

**San Miguel County Historical Commission Meeting Minutes  
(Meeting held via ZOOM)**

Tuesday, March 9, 2021, 5:30 p.m.

**Attendance:**

**HC Members:** J.J. Ossola, John Wontrobski, Ted Wilson, Jonna Wensel, Bob Mather, Amy Levek, Kiernan Lannon

**SMC Staff:** Janet Kask and Alexis Choate

**The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. by Mr. Ossola.**

**Meeting Minutes Approval**

- The HC unanimously approved the 1/12/21 HC meeting minutes with a motion from Mr. Wontrobski and a second by Mr. Wilson.

**Topic Overview:**

**Keystone Gorge Loop Trail/Keystone Placer Mine**

- Mr. Wilson presented information on the Keystone Gorge Loop Trail and Keystone Placer Mine as he prepared a 70-page document on the history.
  - There is an area with a couple of concrete picnic tables down by the lower bridge on the Keystone Gorge Loop Trail where it looks like the mining activity's brunt took place.
  - There are two existing small wood structures from the area that were also part of the Keystone Placer mining operations.
  - In the gorge, a water cannon still exists. Referred to as "The Giants" and used to blast the area to mine. It is a vast piece of machinery that gives the perspective of the mighty workings that were once there.
  - The vast mine tailings pile to the east of Telluride is a result of the Keystone Placer Mine.
  - Mr. Wilson suggests establishing a historic interpretive signage area incorporated with the surrounding history to tell the significant story.
  - Ms. Kask notes the County manages the Keystone Gorge Loop Trail under the auspices of a conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy. TNC conducts annual inspections to check County adherence to any imposed restrictions.
  - Mr. Wilson stated if there was a desire to acknowledge the history of the Keystone Placer Mine, given now that the land is Nature Conservancy land, the assets and history are there.
  - Ms. Levek said a photograph would reflect the scale of what took place and help people understand the context.
  - Mr. Ossola noted that if the property ownership works, etc., he would approve of Mr. Wilson's vision as he emphasized the Keystone Gorge is one of the town's hidden gems.
  - Mr. Wilson suggests a few panels on boulders (attach?) to display the historical significance.
  - Ms. Kask notes she will contact TNC as permission may be required and also loop in Rich Hamilton, County Parks Supervisor, to include in a site walk visit for all to discuss and explore options.
  - Mr. Wontrobski asked if Mr. Wilson would change or augment the Highway 145 CDOT pull-off signage with some information about Placer mining.
    - Mr. Wilson said to leave it and noted the historical panels on placer mining were highly informative.

- The Keystone placer mine has historic significance, as it was one of the biggest failures and most destructive in our County.
- Mr. Wontrobski notes the suspension bridge is a "work of art" and engineering.
- Ms. Kask will find out the history of the bridge and schedule a site walk visit with the HC, Mr. Hamilton and TNC.

### **January 22, 2021, CDOT Meeting Update**

- Mr. Wontrobski presented an update of the 1/22/21 meeting with CDOT. Ms. Kask and Kaye Simonson were also in attendance, as were 3 members of CDOT, including Ralph Campano, who was in charge. He took a lot of pictures and measurements and presented the ideas to his supervisors back at CDOT.
  - The next step is to issue an RFP to conduct a feasibility study for this project. The County may require legal documentation with the property owners to allow the RFP group to conduct the feasibility study by going in and doing what they need to do (take pictures, take measurements, etc.). He is concerned a legal document may scare off the current owners or not, but it might be a necessary requirement to proceed forward.
  - Ms. Kask will speak with Amy Markwell, County Attorney, about this process, but thinks steps to grant access to the private property may be required. Ms. Kask noted Mr. Campano worked with LLB on the historic Placerville School House project so he knows the area well.

### **Liberty Bell Structures/Stillwell Tunnel Update**

- Ms. Kask noted in 8/20, Ms. Levek emailed the HC about the compromised condition of the Liberty Bell Structures near the Stillwell Tunnel, which sit on USFS land. At the time, Ms. Kask contacted Amanda Sanchez at the USFS to get involved. Trees need to be removed, etc.
- Amanda Sanchez was new then and delays on her end due to USFS staffing changes. Ms. Sanchez finally responded and is open to a site walk visit. Ms. Kask will schedule for spring 2021 to assess all.

### **Mill Creek Park Update**

- Ms. Kask conducted a 2-3 month community survey during summer 2020 regarding the County's new Mill Creek Park, which will be on a 1.09 acre-sized parcel across from the Shell gas station.
  - Ms. Kask observed remnants, which may be historic, on a site walk visit last fall and forwarded photos to Jon Horn of Alpine Archaeology. He said they look historic. She has since forwarded them to 2 other groups to review for potential historical significance.
  - Ms. Kask said a Cultural Resource Survey/Site Recordation needs to be performed on this parcel. The park itself is an Open Space Commission project; but this falls under the HC.
  - Ms. Kask noted she budgeted \$7500. for a project such as this in the HC's 2021 budget and cost estimates are approx. \$5K.

### **Matterhorn Mill Update**

- Ms. Kask stated she sent copies of the draft Matterhorn Mill RFP to members of the HC for comments. She only heard from 3 members so far and is still awaiting comments from everyone else.
- The State Historic Preservation Fund grant deadline is 8/1/21; drafts requested by 7/1/21.

- Ms. Kask, Ms. Markwell and Mr. Ossola participate in monthly conf. calls with the USFS and DRMS to discuss the conveyance process.
- The plan is to convey the structure, but the County has the option to acquire up to 20 acres of land. However, a fair market appraisal of the land is required.
- Ms. Kask said the USFS equates this to the San Bernardo neighborhood because the subdivision is adjacent; this isn't an "apples to apples" comparison; they are dealing with tailings on the MM land.
- Mr. Ossola recommends a couple of people provide cost estimates to obtain an appraisal and the USFS does the same. The fair market assessment will dictate how much land the County wants conveyed.
- Mr. Ossola states the USFS must go through a specific appraisal process, and the County must do its due diligence and figure out what to take on.
- Ms. Kask said based on a call with Nick Szuch of the USFS, if all of this goes through the legislative process, the USFS will be told what to give the County based on what we request at no cost.
  - Ms. Levek questioned if the "legislative process" referred to this one piece of property alone or will it get tacked onto something else going through Congress?
  - Ms. Kask stated Hillary Cooper is working with John Whitney of Senator Bennet's office.
  - As far as defining the Wilderness Bill, the understanding is that this matter will not stand alone and will instead be part of a package.

### **New Business**

- Mr. Wontrobski proposed historical site visits this summer. There would be six different historical site visits from May through October 2021.
  - Everyone is interested, and Mr. Wontrobski will move forward with preparing a draft plan/schedule.
  - Ms. Levek notes they were working with the USFS a couple of years ago looking at different historic structures throughout the County and prioritizing them. What happened with this?
    - Ms. Kask stated some projects are delayed due to USFS staffing changes including the departures of Jeremy Karchut and Corey Wong. She is trying to get Ms. Sanchez to focus on this.
- The next HC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 11th at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom.

**Meeting Adjourned 6:10 p.m.**