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517 E. HOPKINS * ASPEN, COLORADO 81611 * PHONE: (970) 925-2220

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Aspen strikes deal to improve Burlingame

By Adam Preskill/Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

Aspen Valley Land Trust and the city of Aspen have struck a deal that will make the Burlingame Ranch affordable-housing project more environmentally friendly while at the same time protecting more than 400 acres of land around Aspen with conservation easements.

"It's very good news for the city and the community," Mayor Helen Klanderud said Wednesday. "It makes me feel 100 percent better, and regardless of my position on Burlingame, acquiring this piece of property has been very important to the city."

Although complicated, the deal basically amounts to a land purchase, with AVLT's Amcord property, a square of undeveloped land contiguous with the Deer Hill and Burlingame property, going to the city. In exchange, AVLT will receive a variety of considerations, including \$650,000, of which \$400,000 must be spent to preserve open space within two miles of Aspen's city limits, according to the terms of the agreement.

"We'll see who comes knocking when they hear about that one," AVLT executive director Martha Cochran said.

AVLT will also receive conservation control over parcels around Burlingame Ranch and the adjacent properties, and over Cozy Point, although the city will retain an easement to use the site for parking for three events per year. In total, while it will lose the 29-acre Amcord property, AVLT will gain control over 430 additional acres of property under conservation easement.

The advantage to the city in acquiring the Amcord property is that it allows for the Burlingame Ranch housing site to be reconfigured to make the best aesthetic use of the land with the least environmental impact. Early on in the project, the city reached an agreement with the owners of the Zoline property, a major component of the Burlingame Ranch development, that would allow it to build housing units in a section of open space on Deer Hill known as the "back bowl."

But the city recognized that the back bowl was not the "greenest" building site on the property, and the original agreement also stipulated that if the Amcord property could be acquired, the site would be reconfigured to move the development back away from Deer Hill.

Now that an agreement has been reached with AVLT, the building site will be readjusted to take advantage of a portion of the Amcord parcel, minimizing impact in the currently untouched area.

"It allows for a much more environmentally friendly development," city attorney John Worcester said.

"And a less destructive kind of construction," Cochran added. "You'll stay down on the flats, rather than going up onto the hillsides and disturbing the vegetation."

Preserving all of Deer Hill is an important goal for AVLT, because it provides an undisturbed

wildlife corridor from the Roaring Fork River up through the development, Cochran said. A number of small species of wildlife currently call the area home, and Deer Hill is also covered in natural vegetation, unlike some other areas of Burlingame Ranch, she noted.

Rather than try to preserve the Amcord property in spite of the Burlingame property, Cochran said AVL T chose to work with the city to put that project in the best possible position, while also using its leverage to further other conservation projects in the area.

"(The housing) would have compromised the conservation values of the property, so once the decision was made and the units were going to be built, we thought we might as well ... protect Deer Hill all the way to the river," she said.

Although the entire 29-acre Amcord parcel will be transferred to the city, only a few of those acres - between four and seven - will be used for the development, and the rest of the property will be placed under conservation easement and returned to AVL T's control.

The city has approval to build 330 affordable-housing units at Burlingame Ranch in a variety of sizes and deed-restricted categories, with 110 units set for construction in the first phase, scheduled to begin at the end of 2005.

Project managers are currently reviewing engineering proposals for the project infrastructure. Burlingame Parcel D, a much smaller development next to Burlingame Ranch, has already received formal design approval for 40 one-bedroom units of for-sale housing.