

“Jim Billen Trail” Naming – Public Hearing Committee Minutes
April 25, 2019
5:30 p.m. – Fuller Lodge

Los Alamos County Public Information Office Julie Habiger opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. The following were present:

Members:

Julie Habiger, Public Information Officer
Dave Jolly, Business Owner
Steve Whittemore, Citizen
Terry Priestley, Planning and Zoning Commission
Kyle Wheeler, Citizen
Don Ulrich, Parks & Recreation Board

Others:

Jackie Salazar, Executive Assistant
Members of the Public

1. Opening

Julie Habiger welcomed everyone to the public hearing for the proposed trail naming of the “Jim Billen Trail,” and gave a brief explanation of the process for naming a County facility or a trail, which is driven by County Code and must be an official record, including a public hearing, which will then go to Council. She explained that, last November, resident Irene Powell was the petitioner who turned in a petition proposing the County rename a segment of the Pueblo Canyon Trail after Jim Billen. Under County Code, the person must be deceased for at least six months before a naming request can be considered. Jim passed away in April 2018. In November, Irene went to the Parks and Recreation Board and they endorsed the proposal, and subsequently the Council then referred this matter to the official naming committee in February 2019. The matter is on the May 7 Council meeting, and the outcome of the hearing will be a yes/no vote by the committee. Ms. Habiger then gave an overview of the meeting format.

2. Introductions

Committee Members were introduced:

David Jolly, General Manager of Metzger’s and a citizen of White Rock, representing the business side of the committee

Steve Whittemore, Los Alamos citizen, representing the citizens

Terry Priestley, Los Alamos citizen, representing the Planning and Zoning Commission

Kyle Wheeler, Los Alamos citizen, representing the citizens

Don Ulrich, representing the Parks & Recreation Board

3. Remarks from Petitioner Irene Powell and Mary Billen

Irene Powell presented the petition. She remarked that she was there to speak for the supporters of the Jim Billen trail and asked the committee to recognize a man who did something special for Los Alamos; he should be honored by naming a segment of the Pueblo Canyon Rim Trail after him. She noted that Jim worked on this part of the trail for six years. After he retired, he would be out there for six to eight hours a day, clearing the brush of a narrow deer path, digging into the side of the hill and moving rocks to make the trail wider for both hikers and bikers alike to enjoy. Ms. Powell remarked that Jim worked hard and was by himself, refusing any help, unless it was removing a large tree.

The Pueblo Canyon Rim Trail is made up of five trails as named on County maps. The segment the petitioners are considering starts behind the Jewish center on Canyon Road and goes to Graduation Point. Irene spoke to Craig Martin when the petition got started, and Craig mentioned that it was Jim that laid out the basic course for the trail and worked on a very difficult section. On April 14, 2018 Jim died at the young age of 71 of Multiple System Atrophy. He moved to Los Alamos in 1983, had a brilliant career at the Laboratory and was a resident of Los Alamos for 35 years.

Ms. Powell confirmed in her comments that the petitioners followed the proper procedures as had already been explained in order to pursue naming this trail after Jim. On October 11, 2018 they went to the Parks and Recreation Board and presented their proposal. The Board studied and discussed the proposal and at their December 13, 2018 meeting, took action to support the naming of a portion of Pueblo Canyon Rim Trail in memory of Jim Billen. On February 12, 2019, the County Council requested that the naming committee be formed and that the County convene a public hearing to consider the naming of the trail.

In closing, Ms. Powell commented to the committee that now it was up to them to vote yes and recommend to the County Council that this segment be named as the Jim Billen Trail.

Ms. Habiger then asked Mary Billen, wife of Jim Billen, if there was anything she would like to add.

Mary Billen commented that she couldn't really add anything else to Ms. Powell's remarks. She did comment that when she would call Jim as he was working on the trail she would ask, "Are you coming home anytime soon?" and she added that while Jim would be in the canyon six or eight hours, to him it was a labor of love. She said many people told her, "You should have this trail named after Jim."

4. Public Comment

Wayne Hardie, 15 Bonito Place, Los Alamos: He is normally not a big fan of naming things after people because often those are the people that convince the County to spend taxpayer money. However, in this case, Jim did it quietly, without a penny of taxpayer money, and Jim told him that he would do twenty feet a day. It was an incredible accomplishment and he encouraged the committee to name a segment of the trail as the Jim Billen Trail.

Dr. Mary Cummings, 286 Bryce Avenue, White Rock: Jim was struck by a devastating illness that took his strength away in five years, piece by piece. Mary took wonderful care of him and did everything she could to keep him physically active. Part of Dr. Cummings' admiration in naming a trail after him is for the incredible example he gave of perseverance. Despite his total loss of his physical capacity, he was still riding a three-wheel bike around town for as long as he could. So it is

about more than just the trail, it is about the spirit of this man and what he brought to the community.

Mary, 47 Manhattan Loop, Los Alamos, commented that the trails we have around town are a treasure and Jim Billen was a treasure. She would like to see the naming happen, naming a trail after someone that made it happen.

Bob Dryja, 707 47th Street, Los Alamos, commented that there is another trail called the Mitchell Trail that was created by the Boy Scouts; therefore, you see another way of naming a trail after those who make the effort in creating that trail.

Vernon Smith, 109 Glenview Dr., White Rock, strongly supports naming a portion of the trail in honor Jim Billen.

Joe Ladish, 260 Aragon, Los Alamos, commented that after Jim finished the trail, Jim took them to the end of the trail, and he and his wife asked him, "Where do you go next?" After it was done, a group decided they were going to go with Jim and have a little party. They went down to Graduation Point and Jack Hanlon had to help Jim down to the end of the trail. They started the party and so many people came by - they introduced Jim as the guy that created the trail and all were very appreciative. Mr. Ladish encouraged the committee to name the trail as the "Jim Billen Trail."

5. Written Public comment received by the County

Julie Habiger read all letters received via e-mail to the County in advance (see attachments)

6. Discussion and clarifying questions by the Committee

Don Ulrich, Parks & Recreation Board, spoke. He said naming the trail was discussed at a Parks & Recreation Board and the Board is in full support.

Kyle Wheeler, representing the citizens, is personally opposed in naming buildings or anything after people and has stated that publically in the past so has mixed feelings. There is Sullivan Field and she remembers being present at a discussion about changing the name of Sullivan Field until some pointed out that it was named after someone that was here with the AEC in the forties and did a lot for recreation in this community. There was also a Slotin Field where Urban Park is located and that was moved to North Mesa and is still there, yet Slotin was somebody who is a name that a lot of people in this town still know. Ms. Wheeler personally thinks that the policy should be five years before we name anything after anybody, but we are living with the policy we have, which is six months, and the petitioners have met that criteria. She hikes the Mitchell Trail a lot and does appreciate that there is a plaque that tells you who David Mitchell was and why the trail was named for him. Also she knows of Satch Cowan and the segment of trail named for Satch, and is not opposed of naming a segment for Jim Billen. She appreciates what he did and is more amiable toward it since it is one segment of the trail only. She would like to see some kind of plaque acknowledging Jim, about how he worked on his own and what a great contribution it was to the County. If someone makes the motion, she would support it. Ms. Wheeler did want to go on the record as being opposed to naming building or anything else after people, which is her own opinion.

Terry Priestley, representing Planning and Zoning Commission, asked what the County's commitment would be in naming a segment of the trail.

Ms. Habiger answered that there would be sign placed there.

Ms. Powell said that the County has made other beautiful metal signs for the trails.

Mr. Priestley asked if it would there be a sign at that particular segment of the trail? Or how would that portion of the trail be named differently from the entire length of trail?

Ms. Habiger said that although she didn't have a definitive answer, a sign placed at the actual portion of the trail named after Jim Billen is what she would assume.

Steve Wittemore, representing the citizens, commented that he was a little ashamed because he didn't know the history of naming of the trail and it was great to learn about Jim. He asked what was the timeframe of building the trail and did the trail exist in any fashion.

Ms. Powell answered it was only a deer trail prior to Jim's work, and a dangerous trail.

David Jolly, representing the business owners, started by thanking everyone for being allowed in be part of the process. He commented that he shares some of the concerns of naming things after people and he struggled when he first started thinking about it. However, after listening to the comments, it explains it well – it is the fact that Jim had a personal investment in this trail, and if it's memorialized with some sort of plaque, he would agree with it. He said if it's only a segment, that is what people will look for, and it will be an important segment because he invested so much of his time. And as he struggled, someone mentioned to him, that if you go to Norris, Tennessee and if you go downtown the library is the "Betty Jolly Library," named after his grandmother - he said she invested years and years of her life building that library from scratch, and that how he remembers her before she retired and left town. Therefore, he thinks it is truly fitting and he supports the name of the trail and is very thankful to Mr. Billen.

Don Ulrich, Parks & Recreation Board, said the Board had already approved the naming of the trail, but he added some personal thoughts. His own opinion is that he is new to town and does not know who the buildings were named after, but he does believe that this trail should be named after Jim. It is a worthy thing to do and it shows that normal people can be exceptional and can have an impact on their community. And this shows that it is not just someone who is exceptional who can build a trail, but it was someone who gave his time to do that. A lot of people won't do that and it sets a great example for other people to get out and make your community a better place. He noted that having a plaque explaining to trail users that Jim spent 6 years of his life building a trail is a powerful statement to carry away with you.

Ms. Wheeler commented that there is an app called "Los Alamos Trails" that she frequently uses when she is hiking around Los Alamos because she thinks one of the great things about Los Alamos is all of its great trails. She thinks people will still find this segment by looking under the name for the Pueblo Canyon Rim Trail and she is glad that it is not the beginning or the end of the trail segment. There is also a Facebook page for local trails and there have been a lot of comments about the Mitchell trail because it had to be re-routed around in parts, because there are some really big switch backs, and there are a lot of people on this Facebook page who complain about

everything. But they are not the people who are will to go up there and do the work, and there are some really amazing folks in this town who are doing these things. She said it is not that she is trying to discount anything Jim did, but there are people working out there on trails until sundown - who are out improving switch backs because of erosion or trees are falling - and as for the people on that Facebook page who are complaining about it: her challenge to them is “get out there and help before you start making comments.”

7. Committee Vote on Petition

Ms. Wheeler made a motion to re-name a segment of Pueblo Canyon Rim Trail after Jim Billen, so it would be called the “Jim Billen Trail.”

The motion was seconded by Steve Whittemore.

Terry Priestley asked for an amendment to add that a plaque be placed there that describes the reason for the trail.

Ms. Wheeler and Mr. Whittemore accepted the amendment as a friendly amendment.

The vote was:

Don Ulrich	Yes
Kyle Wheeler	Yes
Steve Whittemore	Yes
Terry Priestley	Yes
David Jolly	Yes

Motion passed 5 to 0 to name the trail after Jim Billen, with a plaque denoting why the trail is named after him.

8. Adjourn

Ms. Habiger commented that this item would be on the May 7th Council meeting agenda as a consent item. She then thanked the committee members and the members of the public for attending.

The public hearing was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.