



The Vail Lion Building Under Construction: Shown Are Parking Levels and Elevator Shafts - Frontage Road Lanes Shown Right

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Visioning Vail - Addressing the Parking Problem

July 24, 2015

The Vail Economy and Congestion: Vail has made a remarkable recovery from the 2007/2008 recession. Town sales tax receipts have shown positive monthly gains for most of the past two years. The increase in sales tax revenues have offset, in large measure, a decrease of revenues generated by property and real estate taxes as the real estate market still struggles to get back to pre-recession levels.

Vail's sales tax receipts are tied directly to tourism. A significant growth in tourism was key to Vail's quick recovery. The surge in tourism is being propelled through mass marketing a highly coordinated branded image via social media. A wide spectrum of mass media techniques have been used to attract and hold the attention of an expanding array of multi-national and generational consumers. The approach has been successful in attracting the day visitor and to a lesser extent the destination market.

The Town's economic consultants now say that during prime tourism weekends for either summer or winter, lodging and hotel properties are increasingly becoming fully booked, something that is a first for Vail. Town officials are now promoting strategies to infill the early and middle of weeks as well as looking to increasing group business to grow off-season bookings. But this strategy of increasing the volume of visitors in all seasons, by all means, has consequences.

Providing for this new abundance of consumers is causing the community's infrastructure, particularly parking, to become a much larger, urgent and more expensive challenge. The community relies upon centrally located parking structures and a town/county wide bus system to efficiently organize and distribute visitors.

Centralized parking structures free the public streets for pedestrians, reducing public safety hazards and the visual intrusiveness of the automobile. With thousands of automobiles concealed in structures, residents and visitors alike get to enjoy a unique car-free commercial and residential environment. This has been at the foundation of Vail's lifestyle and economic success since the 1970's.

But with peak days increasing in both the winter and summer seasons, more and more parking is spilling over onto the Frontage Road creating public safety issues and urban blight. This is especially true for outdoor events where there is no requirement that the promoter provide any public parking. For several years, traffic experts have consistently put Vail's parking shortfall at 1,000 spaces.

Frontage Road parking has been a contentious issue for years, with Town Councils at times banning it outright, which still is the case for most of the year in the central core of Town, although there is now daily parking on portions of the North Frontage Road throughout the year. However, as peak days continue to increase, Frontage Road parking in the Town core will necessarily increase, absent decisive action from the Town officials.

There are no easy solutions to the parking problem. Basically the Town has only limited choices: (1) allow more and more parking on the Frontage Road which may require purchasing the rights to that roadway from CDOT, (2) build new parking structures and/or (3) acquire land down-valley west of Dowd Junction and remote-park visitors there. All are expensive solutions. Acquiring the rights to the Frontage Road will not only require a large initial outlay but will also entail assuming the annual maintenance, which will become an increasingly costly item as the years go by.

There are only very limited location choices for a new structure-basically the current Town municipal site, the charter bus parking area at the east end of the Lionshead parking structure or adjacent to the north sides of either the Vail Village or Lionshead parking structures. Building a structure is also a costly undertaking with construction costs becoming a political football with estimates bandied about

ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 per space, the former being quoted by proponents of a new structure and the latter by opponents.

Creating remote down-valley parking is also an expensive undertaking since, in addition to land acquisition and construction costs, the Town's bus service would have to be extended to that parking and there would be significant costs associated with such an operation. And, it remains to be seen whether Vail visitors would utilize down-valley parking.

There are those who oppose spending any money on public parking and are content to allow full-time parking on the Frontage Road as a preferred solution. Proponents of building additional public parking view parking on the Frontage Roads as a public safety hazard, a hindrance to traffic flow, an eye sore and a sign of lack of excellence in customer service. And, while there are no inexpensive solutions, that is not any different from Vail's early years when Vail voters approved and built the existing Vail Village and Lionshead structures.

So far, Vail parking has been a decision by indecision. The question before the community is whether that should be allowed to continue or whether the greater good for the community's future and the quality of the Vail experience requires Town leaders to find a solution. Stated another way, has the time come for community leaders to take up the hard work of bringing workable solutions before the voters, as their forward looking predecessor did in their day when they rose to the very same challenges in the beginning years of the community? The parking challenge then was no easier than it is today.

VHA recommends that serious study be given to the building of additional parking structures and the staged removal of all Frontage Road on-street parking, with the provision that all currently existing week long 24 hour time limited free and permit parking be continued within public parking structures.

**Questions or Comments?
Contact the Editor**

[Membership Information](#)

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