



The 2017 design plan for West Lionshead, then known as Ever Vail. The 2017 plan is to be modified which may or not retain appropriate amounts of public parking, workforce housing, open space and transportation facilities.

Letters to Vail

What's Next: Economic Development – Part One

December 12, 2024

The world is anxiously wondering what the New Year will bring concerning politics and the economy. While there is massive speculation, it is hard to predict how Vail and Eagle County will fare. Vail is highly vulnerable to adverse fluctuations of transient worker and visitor populations. Historically, equivocating economic conditions have suppressed tourism, construction, and real estate values. Vail has been seen as ‘nearly recession-proof’ in the past or ‘last-in, first out’ in economic downturns. However, it has not been completely immune to decreased property values and budget cuts. Recession, devaluation of the peso, and an oil crisis precipitated downturns in Vail in 2008, the ‘80s, and ‘70s. Communities look for ways to protect their populations from economic swings.

Vail is potentially anticipating a period of substantial growth and change as plans for the limited remaining developable land in the Town and re-development are quickly evolving. Uncertainty about the near and longer-term future call for balancing flexibility with rigidity in the setting of housing and related tourism policies. Based on prior experience, if the general speculation about foreseeable economic trends materializes, the pace of development and consumer discretionary spending could be dampened. Local governments have traditionally been quick to make adjustments in non-essential spending. Expenditures designed to anticipate future growth are lost in the budgetary shuffle, putting local governments further behind in their responsiveness to tourism-related consequences.

A hiatus in development may buy time, giving the community the opportunity to recover, reassess past decisions, and prepare for the next surge in development.

By any measure, rebalancing outdated assumptions and policies is a daunting task fraught with complexity and pitfalls. The risk is that stress-tested standards are abandoned in favor of untested short-term development opportunities that skirt zoning, environmental, and design approvals and allow multiple variances. The habitual cure is to reduce development costs by repealing standards as an incentive to increase the pace or profitability of development. Widespread opinion is that Eagle County has become known for its lax attitude toward approving

developments, granting variances and approvals deemed “adequate” as being acceptable rather than seeking a higher standard.

The community ought to be asking if the Town of Vail should be building subsidized housing for workers who



Should the TOV subsidize developing worker housing for those not working within the Gore Valley?

are not working within the Gore Valley or employed fulltime elsewhere in Eagle County. Requests for a public accounting of worker housing needs and where those currently living in subsidized or Town-provided housing work have been ignored. Without accountability, it is impossible to make informed decisions about further Town subsidized construction of workforce or ‘affordable’ housing.

When a recovery does occur, greater reliance upon mass tourism and transportation is set in motion, potentially further diminishing the recreational experience and the community’s quality of life. Notable exceptions excluded, these are excessive transactional behaviors that bring resorts into disfavor and transformational communities into decline.

Against this background, matters are complicated by the exchange of the bighorn sheep wildlife habitat in East Vail for an untested scenario to develop an additional portal to Vail Mountain in West Lionshead.

What is not widely known or understood are the cumulative implications of several developments already approved or in the process of being considered by the Town of Vail.



The TOV’s leadership is setting future milestones in its commitment to carry on the tradition of forward-looking

Will Sandstone and Gore Creek green belts remain as depicted in the 2017 plan for Ever Vail shown above?

transportation and planning concepts for the future of the Interstate system in Vail. There are advancements in the direction of expanding mass transportation and alternative forms of transportation technology within the Town’s jurisdiction. Vail has always positioned itself to take advantage of Federal and State assistance by having shovel-ready projects at hand.

The impacts on human and wildlife inhabitants’ matters are subject to environmental impact analysis by governing authorities. Incrementally, over time and through community action, authorities should take positive measures toward protecting and enhancing the quality of the Vail experience.

A reader confides, “I’m writing to say that I hope the VHA continues to serve its very important role as a watchdog and advocate. VHA’s efforts have been invaluable at keeping folks “honest” and letting local government and officials know that someone is watching. The bigger Vail gets, the more the VHA is needed.”

VHA, is funded by voluntary dues pledged annually from condominium associations and individual property owners. Members are primarily the part-time resident property owners from Vail’s founding generations. As Vail grows, traditional assumptions of political activism have also become more complicated and costly.

VHA is a member and reader-supported non-profit. Memberships and contributions fuel the VHA reports, *Letters to Vail* and help VHA respond to important issues, expand our reach and ensure transparency and coverage. VHA is thankful for support and participation from the Vail community. We are pledged to remain at the forefront of advocating on behalf of the mutual interests of full and part-time residents and property owners.

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