

SOUTH PARK

COMO ROUNDHOUSE

HERITAGE TOURISM SITE PLANNING



BUFFALO PEAKS RANCH



COMO ROUNDHOUSE



PARIS MILL



SALT WORKS RANCH



SANTA MARIA RANCH





Colorado
Tourism Office
www.colorado.com 1-800-Colorado



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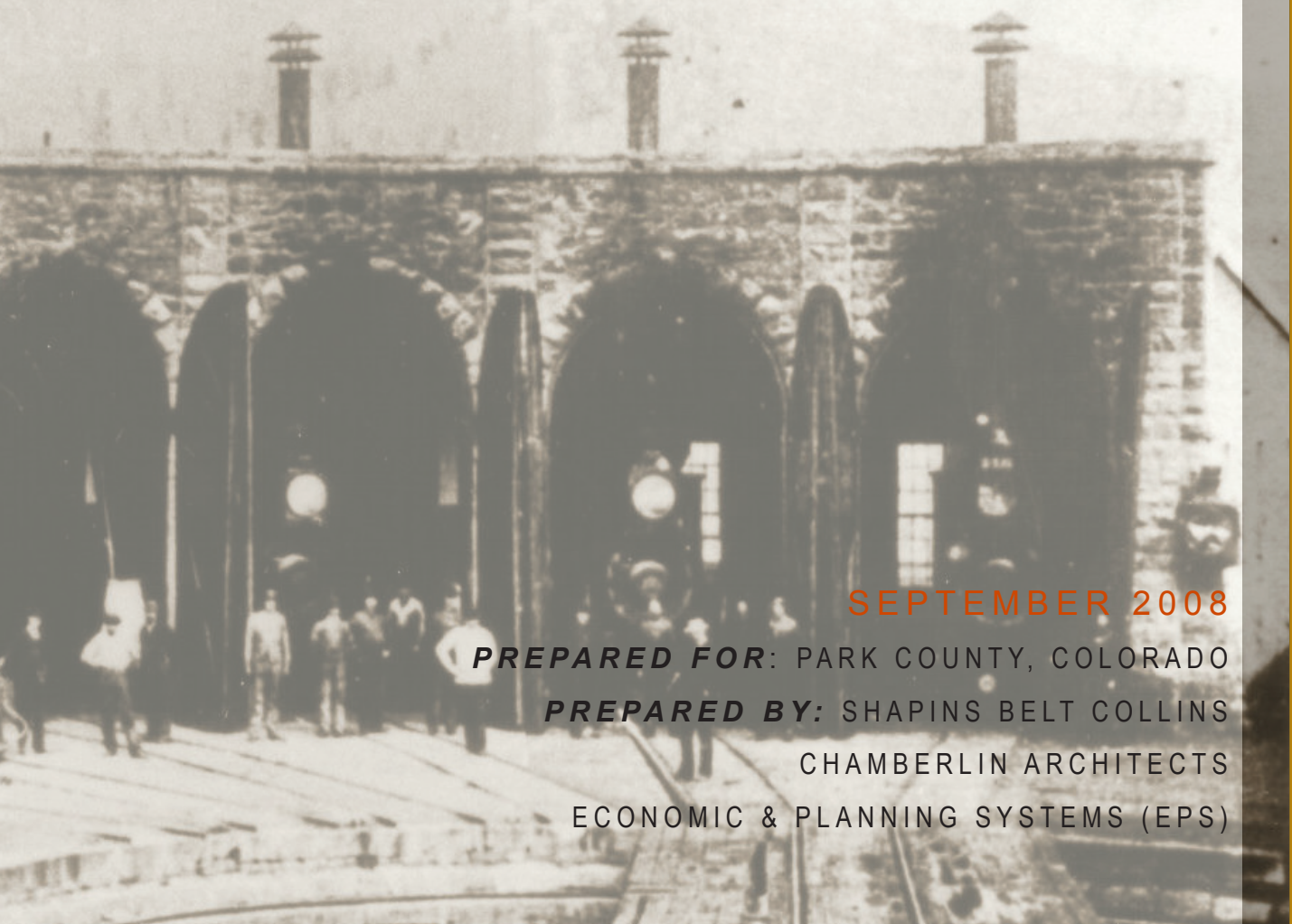
COVER PHOTO BY DEBRA QUEEN-STREMKE



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SEPTEMBER 2008

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CHAMBERLIN ARCHITECTS

ECONOMIC & PLANNING SYSTEMS (EPS)

S I T E P L A N R E P O R T

HERITAGE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN PARK COUNTY, COLORADO

Since 1994, Park County, Colorado and its partners have been laying the groundwork for a new, sustainable economy by protecting, restoring, interpreting and promoting its most valuable heritage sites and properties. The South Park Heritage Site Planning Project builds on these efforts by analyzing and proposing community and business development programs for five key heritage sites in South Park. These five sites include the Buffalo Peaks Ranch, Como Roundhouse, Paris Mill, Santa Maria Ranch and Salt Works Ranch. All five sites are rich in history and resources, and lend themselves to adaptive reuse to accommodate heritage tourism and new business opportunities. This report summarizes the site plan and heritage development proposal for the Como Roundhouse.

Extensive preservation work was accomplished at the Como Roundhouse by the previous owners, and the current owners are interested in determining how to establish economically sustainable uses of the roundhouse that will ensure the structure's long-term preservation, provide opportunities for sharing the area's railroad history and serve as a flexible venue for the performing arts. As a highly visible landmark, the roundhouse lends itself to interpreting regional history and orienting visitors to South Park. The Como Roundhouse site plan is intended to guide future development and design of the property. Over time, the Como Roundhouse and the other four sites featured in this project will serve Park County as tourism generators and create new business opportunities in South Park.

PLANNING CONTEXT

Park County has been designated as a Preserve America Community by the White House for 1) protecting and celebrating their local heritage, 2) using their historic assets for economic development, and 3) encouraging people to experience local historic resources through education and heritage tourism.

On July 25, 2007 Colorado's U.S. Senators Ken Salazar and Wayne Allard announced that the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources passed S. 444 to create the South Park National Heritage Area. Once the bill is signed into law, Park County will be eligible for \$10 million in federal funding to help preserve, promote and utilize its unique heritage resources for community development purposes. The Park County Board of County Commissioners unequivocally supports legislation to create the South Park National Heritage Area. Established in 1994, the Park County Heritage Program has become one of the most successful heritage programs in the Rocky Mountain region, with more than one hundred active partners and \$17 million in project accomplishments. According to the late Commissioner, Louis "Doc" McKay, "We are extremely pleased that our bipartisan National Heritage Area bill is moving forward in the Senate."

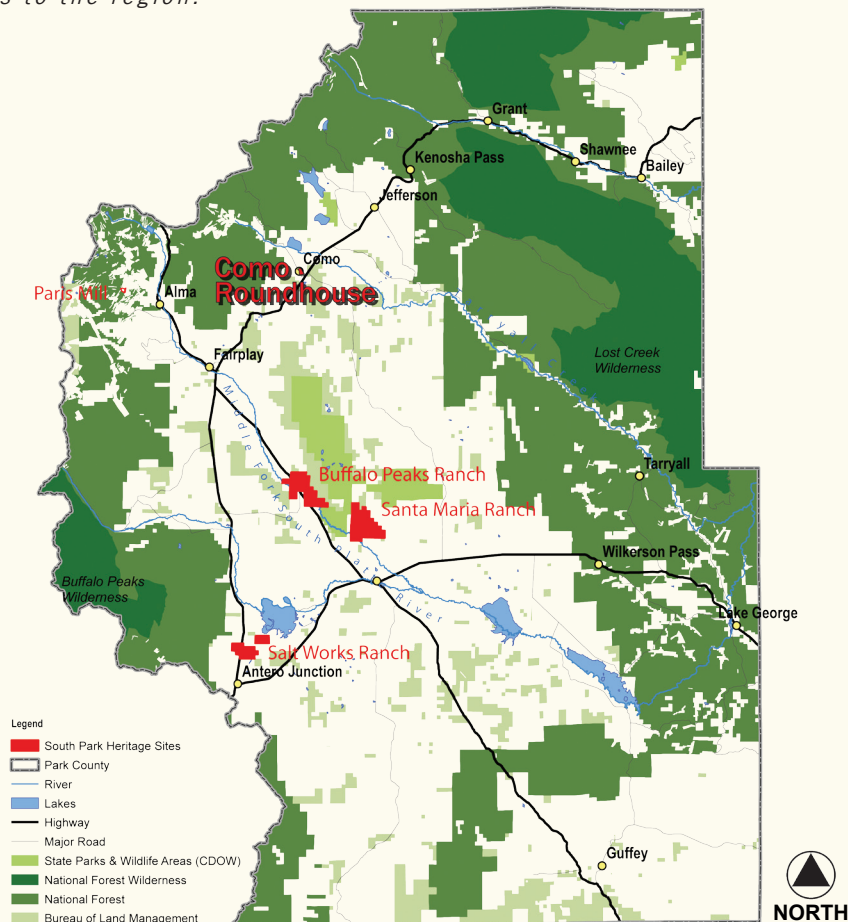
South Park is a compelling heritage tourism destination. The area is close to Colorado's Front Range, which represents a large potential visitor base. By offering new infrastructure such as lodging and dining facilities and serving as destinations for fishing, group retreats, workshops, regional artists, and public entertainment, the five sites featured in this report can bolster business development in Park County and provide a foundation for the proposed South Park National Heritage Area.

FRAMING AND PROMOTING THE STORY OF SOUTH PARK

Research conducted during the analysis phase of this project indicates that heritage areas are most successful when they creatively interpret resources and share compelling stories of the land, culture and history. This report addresses the interpretive potential of the Como Roundhouse and outlines how the site's history, inhabitants and development link to the broader stories of South Park and the western United States.

The overarching interpretive themes identified in the South Park National Heritage Area feasibility study conducted in March 2006 were used to organize the interpretive planning for the Como Roundhouse and the other featured sites. The themes are 1) Natural Resources: We've Got Altitude; 2) Prehistory: An Ancient Hunting Ground; 3) Settlement History: Panning for Prosperity; and 4) Cultural Traditions: Pioneering Characters. Under this interpretive framework, the resources and stories of the five heritage sites proved to be complementary. Each of the sites reveals a distinct aspect of South Park's heritage, and collectively they can be interpreted to build a greater understanding and appreciation of the Park's resources.

Promotion of the South Park story is a key step in enticing heritage travelers to visit the region. The Como Roundhouse may be physically linked to other heritage attractions in South Park through auto-tour brochures, websites, wayside exhibits, and other interpretive media. Cross-marketing the sites and interpreting the roundhouse story within the larger South Park context will help move visitors to different sites and spur repeat visits to the region.



COMO ROUNDHOUSE

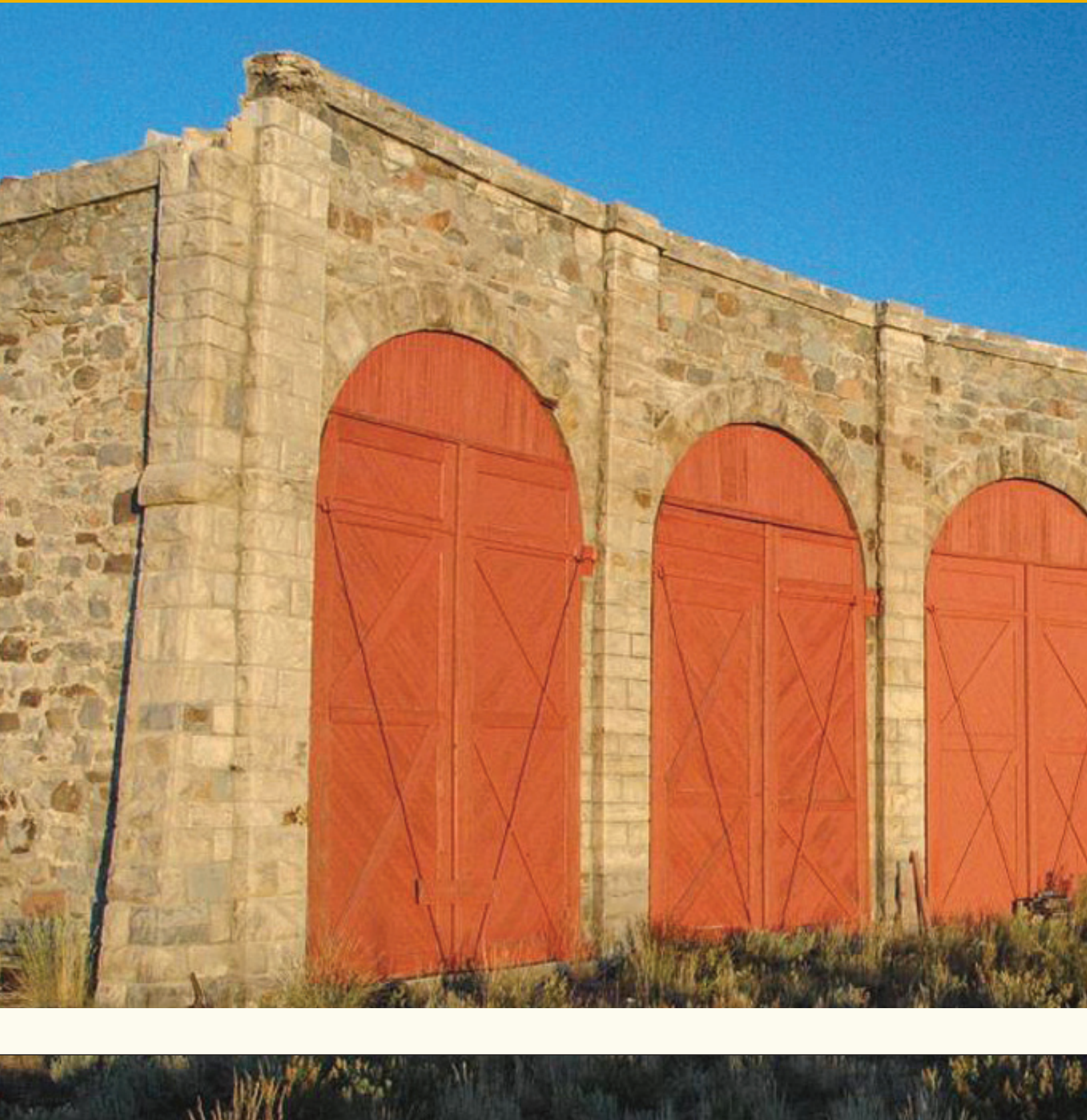


PHOTO BY DEBRA QUEEN-STREMKE



S I T E P L A N R E P O R T

HERITAGE TOURISM SITE PLANNING
COMO ROUNDDHOUSE

CONCEPTUAL SITE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES





VISION

*THE COMO ROUNDHOUSE IS
A STRIKING LANDMARK WHERE
SOUTH PARK'S FRONTIER
RAILROAD HISTORY AND THE
SPIRIT OF THE HARDWORKING
RAILMEN WILL BE REVEALED.*

S I T E P L A N R E P O R T

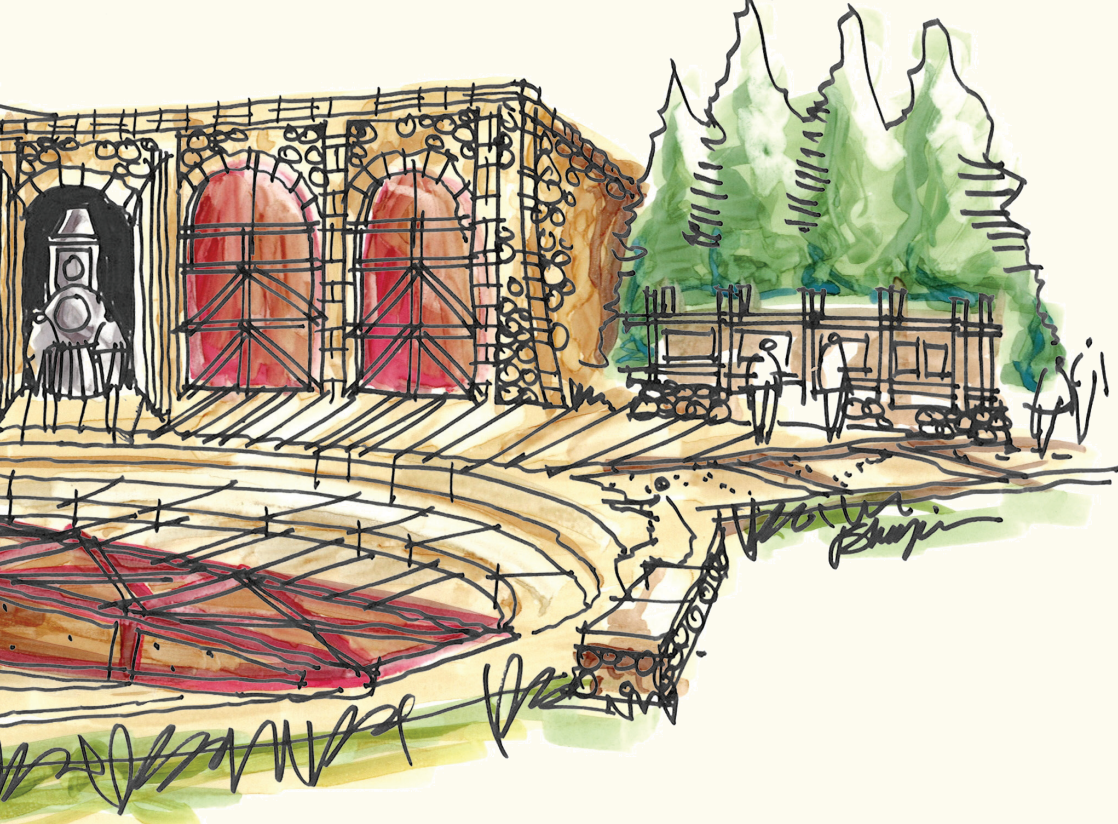
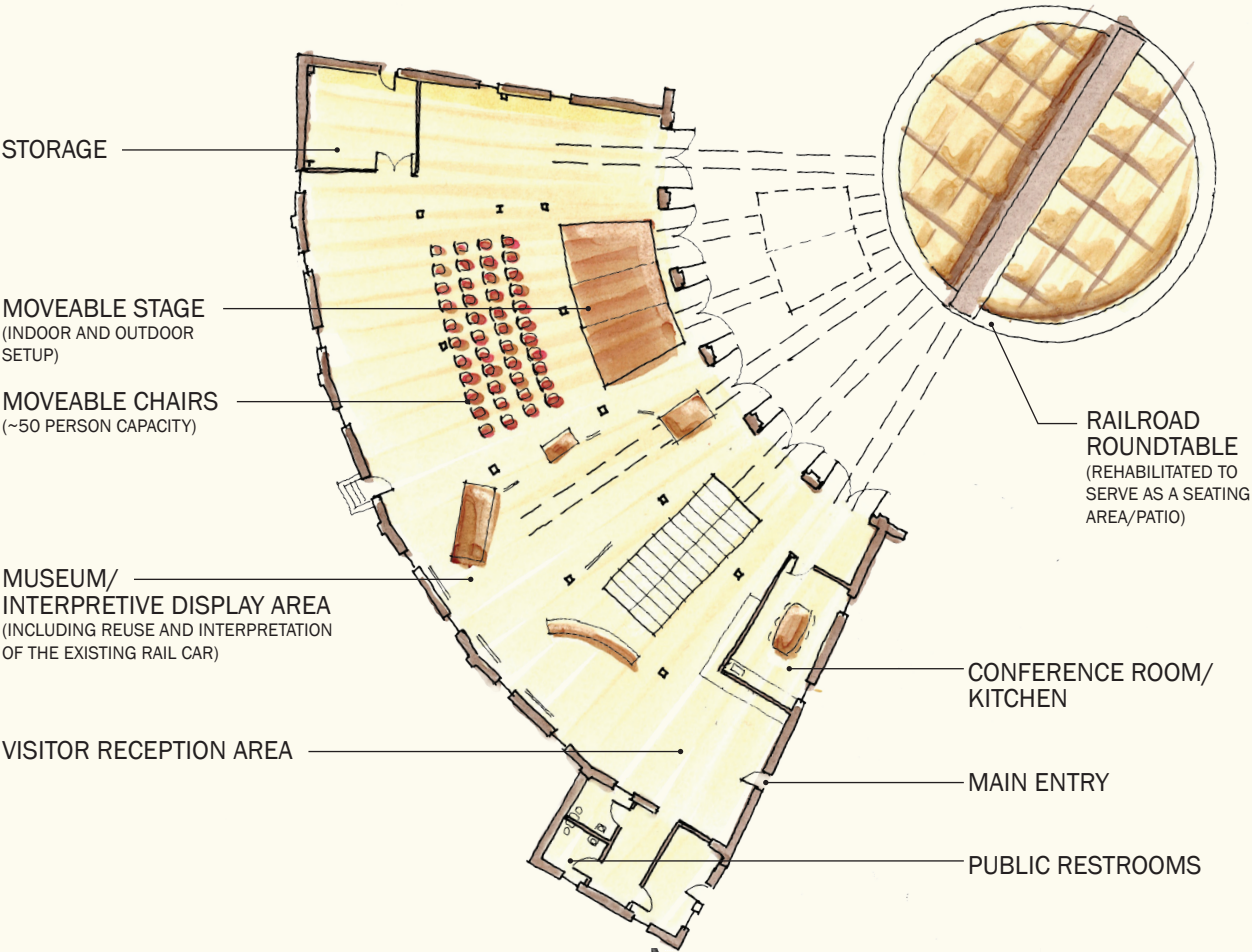
HERITAGE TOURISM SITE PLANNING
COMO ROUNDHOUSE

COMO ROUNDHOUSE EVENT VENUE

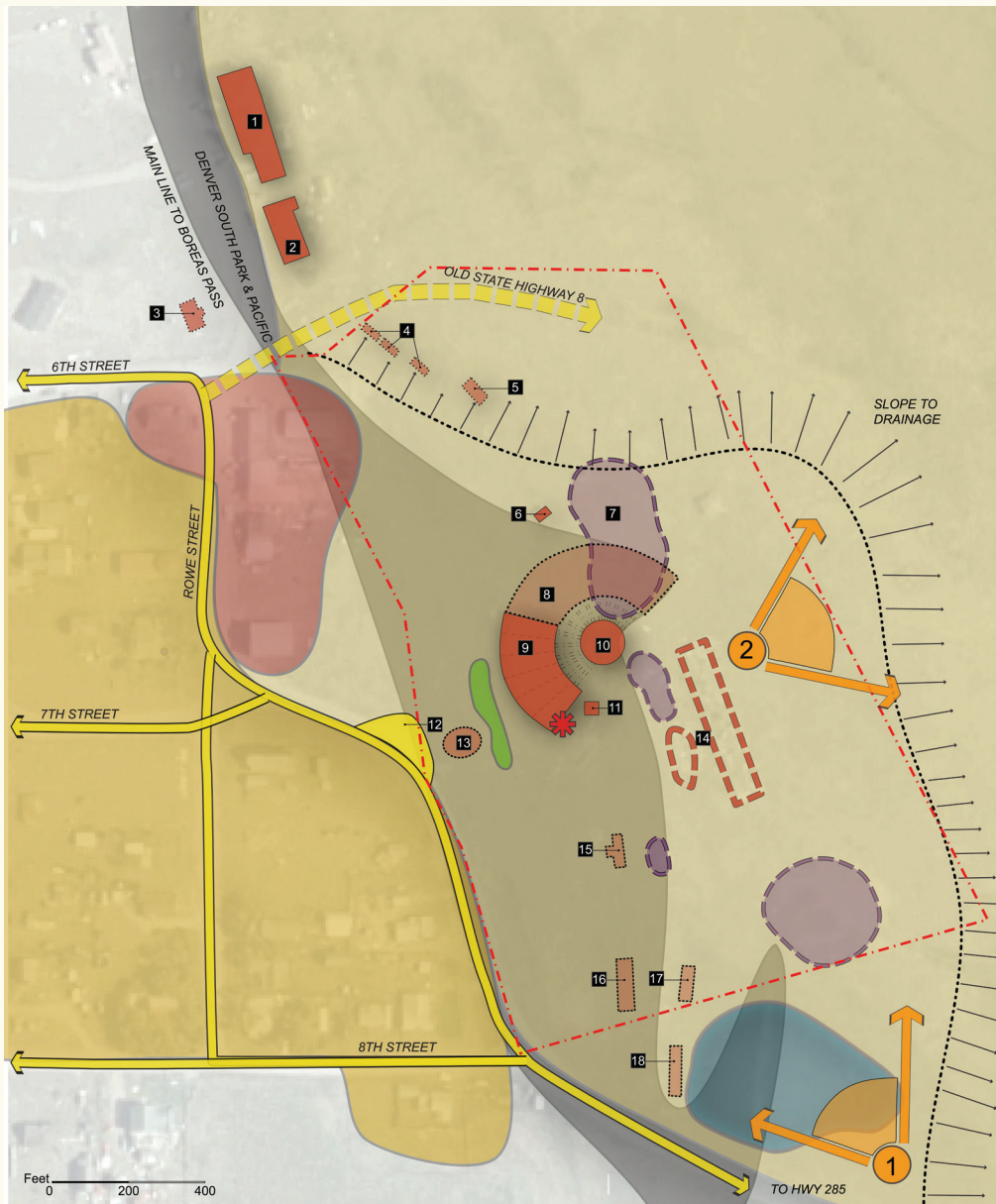
THE COMO ROUNDHOUSE WILL SERVE AS A HERITAGE DESTINATION WITH EXHIBITS, VISITOR INFORMATION AND FLEXIBLE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR EVENT SPACES.

SOUTH PARK





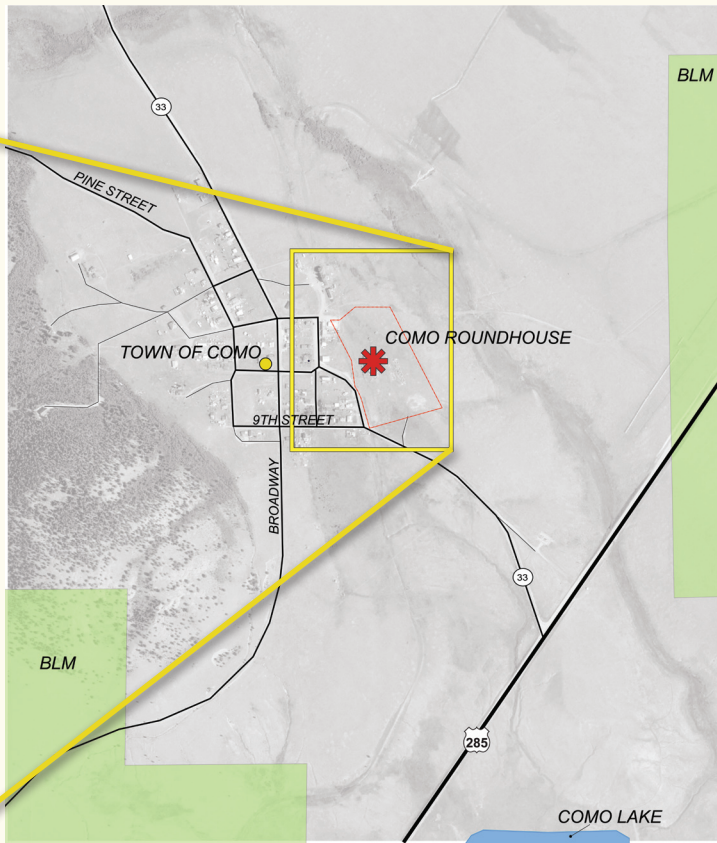
SITE CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS



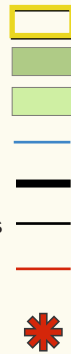
- | | | | |
|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| | Foothills/Mountain Grassland | | Former State Highway (non-existing) |
| | Historic/Current Commercial Area | | Roundhouse Visible from Hwy 285 |
| | Current Residential/Portions Historic | | Expansive Open Views of Grasslands |
| | Existing Evergreen Trees | | Main Entry |
| | Wetland/Riparian | | Roadways |
| | Disturbed Areas | | Site Boundary |
| | Existing Historic Structures | | Slopes |
| | Approximate Sites of Historic Structures/Facilities (non-existing) | | |
| | Area Formerly Covered in Railroad Tracks | | |

Source: A Preservation Master Plan: Study of Alternatives For the Denver South Park & Pacific High Line. The Historic Resources Imaging Laboratory. Texas A&M. January 1994.





- Area Enlarged
- State Wildlife Area
- BLM
- River
- Primary Highway
- State Route/County Roads
- Como Roundhouse Boundary
- Site Headquarters



- 1 Hotel
- 2 Depot
- 3 Dispatcher
- 4 Historic Bunk Cars
- 5 Historic Tool House
- 6 Tool House
- 7 Existing Coal Pile
- 8 Location of Former Wood Engine House
- 9 Stone Round House
- 10 50' Turn Table
- 11 Outhouse
- 12 Parking
- 13 Former Well Area and Water Tank
- 14 Site of Tenement House Foundation Remains
- 15 Approximate Site of Former Sand House
- 16 Approximate Site of Former Sand House
- 17 Former Platform
- 18 Former Platform

SITE OVERVIEW

Located in the small town of Como, the Como Roundhouse is an historic railroad roundhouse built in 1881 by Italian stonemasons. With six engine bays situated around a turntable, the roundhouse is an impressive structure and a remarkable relic of the Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad. The exterior of the roundhouse has been restored, but the interior has yet to be renovated. Along with the nearby Como Railroad Depot and Hotel, the Como Roundhouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Collectively, these structures represent an important aspect of the architecture, engineering and events associated with frontier railroading in the late 1800s.

The roundhouse property encompasses nearly 80 acres and includes the locomotive turntable, several outbuildings, the ruins of stone tenement housing, an expanse of open grassland, and striking views across South Park. Park Gulch, which crosses the northeastern corner of the property, is a significant movement corridor for wildlife. The Como Fen (wetland) is found along this riparian corner and straddles the northern edge of the property.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Following the analysis of a variety of potential uses for the Como Roundhouse, the conclusion was reached that adaptively reusing the structure as a flexible venue to support visitor information, small events and railroad exhibits will be the most appropriate use of the site and the most efficient way to ensure its long-term preservation.

The owners' priority for the roundhouse is to ensure the long-term preservation of the structure. To achieve this end, securing a lessee to offset upkeep and maintenance costs of the building is desired. Alternatively, the owners could rely on revenue generated from entrance fees to view the exhibits and tour the roundhouse, as well as special events to offset operations and maintenance costs. Following renovation, the roundhouse and turntable could be used for weddings, conferences, reunions and small musical and theatrical performances. Either scenario will ensure that the roundhouse is occupied, cared for and open to the public. Furthermore, these scenarios can accommodate the owners' desire to use the property on occasion for private functions.

FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS SUMMARY

Visitation Forecast

If the Como Roundhouse serves as both an information center and a special-events venue, the site could receive 20,000 to 25,000 visitors annually. Single use of the structure as a railroad museum would draw fewer visitors. Like South Park City Museum in Fairplay, the roundhouse museum is expected to attract approximately 14,000 visitors per year. Bolstered by marketing throughout the Front Range and directional signs along Highway 285, combined use of the roundhouse as a museum and information center would maximize visitation to the site.

Economic Considerations

While the roundhouse has been restored and is structurally sound, considerable capital improvements will be required to adaptively reuse the structure and make its interior and the immediate surroundings visitor-ready and inviting. To accommodate a simple visitor reception area, railroad exhibits, kitchen facilities, restrooms and a flexible performance space (with movable chairs and a stage), it is estimated that a \$625,000 investment will be required. An additional \$50,000 will be needed to cover site improvements, including site cleanup, expanded parking, interpretive panels and adaptive reuse of the turntable as an outdoor seating area. This large investment will likely require a combination of grants, charitable donations, endowments and preservation tax credits.

Estimated annual operating costs amount to \$70,000. This expense assumes full utilization of the roundhouse and includes annual taxes, utilities, a maintenance reserve fund, and administrative costs associated with one full-time equivalent (FTE) employee. At this time, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has expressed interest in using the roundhouse as a visitor center facility staffed by seasonal volunteers. Under this scenario, only a quarter-time employee will be needed to oversee scheduling and occasional special events, which will reduce annual operating expenses to \$32,000. However, the USFS does not currently have adequate budget to lease the roundhouse for visitor center purposes. An annual lease fee of approximately \$13,500 will be required from the USFS or other lessee to cover the upkeep and long-term maintenance of the building.

Revenues generated from special events are expected to total \$20,000 annually. While this is insufficient to cover operating costs, event revenue in combination with museum entrance fees (estimated at \$90,000 annually) will offset annual operating costs. For the roundhouse to become a viable operation without volunteer staff or a lessee, the venture will need to charge an entrance fee (\$6 for adults, \$3 for seniors, students, and children) and aggressively market the site to attract a large number of annual visitors.

Analysis Conclusions

Based on the economic and financial analysis outlined above, the optimal operations and maintenance cost scenario entails leasing the facility to a nonprofit organization such as the Denver, South Park & Pacific Historical Society. As a museum, the lease fee must cover the long-term maintenance and preservation costs. This scenario ensures that the building is occupied, that maintenance costs are covered and that the public has an opportunity to experience the structure and learn about the region's railroad history. If the owners elect to operate their own museum and event venue, it still would be advisable for them to take advantage of the USFS' interest in operating an information center and staffing it with volunteers to minimize operating costs. There is ample room within the roundhouse to accommodate a visitor reception area and USFS information displays, in addition to museum and performance spaces.

The owners are advised to establish a nonprofit organization to operate the roundhouse venture. As a non-profit the roundhouse would be exempt from federal income tax and most likely exempt from property tax. Additionally, the organization would be eligible for tax-deductible contributions, which would appeal to private donors as well as granting organizations. Additionally, by donating the roundhouse to a non-profit, the current owners

could deduct the value of the structure from their tax liability. If landowners donated the Roundhouse to the non-profit they would qualify for a tax deduction and could deduct the structure's full value. If the non-profit is terminated for any reason, the non-profit's assets must be transferred to another non-profit entity. So by establishing a non-profit and donating the roundhouse to the organization, the current landowners do give up individual rights to the structure.

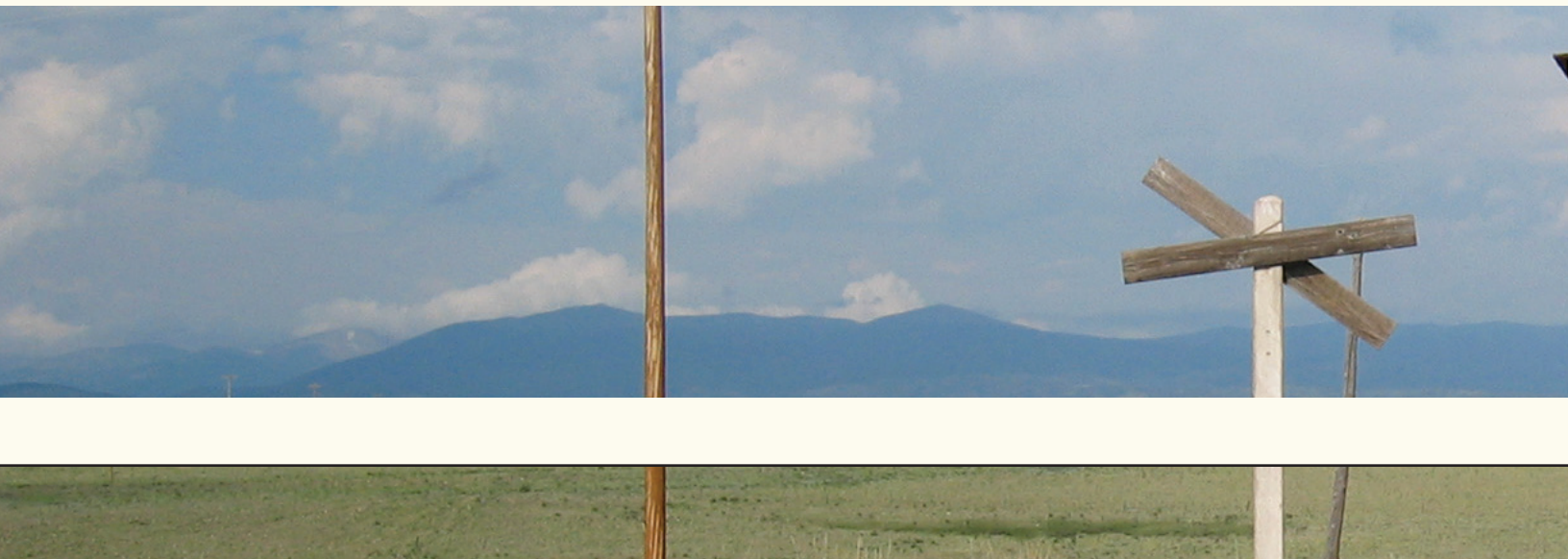
Recent meetings between Park County and new owners of the Como Hotel and Depot suggest that an opportunity now exists to cooperatively develop other ideas, uses and funding scenarios for the roundhouse. The new owners have renovated the hotel, expanded the restaurant menu/hours, and established a bed & breakfast operation. Moreover, they have stabilized the depot and are working on a master plan for the entire complex. While the implications of this venture are uncertain for owners of the roundhouse, plans for the hotel and depot appear to complement the roundhouse scenarios discussed above.

To ensure the long-term success and sustainability of all interests in the Como community, it is highly recommended that owners of the roundhouse collaborate with owners of the hotel and depot, the Park County Tourism Office, the Park County Historic Preservation Office, the USFS and others regarding the future use, programming and marketing of all resources related to the entire Como historic railroad complex.

SITE STORIES

Historic Significance

The roundhouse is one of three surviving structures from a major Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad complex located in Como. Other nearby structures include the Como Hotel and Depot. In 1879 the railroad was extended west to Como, where a switch and maintenance site was developed for the famous narrow-gauge Highline Route to Breckenridge, then on to Leadville. The Como Roundhouse, Depot and Hotel are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places and represent an outstanding example of the events, architecture and engineering associated with frontier railroading between 1879 and 1899. The Como collection of railroad buildings is complemented by the railroad Section House at the summit of Boreas Pass. The Section House has also been restored and now serves as a backcountry ski hut and interpretive center.



Italian stonemasons constructed the roundhouse around 1881. Elegant in appearance, the building was a maintenance structure where engines were serviced by railroad mechanics. According to the 1983 National Register nomination, the roundhouse is one of the finest late 19th-century railroad roundhouses remaining in the state and is an outstanding example of industrial architecture.

Interpretive Resources

The roundhouse, associated railroad structures, and other period buildings in Como create an authentic visitor experience that can be enriched through interpretation. While interpretation at the roundhouse focuses primarily on the region's railroad history, opportunities also exist to explore linkages with South Park's other interpretive themes.

Natural Resources: We've Got Altitude

If the site is developed as a visitor center, it will be important to introduce visitors to South Park's abundance of other heritage resources. Location of the roundhouse at the base of Boreas Pass creates an opportunity to orient visitors to USFS lands and other public lands ringing South Park, and to the recreation opportunities afforded in this vast area. Railroads have played a key role in outdoor recreation since the 1860s when they first began transporting city people to South Park to hunt, fish and climb mountains.

Prehistory: An Ancient Hunting Ground

The roundhouse is situated a few miles west of Kenosha Pass, one of five principal passes where Native Americans established trails to and through South Park. These early trails, along with the railroad right-of-way and contemporary roads, may be interpreted at the roundhouse to reveal both the prehistory and evolution of transportation in South Park. Panoramic views of South Park's grasslands also invite interpretation of wild bison herds that ranged here long after the great bison herds had been annihilated from the eastern plains.



S I T E P L A N R E P O R T

Settlement History: Panning for Prosperity

Railroad history is currently the interpretive focus of the roundhouse site. With relatively few contemporary modifications, the Como railroad complex invites additional interpretation of South Park's railroad history. Integral elements of the Como story include gold, silver and coal mining; livestock markets; and operations of the Como Depot, Hotel and maintenance facility. Museum exhibits, including items from the Denver, South Park & Pacific Historical Society's Como collection, in combination with interpretation of the collapsed stone tenement quarters will bring to life the personal stories of railroad workers and immigrants from China and Italy who contributed to the railroad's development.

Another intriguing story is how the railroad served as a catalyst for the development of Como. Train service operated around the clock in Como, and the town grew to accommodate travelers as well as railroad workers. As a result, the adjacent Como-King Mining District grew substantially. The Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad, which owned a large interest in the local coalmines, passed through Como to service the nearby Leckner and King Coal mines. Because coal was a vital source of locomotive fuel, the railroad company made it a priority to service these mines. The town of



Como bustled for many decades with constant railroad traffic up until the late 1920s when the road from Denver to Buena Vista (now Highway 285) was completed. By 1937 the Denver, South Park & Pacific line was abandoned and the great railroad era of Como had come to an end.

Cultural Traditions: Pioneering Characters

The unique charm of Como inspires interpretation of the area's pioneering characters and frontier spirit that still prevail in South Park. The Town of Como, named after Como di Lago in northern Italy, was established in 1879 and was inhabited by Italian and Chinese immigrants who worked in nearby coalmines and for the railroad. The resiliency, perseverance, individualism and shrewdness that define the area's early railroad workers, mountain men, prospectors and homesteaders are evidenced in many of South Park's modern-day residents. At the roundhouse, these enduring and unique characteristics of the Western personality can and should be interpreted.



S I T E P L A N R E P O R T

COMO ROUNDHOUSE



PREPARED BY:

SHAPINS BELT COLLINS

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