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Cashing in on Vail's renaissance

With big renovations complete, town officials and homeowners are focusing on bringing more business to Vail

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VAIL, CO COLORADO

VAIL, Colorado — With brand new hotels, luxury residences, restaurants and other amenities in Vail, town officials and homeowners recognize they can't just sit back and expect people to show up to see it all.

The Vail Homeowners Association held its annual meeting Wednesday in Vail. The theme of the meeting was that Vail's renaissance might be complete, but there's plenty of work that still needs to be done.

“The majority of the building here in completed, but I don't think we can take a ‘we built it and they will come' attitude,” said Gail Ellis, president of the Vail Homeowners Association. “It's our responsibility to let everyone know that Vail is thriving and moving forward.”

Ellis said the Vail Homeowners Association pledges to advocate for the high standards that make Vail a world class resort throughout 2011. The group of homeowners, who Vail Councilman Andy Daly called the town's biggest group of constituents behind tourists, listened to presentation after presentation about the ways Vail will improve in the coming years.

World class competition

Harry Frampton and Ceil Folz presented the Vail Valley Foundation's proposal to give Ford Park a major makeover that they said would help drive the economy.

The Ford Park Gardens, as it's proposed, would help Vail compete with ski resort towns like Sun Valley, Idaho, Frampton said.

“We're in competition with a lot of other places — we can't just rest on our laurels,” Frampton said.

Nobody seems to be resting, either. Not over Vail's 50th anniversary in 2012 or especially over the 2015 World Alpine Ski Championships in Vail and Beaver Creek.

So many of the proposed projects in the works are directly related to preparing Vail for 2015, but how Vail pays for it all is something resting in the minds of many homeowners.

Vail homeowner and former town councilman Kent Logan presented a list of projects in the fall that would utilize the town's \$9.3 million conference center funds in order to drive the economy. Those projects will be discussed in public meetings in the coming months, and Daly told the homeowners Wednesday that he hopes to hear their opinions.

“It's important we develop a consensus on those things,” Daly said.

The projects, which include upgraded technology throughout town to help spread information to guests, a remodel of the Vail Golf Clubhouse and a Ford Park expansion, will be presented to the voters sometime this spring. The money was raised through a special lodging and sales tax and spending it requires voter approval.

The projects are all part of getting Vail into the world-class position that the town and resort so desperately need, Daly said.

Internationalizing Vail

Another world class position driver is the Vail Valley Jet Center and the Eagle County Airport. Paul Gordon, president of the Jet Center, told homeowners that talks about getting an international terminal at the airport have gotten serious this year.

Airport and county officials are working on a business development plan for such a terminal, and have gotten the costs of adding one down to about \$2 million to \$3 million — down from the 2006 estimate of nearly \$6 million.

The international terminal has the potential of bringing in 60 percent net new passengers, Gordon said.

“If we can bring in 6,000 net new passengers into the valley, each customer spends about \$1,500 a day at our resorts,” Gordon said. “If you take those numbers, that's a net new of \$62 million per season to our community by having this facility in place.”

The facility would be welcomed by the community with those numbers, and especially by 2015 — when people from all over the world will be trying to get to Vail and Beaver Creek for the World Championships.

International business is also the major focus of Vail Mountain's marketing initiatives, said Vail Mountain Marketing Director Adam Sutner.

Homeowners heard solid evidence that everyone in Vail — from town officials to nonprofit leaders to Vail Resorts — is working hard to ensure that benefits from the “Billion Dollar Renewal” are felt, and felt soon.

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