

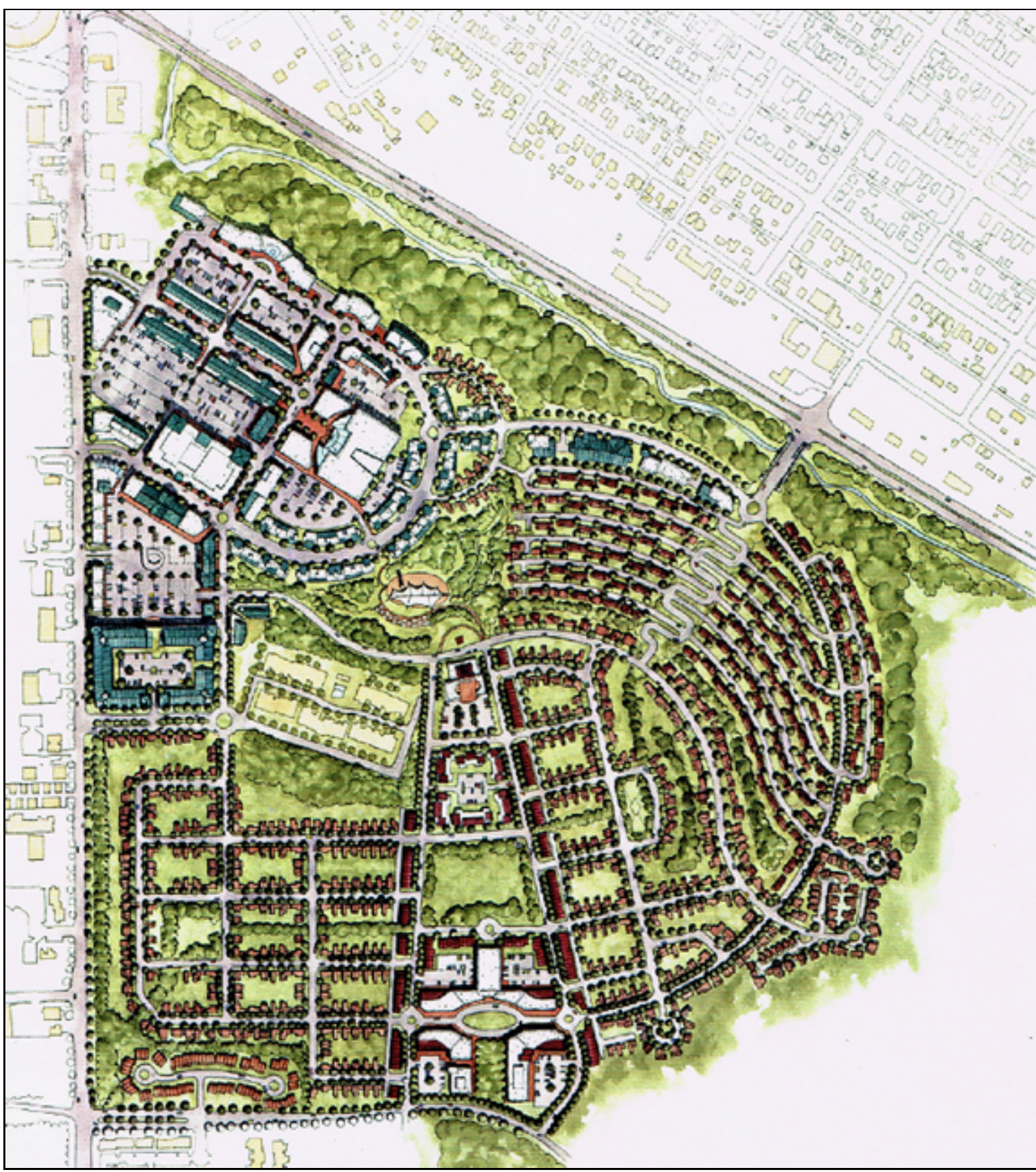


A view from Highway 24 in December shows the face of Gold Hill Mesa's tailings dam - including the development's contour grading and plantings to control runoff and the erosion rills that keep coming back when it rains. The dam face is to become open space. The photo below, taken from a higher vantage point, shows the top of the dam, where houses will be built. Westside Pioneer photo



A fleet of heavy-equipment vehicles works on top of the former tailings dam earlier this year during preliminary grading for Gold Hill Mesa's Filings 9 and 10. The photo was taken from Promontory Point Open Space, about a half-mile north of Gold Hill Mesa. Westside Pioneer photo

Gold Hill Mesa developers turning 'rill hill' into open space, not homes



The Gold Hill Mesa concept plan from 2004 includes a depiction at middle right of then-planned housing on the face of the former tailings dam, including switchback streets to handle the slope. This plan has since been replaced with the one at the bottom of this page, in which the only construction is on top of the dam, and the 22-acre face area is designated open space. Highway 24 constitutes the property boundary at upper right. 21st Street marks the boundary at left. (Note that several other aspects of this concept plan have also changed, including the notion of 14th Street crossing the highway.)

Courtesy of Colorado Springs Planning and Gold Hill Mesa north of Lower Gold Camp Road and west of a housing subdivision and trailer park.

Studies have shown that at least half the development was covered at one time with tailings from the chemical milling in which gold from Cripple Creek was processed for nearly 50 years, ending in 1949. The tall smokestack is the last visible vestige of that era.



In a photo from 2008, Gold Hill Mesa's Stephanie Edwards, the ownership group's lead officer on site, and Barry Brinton, the project's land manager, look at an area of Fountain Creek through the development that was later upgraded in a joint project with the state and city. Westside Pioneer file photo

the 1970s to remill the gold tailings - no small plan, considering their worth had been estimated at more than \$10 million.

For the Gold Hill Mesa project, the homes are built over four-foot-deep soil "caps" and there are no plans to ever dig up the tailings. The recovery, transportation and environmental expenses would have negated any profits, Willard has previously explained.



A graphic displays a close-up of the current Gold Hill Mesa concept plan - limited to the areas planned for development on top of the tailings dam (including Filings 9 and 10) and the dam face which is now designated as "open space." The face was planned for housing in the '04 concept plan (see graphic higher up on page). Courtesy of Colorado Springs Planning and Gold Hill Mesa

Gold Hill Mesa Drive and South Raven Mine Drive. The previously approved concept plan illustrated development spanning to the eastern and northern [parts of the property, including the dam face].

"The revised design pulls development tighter to the flat 'mesa top' before the topography abruptly drops off. This change reduces single and multi-family housing and increases open space in the steep topographic areas."

Dec. 19, 2017
Over a decade ago, when city-approved plans would have allowed up to 1,800 homes at Gold Hill Mesa, the development's concept plan imagined more than 250 of them along winding streets on the steep hillside above Highway 24.

Not anymore.
The slope - actually the face of a roughly half-mile-long, 160-foot-high "tailings dam" left over from the site's gold-milling days - is shown as open space on the latest concept plan.

The no-build decision evolved through the years as the 210-acre development took shape, according to Stephanie Edwards, Gold Hill Mesa's lead officer on site. Overall, the property's development team now foresees roughly 650 units at build-out. So, while the dam face reduction is significant, density reductions have occurred in earlier stages of the project as well.

"It's pretty standard practice for developers to ask for the maximum" early in a project, Edwards elaborated. "Then they can be more specific and adjust as the land is developed over time."

As for the dam face, she said a cost analysis revealed that, with the remediation required, "it would have been far too expensive to continue residential down that slope."

Initially conceptualized about 20 years ago, Gold Hill Mesa is located south of Highway 24, east of 21st Street, north of Lower Gold Camp Road and west of a housing subdivision and trailer park.

After years of planning, including gaining the blessings of the Colorado Department of Health & Environment, Gold Hill Mesa construction grading started in 2005.

According to Edwards, the development now has more than 400 occupied homes. Still to be developed is about 60 acres zoned commercial in the northwest area of the property.

From the beginning, the visionary among the investors making up the project's limited liability corporation (LLC) was Robert Willard, but he has had to step back in the last couple of years because of health issues. The remaining group of LLC principals includes Robert Hadley, whose father Richard had been part of a plan (never implemented) in

In any event, the steep face of the tailings dam - which used to feature erosion rills up to 20 feet deep - has had to be dealt with. The company has spent close to \$1 million on the problem, Edwards said. The efforts have included repeatedly recontouring and seeding the slope to counteract the drainage effects.

The work is never-ending. When the rains are heavy enough, the cascading water can reopen the rills, Edwards said, requiring fresh grading work. To handle that responsibility long-term, the dam face's open space (22 acres in all) is to be maintained through a fee paid by Gold Hill Mesa property owners, she outlined.

The years of tailings washing down from the dam also did no favors for Fountain Creek, which parallels Highway 24 at its base. In 2009, Gold Hill Mesa's LLC partnered with the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado Springs on a \$2.3 million project to restore the creek where it runs along the north edge of its property.

The open-space plan came into focus this fall, as the LLC submitted Filings 9 and 10 to the city. Their nearly 16-acre layout shows 109 lots on top of the dam (also called the "mesa top"), but not down the face of it.

A Project Statement that accompanied the Filing 9-10 submittal outlined a "concept plan minor amendment," which "revises the road and land use configuration of the development north of

Westside Pioneer article (Land: Development Issues)

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