



HOME > LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

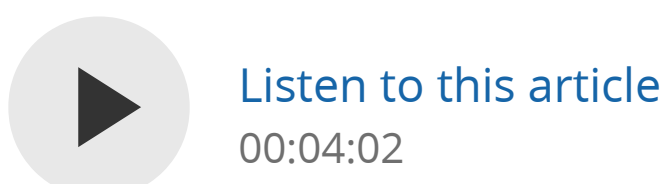
Letter to the editor: Local advocacy group expresses environmental concerns about Rivertown development annexation

The area of the St. Vrain near Roger’s Grove Nature Area in Longmont is home to one of the only known nesting colonies of Bank Swallows in Boulder County.

Shari Malloy, Ruby Bowman, Nadine Lester, Jamie Simo, guest opinion
Mar 19, 2022 10:00 AM



Pelicans in St. Vrain Creek (Photo by Matt Maenpaa)



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Stand with Our St. Vrain Creek, a citizen advocacy group, was formed after the 2013 flood. Longmont residents understood the need for a group to address the impacts of the flood control project — the Resilient St. Vrain Project — and future urban development plans on St. Vrain Creek.

The creek is designated as critical wildlife habitat in the Boulder County Comprehensive plan and is identified as a riparian habitat connector (or wildlife movement corridor). It is also a conservation priority for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, or CPW, due to the presence of rare native fish, including glacial relics.

When CPW compared the St. Vrain to other Front Range streams — such as Boulder Creek and Big Thompson. The St. Vrain was its “star performer.” It contains a disproportionately high number of native fish species. In addition, the area of the St. Vrain near Roger’s Grove Nature Area in Longmont is home to one of the only known nesting colonies of Bank Swallows in Boulder County.

Bank Swallows have special habitat requirements, which include specific soil types and bank slopes. Therefore, they are rare and considered a Boulder County Species of Special Concern.

Stand supporters are extremely concerned about city council’s recent approval of the Rivertown annexation concept plan. Council voted to approve the high-density residential concept plan with two small modifications. However, these amendments didn’t address the most environmentally damaging and aesthetically offensive issue — the apartment density. By approving the developer’s concept plan, city council allowed the high-density development to move forward. Any changes, including a lower density, to the approved concept plan will have to be agreed upon by the developer. How likely is that to happen?

Three-hundred-thirty-four residential units consisting primarily of apartments on a 21-acre property is not the appropriate density for a development located next to two ecologically sensitive areas — Roger’s Grove and St. Vrain Creek. It will be an abomination on our St. Vrain Greenway.

To make matters worse, if the Rivertown developer adheres to Longmont’s Inclusionary Housing Ordinance designating 12% affordable housing — versus paying cash-in-lieu — they could get a “bonus” building story. This means it could be five stories.

Picture buildings a full story higher than an apartment complex on Main Street east of Roger’s Grove and looming over our Greenway from Roger’s Grove to Sunset Street.

A review of city council emails by Stand with Our St. Vrain Creek revealed 50 residents emailed city council prior to the two public council meetings to voice a myriad of concerns and suggestions for council to amend the annexation concept plan before approving Rivertown. A 2018 Open Space survey revealed that 74% respondents ranked “protecting nature areas from development” as very important. The above demonstrates just how important the city’s natural areas are to the people of Longmont.

There are still more steps ahead, including a detailed development plan that must be approved. If the Rivertown developer wants to demonstrate respect for community values of protecting our natural areas, they should decrease the residential density by more than half and commit to building sustainably. That means carbon neutral using renewable energy sources, rooftop vegetation, natural landscaping etc.

It’s never too late to do the right thing. Wouldn’t it be great if this developer would redesign the project to enhance the St. Vrain Creek corridor and Roger’s Grove for the common good of the people?

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Macie May has built her career in community journalism serving local Colorado communities since 2017.



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