

Hi everyone,

Welcome to the update to all the new signups! For others who would like to receive this, the signup link is at <http://lowell.edu/local-updates>.

Section 17

No action since the last update. We expect to have revised bill language drafted by around the end of this month. We are scheduled for a further review with Council at their April 13 meeting.

On March 1, I gave a tour of our campus to Vice Mayor Daggett and Councilmember Salas. Over the next few weeks, I have additional tours scheduled with Council and Mayor Deasy. This is to provide them an in-person view of the new visitor center site and to go over the project status, as well as to discuss the community process for future development of a Section 17 master plan. As I've noted to a few members of this list individually, I'm happy to show anyone around, so drop me an email if you'd like a tour.

Astronomy Discovery Center

No change since the last update, although we do continue to have fundraising success, with pledges now for almost \$30M of the \$37.5M cost of the facility.

Signs

I'd like to address a couple of email inquiries as well as a letter to the editor regarding No Trespassing signs at various points around our property. (If you drive up Mars Hill Road, you'll also notice a new bright yellow No Snowplay / No Sledding sign at the hairpin.)

We put these in place last year on the recommendation of FPD. As I've noted before, we had major issues during the warm season last year with crowds and loud traffic on MH Road and at the city overlook, as well as more recently with snowplay crowds spilling literally into the yards of staff residences on campus. After we closed due to Covid last Spring, we also noticed occasional pairs of cars in the back parts of our lots, with their occupants engaged in transactions that did not appear entirely savory. And perhaps a few of you recall the afternoon last June when a barrage of gunfire erupted about 1/4 mile past our campus on Section 17. There were hikers out there at the time.

FPD advised us to post more prominent Private Property / No Trespassing signs; this clearly posted messaging aids them in dealing with unruly or illegal behavior around our campus and on Section 17. I can certainly see how these signs might seem unfriendly. But while we welcome use of the city overlook and section trails by well-intentioned residents and visitors, we are not going to tolerate abuse of these areas by hooligans. It's a matter of simple safety for our staff, visitors, and community members enjoying the areas. So, the signs will remain (although we will remove the No Snowplay signs probably in early April and put them back up in November).

A Section 17 Trail System

The whole issue of signage, however, has given us an idea. I wish I could take credit for it, but it goes to our staff member Danielle Adams.

An approved Section 17 master plan will take some years to develop. In the meantime, we have an increasing set of dispersed trails on Section 17; some of these are the wider forest roads and some are meandering singletrack not always in the best places. We propose in the short term to define the trails more formally in what we would call the Lowell Observatory Trail System (LOTS), and we'd like to see if some residents and regular hikers/dog-walkers would be willing to form an ad hoc group to help us identify the best and favorite trails and routes. We could even consider a bit of trail development, perhaps with specified routes for additional purposes such as equestrian use (I had an inquiry about that a week and a half ago) or mountain bikes (Section 17 is a logical and fun way back into town if you've been riding out in the A1 and Wing Mts area). This could also be a good way on the short term to provide well-defined connections to the FUTS and City open space to our west. Once a trail system was figured out, Lowell would have nice signs made and installed a la FUTS wayfinding, and we could provide GPS maps of the whole thing in a flyer box at the trailhead

across from our current Visitor Center.

If you would be interested in participating in this committee, please drop me an email. Or, feel free to forward this update to someone you know whom you think might be interested. I'll probably try to get it going in April, once the weather is a bit nicer (we all know how reliably calm and beautiful Spring is in Flagstaff!).

I hope everyone is staying well and that all who want a vaccine are able to get one in short order. I got a painless and minimal-side-effect Moderna 1 last Friday, and the friendly NAH staff and workers at the Elks were terrific. I hope the favorable signs in the Covid numbers continue and that we're back to more normal hiking - and everything else - as we head into summer.

Jeff Hall
Director
Lowell Observatory