

# Aspen Daily News

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Citizen wants answers on extra Droste spending

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A Carbondale resident has asked the Pitkin County commissioners to explain a budgeting shortfall of more than \$1 million for their purchase of the Droste open space property.

During the public comment portion of Wednesday's commissioners' meeting, Ray Pojman submitted an open records request for information regarding the private fundraising campaign that has fallen well short of its \$1.5 million goal.

The county purchased the 841-acre property from the Droste family in December for \$17 million.

A private fundraising campaign shooting for \$1.5 million to supplement taxpayer dollars has raised just \$346,555. Most of that comes from a \$250,000 donation from the nonprofit Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT).

When the deal closed, the county cut the full \$17 million check to the Droste family. County officials at the time said they expected to actually pay \$10 million, with the rest coming from public partnerships and private donations.

"In reviewing recent news articles on the Droste land purchase by Pitkin County Open Space, I'm at a loss to understand how taxpayers may be responsible for an additional \$1.5 million to cover insufficient funding," Pojman wrote in his request.

The shortfall is actually a little more than \$1.1 million. That amount will be covered by the county's open space fund. That fund comes from a voter-approved property tax, which can only be used for land conservation.

Pojman made 13 specific requests of the county regarding the unforeseen expense. Among the items, he has asked for a list of people who made pledges to the county, some of which have fallen through since December. He's also asked for county documents and budgets for managing the land.

"It just seems like they rushed the whole thing," he said.

Earlier this month, county open space director Dale Will said his department, from the start, assumed responsibility for covering the Droste bill if the fundraising campaign fell short.

"It's always been implicit in our decision to close [the deal] that we've spent the county's funds to get it

and we have to pay it," he said.

After county officials made the deal, the government quickly gained pledges from local and state public entities. The state put up \$2.5 million from its Great Outdoor Colorado fund; the town of Snowmass Village contributed \$2 million; and the city of Aspen gave \$1 million.

The county is currently working on a management plan for trails and wildlife preservation on the Droste land. One trail is currently open across a ridge at the scenic property, which had been approved for a nine-home luxury subdivision in 2009.

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