

Best way to protect open space forever

As our community continues to discuss and debate various land use files and requested zoning changes at both the municipal and county levels, it is a perfect time to also discuss the overwhelming value of placing open space into permanent conservation easement.

Land that is designated open space is not protected forever unless and until it is encumbered with a conservation easement. A piece of land may be called open space today, but without a conservation easement, that open space could be undone tomorrow or in the future.

Owners of land designated as open space may request changes to the open space designation, as evidenced by the debates in both the town of Vail and Eagle County.

A zoning change approved for land that has been represented as open space, taxed as open space and used as open space can mean the loss of not only that land but of many more open space areas in the future by similar action.

The only way to protect against this — the only way to ensure that a parcel of land currently designated as open space will remain open space forever — is to place that land into conservation easement.

If more open spaces were permanently protected with a conservation easement, then we would not be having the community debates we are currently having. Open spaces with conservation easements could not be undone.

The Eagle Valley Land Trust encourages our elected officials and planning and zoning board members to always require landowners and developers to place a conservation easement on land designated as open space during any up-zoning or planned unit development approval process.

By requiring a conservation easement on open spaces, there would be no questions or debates. The land would remain open space forever, regardless of what the land owner wishes to change in the future.

Forever means forever, and the only vehicle to ensure that open space is protected forever is a conservation easement.

So, I will say it again, really driving the point home. Open space is not permanently protected in perpetuity unless and until it has a conservation easement. Without a conservation easement, neighborhood parks, access trails, visual separators and other open space near your home are at risk of possible development sometime in the future. But if these spaces are protected by a conservation easement held by a certified land trust, then no one could ever

change it and that land will remain open space forever.

Land trusts across the country (and the Eagle Valley Land Trust in Eagle

County) are ready, willing and able to protect our precious open spaces forever through the use of conservation easements.

It's up to you to let your elected officials know how much it means to you that designated open space parcels are not just temporary but are protected forever.

Always remember — open space is not permanent and can be undone unless the land is encumbered with a conservation easement held by a qualified land trust on behalf of the public.

Jason Denhart is the director of communications and development for the Eagle Valley Land Trust. For more information about permanent conservation easements to protect open space, email jdenhart@evlt.org, call 970-748-7654 or visit www.evlt.org.

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Valley Voices
