

Happy CAMPers

Trails planners optimistic following second summit.

By Walter Kent

Maybe Mammoth Lakes will be the future preferred vacation spot for NASCAR's Dale Earnhardt Jr.

After all, even race car drivers need to get out of their cars once in awhile.

And as Consultant Jeff Olson of Alta Planning said at the wrap-up session of MLTPA's Winter CAMP on Monday night, "Mammoth could be a place to come take a vacation from the automobile."

If, of course, there are trails and buses to help people get around.

That's where MLTPA (Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access), a local non-profit, comes in. MLTPA organized the six-day CAMP (Concept and Master Planning) event. Its goal: to solicit public feedback as to how Mammoth can provide access to public lands during winter months, how trails should be used and maintained, and how to make Mammoth more pedestrian-friendly.

Winter CAMP included public forums and workshops, many of which took place "on the ground" on snow-

mobiles, skis and snowshoes.

This public input will eventually be incorporated into a proposed update to the Town's Master Trails Plan, which was written in 1991.

The Consultants Weigh In

At Monday night's session at MMSA's Mountainside Conference Center, both Jeff Olson and Cimarron Chacon of Trails Solutions outlined some of the broader findings gleaned from the weekend.

Olson, as dressed-down and ruggedly fit as any Mammoth lifer, seemed in awe of the recreational opportunities in Mammoth, the town's setting, and the level of community enthusiasm for increased and better public access.

However, the Saranac Lake, NY resident summed up previous planning efforts by saying that the "built environment doesn't connect to the kind of community you want to be." He highlighted the town transit system as a huge success but emphasized that

"getting to and from bus stops should be made easier."

Other points of emphasis for Olson were storm safety concerns which struck him as "one of the most significant issues the community faces."

To illustrate this point, Olson showed photographic examples of Main Street during a snowstorm with pedestrians struggling to keep their footing and drivers struggling with visibility.

Another safety issue for Olson was the snowplay area on Minaret Rd. adjacent to Sam's Wood Site (What happens if a Flexible Flyer actually takes flight and makes the roadway?). Also mentioned was a need to increase the availability of safe, winter routes for children to walk to school.

Cimarron Chacon of Trail Solutions also looked the part of an Eastern Sierra local. Her enthusiasm for backcountry snow recreation was as apparent as that of any devotee of untracked powder turns. She turned the focus of her comments to the concerns she heard at various listening sessions from members of Mammoth's "strong backcountry culture." Chacon stressed planning to increase snowmobilers' access to fuel and services. Also included in her recommendations were ways to provide connectivity between the extensive groomed trail system north of town accessed from the Shady Rest portal and snowmobile trails elsewhere in Mammoth's vicinity.

Chacon's emphasis on backcoun-

try accessibility did not end with snowmobiling. She recommended increased information and signage regarding Sherwin Ridge access to backcountry skiers and snowboarders and also mentioned "the logical natural portal for a sledding and child snowplay area is at the foot of the Sherwins."

Both Chacon and Olson also mentioned the possibility of a groomed Nordic loop through and around town, free from motorized traffic, and providing access to other small loops branching off the Main Trail.

Winter CAMP signalled the culmination of the research phase of the Master Trails planning effort. However, the public still has the opportunity to comment online by filling out a user survey at www.mltpa.org.

In addition, Mammoth Lakes Town Council will again address the subject of a potential sales tax measure at its regular meeting next Wednesday at 6 p.m. Council is mulling whether to place a measure on the June 3rd ballot which would raise the local sales tax 0.5% to help fund implementation of the updated Trails plan.

For now, however, the consultants will go home and get to work on what they hope will be a safer, more recreation-friendly plan for Mammoth's future. A rough version of the plan may be available as early as next month. A formal version of the plan should be available for adoption by June.

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preservation, limitation and conservation?

"Does it really need to be improved?" he asked. "It's adequate the way it is."

Finally, Dan Dawson said the dispersed recreation along Mammoth Creek is highly impactful and there should be just one trail and one corridor.

He also pointed out that Cardinal Investments does not own the property, it owns an option. He suggested the Town's purchase of the property for conservation should be considered as an option.

In short, there is a lot of opposition and Cardinal faces an uphill battle to sway public sentiment in its favor.

The Cardinal's biggest public relations asset is one of its principals, Jesse Langley, whom everyone seems to like.

Overheard at the Good Life on Tuesday: "Ted Carleton is the single

biggest detriment to this town." - John Eastman.

Sheet reply: Biggest detriment? Who approved the current Town budget that's \$6.5 million underwater, Mr. Eastman?

And who said on June 6th of this year, "Council and Staff have been given a sobering report on the state of the [local] economy," yet two weeks later, voted to pass a budget which included a 49% increase in the Tourism and Recreation Dept.'s administrative budget?

And to those who think that hindsight is 20/20 and it's easy to criticize after the fact, let me quote from the June 23rd edition of The Sheet.

"One thing I did find interesting was the methodology Finance Director Brad Koehn used in determining his strong growth/slow growth long-term

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