

# Gold Hill Mesa expansion gets the green light

BY MARY SHINN

[mary.shinn@gazette.com](mailto:mary.shinn@gazette.com)



JERILEE BENNETT, THE GAZETTE

Gold Hill Mesa homes and the skyline of Colorado Springs in July. The Colorado Geological Survey gave no objection to home construction moving forward at Gold Hill Mesa, a subdivision on the west side, after raising questions about the potential for soil to sink last year.

Construction of homes in Gold Hill Mesa, a development on Colorado Springs' west side, will likely go forward now that state and local officials no longer have concerns about the stability of soils in the area.

The Colorado Geological Survey said in a July 27 letter that recent studies paid for by the developer, Gold Hill Neighborhood, answered outstanding questions the agency raised last year about soil settlement and potential destabilization of the land should an earthquake occur. The studies found low potential for the soils to settle more than was typically expected after construction, and a low risk that an earthquake would cause ground under new homes to destabilize and harm other areas of the subdivision.

"The work by the geotechnical engineer is thorough and satisfactorily identifies and provides mitigation for potential geologic hazards," the CGS letter stated. The agency reviewed work paid for by the developer, an independent analysis by the state or another agency was not required for approval.

The city of Colorado Springs' Engineering Division concurs with the state agency's findings, Kim Melchor, a city spokeswoman, said Thursday. The city is reviewing other aspects of the development plan to build 32 homes near 21st Street and Gold Hill Mesa Drive, known as Filing 11. She could not say when the review would be complete.

The developer, Gold Hill Neighborhood, was pleased with the recent letter from the Colorado Geological Survey, said Stephanie Edwards, executive vice president.

"Since the inception of the development, we have invested in the highest standards of engineering and best practices in the preparation of this site and healing of the land," she said.

Gold Hill Mesa, a neighborhood of about 550 homes, was built on the former site of the Golden Cycle Mill, which produced millions of tons of tailings from the 1890s to the 1940s while refining 483,000 pounds of gold.

Edwards said the company is still committed to "upcycling" the land from the industrial blight left behind by the mill and doesn't foresee additional hurdles with the city's review process.

A city letter asked the developer for minor technical revisions to the developer's plans and to address some concerns raised by neighbors about open space, traffic and view protection.

"We are feeling confident that these remaining questions will be easily and quickly addressed and approved," Edwards said.

The mill tailings left behind by the gold refining process concerned the Colorado Geological Survey because they can settle at different rates, the agency said in an April 2019 letter. Differential settlement can cause structural damage to homes. A satellite study of the neighborhood commissioned by CGS also found 3 inches of settlement in portions of the subdivision, a finding Edwards disputes. The Colorado Geological Survey reviewed the development at the request of the city, a safety measure put in place by a 2017 ordinance following landslides in the city that damaged homes.

While the Colorado Geological Survey said it had no objection to construction in Filing 11, it noted in its July letter much remains unknown about the mill tailings in other areas of Gold Hill Mesa, including depth, engineering properties, and potential hazards. The agency recommended developers complete the same detailed analysis they paid for in Filing 11 ahead of other future construction or redevelopment in Gold Hill Mesa. The Colorado Geological Survey declined to comment for this story.

The Gold Hill Neighborhood expects future studies of the soils in the subdivision will differ from the one completed in Filing 11, but the company is committed to high-caliber studies, Edwards said.

The Colorado Geological Survey also raised questions in October about Filing 10, a development of 55 homes, expected to be built near north Raven Mine Drive and Mayflower Park Place. The agency said it could not recommend approval of the new homes in Filing 10 without more information about the land.

However, the Colorado Geological Survey will not review the additional engineering studies done for that area because the geological hazard report for Filing 10 was previously approved, Edwards said. The city will review the most recent engineering studies of the area, and, if city staff approves, construction will be allowed, she said. Four builders are awaiting the city's approval of Filing 10 and are ready to purchase lots, she said.

In the future, the city could ask the Colorado Geological Survey to review future geohazard reports ahead of construction within the subdivision.