

MAKE NO SMALL PLANS, for only large plans have the power to capture the imagination of the people." That is the borrowed philosophy Ronald Donahue, Boulder, Colorado, Parks Superintendent, took for his own a long time ago.

Just how far this philosophy has extended, can be seen in Boulder's Greenbelt Program. Believed to be the largest municipal open-space program in the nation, planners hope it will ultimately total 12,000 acres, preserving the city's scenic mountain backdrop and controlling urban sprawl.

To date, thru purchase and option, \$4,200,000 have been committed on the project. Projections estimate it may take another 25 years to complete the master plan, and \$15 to \$20 million.

For other U.S. cities faced with the dilemma of decreasing green space, Boulder's open space plan is a model.

"First of all," Donahue says, "I think the key in our particular plan here was that this community had some kind of an anchor, a geologic feature, to preserve."

One has only to look out the window to see that feature: a dramatic mountain view.

Boulder, which has risen from a mining camp to an academic and technology center of 70,000 persons, nestles in a basin at the edge of the Rockies, 27 miles north of Denver. Rapid development threatened Boulder's scenic setting as subdivisions pushed further and further up the mountains.

In 1958, spirited citizens launched a holding action to protect the foothills. A "blue line" was established at an elevation above the city beyond which city water and sewer services could not be extended.

"This bought us time," Donahue says. "Other communities might do this with their own utilities, especially if they have electric services. It's kind of a hammer. If a developer cannot get sewer, lights, and water, chances of him being able to put in a development are slimmer."

Often, though, land becomes so valuable people are willing to sink wells and put in expensive package treatment plants. Electricity is almost always available from some source.

The "blue line" effectively slowed development in the Boulder Valley until a plan could be set up. and a way of financing begun.

"We had a pretty good piece of land to start with," Donahue says.

Thru grants in 1899 and 1910, the

Greenbelt in Boulder

SAVING THE SCENERY

By LOU SPEER

Federal Government deeded the City 3,000 acres of Mountain Parks land. The Greenbelt expanded from there.

City fathers envisioned a belt of land in its natural state surrounding the city, with wilderness and park areas available to everyone in the community. Lakes and reservoirs would be anchor spots; there would be continuous linking systems.

Preservation of the majestic mountain backdrop had first priority. The City had little money in its acquisition fund.

Informed citizens, in a whirlwind educational program, took the matter to the public. In November 1967, a one-cent, open-ended, tax increase was approved by the voters, four-tenths being designated for the Greenbelts.

Today, all but 500 acres of the backdrop have been secured by the City.

"It is probably going to be more difficult," Donahue admits, "for a community with no prominent geologic feature — like a river, lake, or mountain outcrop — to establish a plan. However, I think the necessity for doing so is maybe the same in all areas, that is, to take the immediate person-to-person pressure off by establishing open spaces, where just the actual rub of civilization is becoming intolerable.

"And unless the plan is rather sweeping and imaginative," he adds, "it generally will not get the support that it needs to pass . . . The idea that the majority of the public has to be touched to benefit from the issue, is very important. That's why a large consolidated plan, which makes some sense, really has a better chance of surviving than a disjointed program which requires a gob here and a gob there. That's really not a Greenbelt anyway, but a residential park preservation."

Boulder, already, has realized

many tangible and intangible benefits from its sweeping concept.

A 1970 flood control report showed the grassy and wooded slopes above the "blue line" absorbed more rain than rooftops and streets would have, thus lowering the City's output for expensive flood control installations.

A variety of active and passive recreation is available to the public: hiking, horseback riding, picnicking, fishing, mountain climbing.

The mountain lands shelter numerous wild animals: birds; kit foxes; bobcat; deer; and the uncommon tufted-eared, black abert squirrel.

Over 50 varieties of wildflowers have been identified along mountain ridges and slopes. Of particular interest in the area where the Greenbelt and Mountain Parks merge, is an unusual interface between mountain and plains ecology.

"We find things that are associated with alpine growing alongside things associated with the plains," Donahue says. "This is significant to those studying botany, of whom we have quite a few in the city."

A second report cites the savings to the City in retaining land in its native state versus developments needing streets, utilities, schools, and protective services.

Donahue states, "I think the community that has well distributed open space lands has the tendency to be a much better preserved community than ones that don't."

Not all of Boulder's Greenbelt System is in its "out-of-town basket." The City has 25 in-town parks, totaling 300 acres. The greenways of some planned housing developments have been incorporated into the Master Plan. Narrow green strips, along creeks and irrigation ditches running thru the city, are being acquired. Extensive tree



Among the latest acquisitions for the Boulder Greenbelt is the Mt. Sanitas area. It is adjacent to Mountain Park land and continues north of the city.



Besides the so-called "out-of-town" greenbelt area, Boulder maintains 25 town parks such as the Chataqua Park, pictured.

planting along streets is furthering the program.

Present Park Department holdings total 7,300 acres (including Greenbelts).

"We administer the Mountain Parks and Greenbelts the same," Donahue says.

The wilderness lands require little care beyond regular fire protection. Some reforestation projects have been started, and erosion control along one fire trail. A sign program,

establishing the boundaries of the Greenbelt is in progress. Litter pick-up and fence repair along private holdings are regular duties of Park maintenance crews.

Maintenance crews in the Mountain Parks and Greenbelt area rarely exceed five.

"In the summer, we have a four-man crew plus a ranger," Donahue says. "In the winter, a two-man crew plus a ranger."

The ranger patrols the area,

checking for illegal camping and fire violations, in a four-wheel drive vehicle equipped with two-way radio communications.

Maintenance crews operate four-wheel drive pickups, and the department obtained a low-ratio geared fire vehicle from government surplus.

Instances of crime, or destruction of property in the Mountain Parks or on Greenbelt lands, so far, have been few.

Because of the magnitude of the Greenbelt Program, the bookkeeping system is computerized.

"It is a separate, ear-marked program in itself," Donahue explains. "All records are kept in separate files."

Again because of the size of the program, the City has a special land officer. He is justified by the tremendous amount of time necessary to examine anticipated acquisitions and to negotiate. A qualified appraiser, the land officer, Joe Wing, not only works with the Greenbelt but helps the city in other land purchases.

The biggest headache in Boulder's far-reaching Greenbelt plan, as Donahue sees it, is the execution of the total program.

The main acquisition tool, until now, has been long-term purchase options. In many cases, with its limited funds, the City paid only ten percent down with an agreement to spread the balance across the next ten years, without interest.

With this kind of financing, park officials bleakly faced what looked like an acquisition time of several generations. Meanwhile, land prices would be escalating and hoped for areas left open to developer piracy.

Other ways to obtain money to cut down the time of acquisition were studied.

The City has received \$736,000 in open space grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Additional grants are speculative as requests from cities far exceed the amount available.

The big helping hand extended on November 2, when a record number of voters passed a bonding referendum for greenbelt purchases. The referendum allows for 50 percent of the sales tax money, for a period of ten years, to be used to pay off Greenbelt purchase bonds — a total of almost \$5.5 million.

The issue passed by a whopping 78 percent margin, which Donahue considers both a reaffirmation of the Greenbelt theory and solid support for its continuance.