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Belvoir plans show true vision

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Plans for the city-owned Belvoir Ranch and the Big Hole, both southwest of Cheyenne, were unveiled Wednesday, and the recreation opportunities there appear to be boundless.

Indeed, the city's vision for the Belvoir is exhilarating. To think that someday residents will be able to use this huge playground is truly exciting.

The Belvoir was bought in 2003 from former Colorado Rockies owner Jerry McMorris for a steal - \$5.9 million. Soon after that, the city got the 1,800-acre Big Hole. It borders the southern end of the Belvoir, straddling the Wyoming/Colorado state line.

The Belvoir was bought with several ideas in mind. Those include the possibility of a landfill, water and a place to provide outdoor opportunities for those living in the region. The Big Hole was added because it allows the city to reach to the Red Mountain Open Space and the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area in Colorado, creating even more outdoor possibilities.

So what does the city hope to do with the Belvoir? The five-year plan calls for 13.5 miles of hiking trails, 7 miles of biking trails and 28 miles of horseback riding paths along with future amenities such as a links golf course, camping, an equestrian center and a visitors center.

All this won't be cheap. Building trails, restrooms, a parking lot and roads alone is expected to cost about \$1.8 million.

The city wouldn't be wise to dip below its floor on budget reserves to pay for this, so it needs to look for alternative funding. While the fifth- and sixth-penny taxes may be a possibility in the future, the city will look at grants to start moving this project forward. There are a number of those within the state, like the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust.

Another source might be the \$15 million or so that is headed to Cheyenne from the state.

But perhaps the best revenue stream might come from leasing some of the land to an energy company to build wind turbines and transmission lines. That could be a funding windfall and put the development of the property on the fast track.

That needs to happen since Colorado officials will open about 40 miles of hiking, biking and horseback riding trails next spring on their side of the Big Hole. It would be great to create a link from this side of the border.

Developing the Belvoir and the Big Hole won't happen overnight. Indeed, development of this land will take a decade or two. That's the reality, both in terms of getting the work done and finding the money to fund it.

The vision for the Belvoir Ranch started back in 2003. It was a wise investment then, and it is even a wiser investment today. The future of the Belvoir looks great. Now we'll all have to be patient until we can use it.