



Refashioning Vail's strategies and priorities to meet the challenges of changing times.

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Letters to Vail

Town Council Election Issues: Parts 4 and 5

Part Four - Recalibrating the Town of Vail Budget to meet changing realities.

October 14, 2023

Candidates seeking a seat on the Vail Town Council and those desiring to hold the position of Mayor and authority are invited to submit their qualifications and positions on the following issues to the Vail Homeowners Association for publication.

Is the Vail community heading in the wrong direction with only the resort remaining?

Some argue that Vail as a residential community no longer exists, only the resort remains. The rumor of its demise may be premature; however, undeniable trends are in motion.

In an effort to reverse this perception or reality, the Town of Vail Stewardship Roadmap has identified several goals necessitating changes in certain policies and strategies to ensure survival and re-invigorate the community. To achieve these ends, the Town needs to reallocate financial resources to accomplish desired outcomes.

Vail has struggled with workforce housing for more than 30 years; plans have been agreed upon and then scrapped or not enforced. A change in housing policy is necessary. Greater emphasis should be placed on providing housing solely for those working in Vail and on its mountain. Currently, workforce housing provided by the TOV can be occupied by people working down valley, outside town limits. The change will bring Vail closer to achieving the TOV's planning goal for inclusionary housing by 2027. Narrowing the focus of worker housing within Vail frees resources to address other pressing community needs.

Similar gains can be achieved by redirecting funding for tourism promotions. Current policy overburdens and congests the community during parts of the year. A sign of congestion is the frequency of complaints about long waits for seating at restaurants during peak and often off-peak seasons. The solution is not to open more restaurants, compounding the demand for more staff, parking and housing. A more nuanced approach would be to reduce the promotion of activities aimed at drawing large crowds during periods when the Town is already busy.

Marketing programs have been questing for years to infill the off seasons with some form of tourism, mostly tied to hosting conferences and large meetings. Promised results have yet to materialize. With little to show for the effort, other than a series of failed attempts to finance and operate a standalone convention center, after more than 30 years, perhaps funding should be re-directed toward other approaches to economic diversification.

Could there be value in including a realistic view of life in Vail in promotional material? It could help migrants and potential employees avoid finding themselves in difficult circumstances because of unrealistic expectations.

Current Town of Vail policy, which permits housing workers employed elsewhere in Eagle County, is creating pressures to overbuild worker housing in Vail. The original purpose of the policy was to promote housing for Vail workers in neighboring communities as a means of supplementing the deficit of worker housing in Vail.

The investment of Vail tax revenues has worked to prime the pump of westward development. The intention was to disperse housing by creating a series of interlinked, planned communities separated by ample allocations of open space to avoid the perception and congestion of urban sprawl. Those intentions have largely been achieved, and several projects are still in the developmental stages.

The purpose of the policy was multi-fold. It was viewed as a means to promote down valley development while dispersing tourism and resident populations that would have, otherwise, been concentrated in extremely limited space in Vail.

Critics of the TOV's current housing policy argue that if worker housing in Vail were occupied solely by those employed in the Town and on the mountain workforce housing would be less of a crisis. They believe that Vail may already be self-sustaining in providing housing for its work force. If critics are correct, their claims should first be verified by conducting a carrying capacity analysis to determine the occupancy and location of dwelling units in Vail.

Vail employees are squeezed out of Vail by down valley workers who are housed in Vail and those being displaced by STR (Short-Term Rentals). Until the TOV addresses removing STR from residential suburban neighborhoods and replaces down valley workers who occupy Vail worker housing there is no way for Vail to keep pace. Even if it could there may not be sufficient land to build all of Vail worker housing within Vail town limits at densities acceptable to the community.

How the Town Council goes about phasing in these re-balancing policies is the challenge. Building Vail's worker housing down valley with the policy remaining for non-Vail workers to live in them seems on its face to be self-defeating. Vail workers would not have to live and commute from down valley if they were not kept from housing in Vail by down valley workers living within the town limits in TOV subsidized housing. Until an inventory of housing occupancies is conducted both points of view are dealing with unsubstantiated supposition.

The recent adoption by Vail of a workforce housing tax makes it possible to finance worker housing without drawing from the TOV's general fund. This opens the prospect of using general fund revenues for purposes tied to the redevelopment of the HUB, Municipal and Middle Creek sites in Vail's core area and more public amenities in West Vail and Intermountain.

Adopting inclusionary standards that connect providing worker housing with development of commercial property has proven partially effective. It has also proven to be vulnerable to political manipulation by special interests. There are those advocating expanding inclusionary standards to the redevelopment of commercial free-market residential uses as well. Nowadays, businesses recognize the practicality of investing not only in their storefront but their back of the house operations as well. It has come to be understood that a sustainable business practice requires investing in housing its employees.

The practice by certain businesses of transferring their responsibility for housing workers to the taxpayers is also being scrutinized. An increase in development and growth-related taxes are additional methods of ensuring that commercial interests pay a fair-share of providing for the community's essential public services, functions and facilities. With foresight and forbearance, the TOV is capable of accomplishing community aspirations held back by outdated perceptions and exploitive attitudes.

Part Five - Revisiting the Vail Vision:

Is Vail becoming too Urbanized?

The community should come to better understand the history and successes of its evolution. The redevelopment of the hub site, municipal buildings, and West Vail could see Vail mature as a community and resort consistent with a dynamic vision for the future.

Vail has reached an impasse that risks stagnation and alienation when it comes to redevelopment and new projects. Little appetite remains on the part of residents or guests, who are passionate about Vail, to see the community become ever more urbanized. If over-development happens, the attraction and charm Vail possesses will be lost.

Vail is in the position to influence the distribution of much of the commercial and housing development built in communities along the I-70 corridor in Eagle County. It has influence over regional development through its inventory of water rights to disperse development westward. Exercising its influence continues to be a positive force in shaping Eagle County government as an effective regional management authority.

With water rights to support 6 million additional square feet of development, Vail has ample resources to infill with commercial uses and meet the demand for a diversity of inclusionary housing development well into the foreseeable future. The question arises, does Vail have the land available to achieve a goal of self-sufficiency within the Town boundaries if policies regulating in-Town worker residency and those that discourage STRs in residential neighborhoods are not put in place?

The community should take the opportunity to look beyond worker housing to determine how best to serve the needs of a future population which is becoming more diverse and inclusive. Guided by clearer definitions of "diversity and inclusiveness", the variety of housing types already allocated can be augmented in response to the needs of the community's residents and visitors.



Should the Town and community accept lining the north side of I-70 with similar versions of the Residences at Main Vail high-rise?

With this in mind, the Town should re-evaluate design of the proposed Timber Ridge and other proposed housing re-developments, essentially creating a wall of high-rise worker dormitories along the north side of interstate 70. While Council deemed this to be a suitable location for dense housing, design and architecture can help make the projects a desirable neighborhood rather than ‘workforce storage’. There are many imaginative, less disruptive methods of integrating resident housing into the community. Vail is well-advanced in possessing many types of housing that are compatible with environmental goals and inclusionary standards. Balancing the allocation and occupancy of its housing inventory remains the challenge.

Pressure promoting commercial development, in turn, prompts a need for more workforce housing. Whenever residential densities are increased there is need to provide quality-of-life amenities to serve the expanding population. What remains to be determined is the amount of revenue needed to create facilities and opportunities to support diversification and inclusiveness.

Beyond Ford Park and sites in central Vail, the parks in West and East Vail are suitable locations for more diversified uses that serve the needs of adjacent neighborhoods and the community. New or commercial redevelopment should be required to assist in underwriting community amenities. Community assets could be regained, such as the cultural, educational and athletic facilities in Cascade Village, now part of the Grand Hyatt. The north and south side of the community could be reconnected through more wildlife and pedestrian crossings. A balancing act is required to match public financial resources sufficient to negotiate mutual benefit with private developers who have a shared vision of the community’s future.

VHA provides clear and concise discussions of matters affecting the Vail community in the belief that an informed citizenry will be an engaged citizenry. Our intent is to promote more citizen involvement and community discussions of issues facing the Town. If these are issues that concerns you, please make your views known to candidates and [town officials](#). By joining with VHA, as a member, paid-subscriber or reader, you can add your voice to sustain what is good about our community and to shine a spotlight on important issues. See back editions of VHA communications on the Association’s website.

To receive VHA letters and reports as a Reader, Paid-Subscriber or Member.

Contact:

vailhomeownersassoc@gmail.com

Post Office Box 238 Vail, Colorado 81658

Telephone: (970) 331-2099 Email: vha@vail.net Website: <https://www.vailhomeowners.com>

Copyright: 2023