allow park users to spread out and create more distance between users and activities. We know our parks are being used by our residents in record numbers and I am personally thrilled by this, as exercise and sunshine are so important as we all deal with being cooped up inside, stress, and depression. We also know that exercise and fresh air reduce incidences of suicide, domestic violence, and child abuse, which are all increasing as this crisis endures.

Please see below a recent article from TOSC that very articulately discusses these issues and why our parks and open spaces are always important, but are now critical to the health and wellness of our community. Additionally, many other cities, most notably Denver, are also successfully closing roads and parking lots in parks to create distance and to better disperse users. Here is an article that describes the road closures in Denver:

<https://www.westword.com/arts/denver-streets-and-roadways-close-as-residents-requestspace-for-recreation-11680913>

I have discussed this plan with TOSC, PikeRide, and the Garden of the Gods Foundation and we all agree that it would be in the best interest of our city to close the roads in the below listed parks, on the weekends during this crisis:

Garden of the Gods

Palmer Park

Cheyenne Canyon

All of these parks are experiencing huge increases in users, and people are struggling to walk,

bike, and run with appropriate social distancing. Allowing park users access to the road will allow people to spread out and enjoy our parks, without worry of infection. It will also prevent residents and tourists from driving into the parks for activities like group sports and picnics, which are not allowed now but are still occurring, mostly by those who drive inside the park. Lastly, EPC and other surrounding communities are concerned about the drastic increase in numbers their parks would experience if Colorado Springs closes its parks, so we really need to find a way to prevent closures and to protect our citizens and the citizens throughout our region.

Susan Davies from TOSC and Jan Martin from the GoG Foundation are both in support of this solution and we are all available to discuss this idea more, as soon as possible, as time is of the essence. I will also bring this up at Tuesday's meeting to see if Council has any additional ideas for our parks. Please consider this a formal request from not just me as a council member, but from a huge number of our parks users and community members, many whom have reached out to me or have voiced support on social media. Let's please get this done.

Thanks, Karen. #GetOutSpreadOut

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TOSC Article:

We've all heard of cabin fever and prairie madness—conditions that affect our mental wellbeing when we're either cooped up or confined with the same, small group of people for extended periods of time. Those are exactly the situations we find ourselves in, as we adhere to social distancing and public health orders to stay at home. Not only does staying inside affect our mental wellbeing, but our physical wellbeing. Being cooped up and isolated can lead to sleep disturbances, weight gain, low vitamin D levels, and unhealthy eating habits, which in turn have a domino effect on other aspects of our physical health. Additionally, children (and even adults) with "nothing to do" often turn to risky or even dangerous behaviors. So how do we combat the ill-effects of staying inside by ourselves or with our families?

We get out and spread out! The good news is that Colorado's Public Health Order 20-24 includes engaging in outdoor activities as a necessary activity. We applaud the Governor and local officials for keeping our State and local trails and parks open during these trying times.

What are some of the benefits of getting outside, especially in the middle of a pandemic?

- Engaging in outdoor activity reduces stress, restores mental energy, and increases endorphins (the chemicals in our brain that regulate mood and help us feel happy)
- A walk in the forest can reduce anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders
- Physical activity and being outside help our bodies' maintain our normal circadian rhythm, promoting good sleep patterns
- Getting outside—even for 15-20 minutes—gives us our daily dose of vitamin D, which helps our bones, blood cells, and immune systems
- Spending time outside lessens our access to junk food and increases our tendency to eat healthy meals
- Outdoor time helps us maintain a healthy weight
- Hiking, biking, and walking are activities that keep our minds active and reduce our tendency to engage in risky behaviors.

Tips for staying safe when you're engaging in outdoor activity:

- Avoid touching surfaces with your hands (stay off playground equipment and picnic tables, open doors/gates with your elbow/shoulder, etc.)
- When touching public surfaces is unavoidable, sanitize your hands immediately afterwards
- Wear a bandana around your nose and mouth. This will serve as a reminder not to touch your face, which is one of the most important things you can do to stay healthy. (Bandanas won't filter viruses.)
- Maintain social distancing standards

Get outside and stay healthy! #GetOutSpreadOut

Jill Gaebler

Council Member – District 5

From: Palus, Karen

To: Greene, Jeff H.

Cc: Palus, Karen

Subject: Councilmember Gaebler Proposal 04132020

Date: Monday, April 13, 2020 5:46:19 PM

Attachments: Councilmember Gaebler Proposal 04132020.docx

Importance: High

For your review.. please.

I will send it to Councilmember Gaebler once you've approved. Thank you!

Councilmember Gaebler,

Hello! Thank you for sharing your proposal with me concerning the closure of Park roads on weekends during the COVID-19 Stay Home Order on Friday, April 10th. I shared your proposal with my appropriate staff over the weekend for their response this morning.

I appreciated the additional opportunity to speak with you this afternoon for further clarification of this initiative and share some of our concerns we see with this initial proposal.

We can all agree that these are challenging times for our community and our outdoor recreation opportunities have made a difficult situation a little bit brighter for our residents.

We have been working closely with our peers throughout the state and across the country regarding the appropriate response to this pandemic. The Department has worked closely with El Paso County Health Department, our partners, contractors and participants to provide safe spaces for our community to recreate.

We have managed our facilities in such a way that has allowed many of our park amenities to remain open where other communities have had closures to reduce the curve. I am proud of the efforts of my team and all those who have supported our parks system by being responsible park users during the pandemic.

We have continued to provide good messaging to reinforce responsible behavior and are monitoring through staff and the police department trouble spots to affect compliance. We are currently seeing good results throughout our parks system.

Our park use is up in our neighborhood parks, similar use for our regional parks and lower numbers in the Garden than we have seen in previous years.

After our initial review the following concerns would need to be addressed to be able to move this proposal forward:

1. Road Closures: Closure of the roads would close our parking areas. We need those lots to

spread people out. If no roads are open and lots are closed all those cars would fill up frontage lots, spill into neighborhoods and concentrate folks into only those trails from those locations. This is not ideal if the initiative is to allow users to spread out. For example: Garden of the Gods has 470 spots throughout the park in a variety of locations in which users enter into several different trail access points. If road is closed then those 470+ cars will park at the overflow lot, 30th street shoulder, Pleasant Valley neighborhood and Manitou Springs neighborhoods. The same applies to Palmer Park and would intensify parking in those neighborhoods due to limited lots nearby. North Cheyenne Canon has the Canonwood neighborhood that we must maintain vehicular access to at all times. All other parking would be dispersed to the Gold Camp and surrounding neighborhoods.

2. ADA: We would have need to address ADA issues for each site. There are many citizens who cannot go to their neighborhood park and choose to drive through their nature since they cannot walk, hike or bike and need to be in the safety of their own vehicle for health reasons.

3. Management of Operations: Management of this type of decision requires a significant number of staff, Police presence and volunteers. Because we have hosted the Motorless Morning event at the Garden of the Gods Park we understand the requirements for managing the activities resulting from this type of closure. Due to increased demands on staff we do not have the capacity to pull them from their regular duties. These type of closure events require us to manage the roadway and the unsafe behaviors. Those operations have to be manned due to safety and hazardous situations that we have witnessed in the past.

I understand that this proposal started based on the City and County of Denver shutting down City and park streets to vehicles to allow people an opportunity in Denver to spread out. This was a result of closure to City Center and Mountain Parks. I fully support Denver's efforts since their park acreage can no way sustain their population in the metro area.

I do not feel that the City of Colorado Springs is in that situation and if I did you know I would be looking for appropriate alternatives as well. We have successfully managed many other restructuring efforts to keep our facilities open. For example: Pike Peak America's Mountain, Golf Operations and food distribution at our community centers.

I respect your proposal and interest in furthering the effort to eliminate cars in the Garden but I do not

feel this is the right solution for our community at this time. As I mentioned earlier, I may be overly sensitive to our park neighbors and concerned with how this proposal would impact them directly. I am willing to discuss this further, if you would like to try to work through the concerns and challenges I have expressed in this memo.

Thank you again for your time this afternoon. I truly appreciated the opportunity to share my thoughts and teams feedback with you.