

# VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION



Mayor's Park in Spring Bloom

## Is Another Vail Building Boom in the Offing?

06/08/15

**Executive Summary:** There are indications that Vail may be on the verge of another building boom, even though [real estate sales](#) show signs of flagging. Increasing congestion due to a lack of structured parking and traffic circulation improvements as well as affordable housing remains a hangover from the last boom. The absence of off-street parking requirements for [outdoor special events](#) is also a significant cause of congestion. The Town Council has allowed the proposed Simba Run Underpass to clear another hurdle in the approval process to fund the project, which engineers say will help reduce circulation congestion. The costs associated with the resolution of these issues will have a determining outcome on additional large scale development within the community. Changes in public policy to address these issues may well be the subject of the upcoming fall Town Council election. The election will be poll voting, rather than mail balloting, even though mail balloting has been shown to increase voter participation. Mail balloting also extends the time for electioneering, giving the voters more time to assess the qualifications and agenda of Council candidates. A recent change in the state voting law, now allows qualified voters to add their names to an absentee voter list that will ensure they are always sent an [absentee ballot](#) by mail in future Town of Vail elections.

**Is Another Vail Building Boom In The Offing?** Recent developments suggest that another Vail building boom might be just around the corner. First, there is the already approved master plan for the Vail Valley Medical Center additions. Phase one, the West Wing addition, is soon to begin but the plans for other parts of the expansion, especially parking and affordable housing appear to be in flux. At present, the VVMC plans envision parking to be provided on its campus but that will be a costly venture; estimates currently run at \$120,000 per space which means that the VVMC parking requirement of 600 spaces could cost \$72 million. The site for VVMC's affordable housing has yet to be announced; and recently the Vail Planning Commission [reduced those requirements almost in half](#) by

cutting the Town Staff's recommendation of the method to calculate the requirements. It remains to be seen whether these components will be built on site or whether the VVMC will seek off-campus alternatives.

In West Vail, the east half of the Timber Ridge redevelopment is well on its way to completion; it will provide 113 living spaces, bringing the total for Timber Ridge to 209 units. Yet to be decided is what will become of the west half of the site long-term. At the same time, the Town Council has authorized moving ahead with [developing a detailed plan](#) to install the utility infrastructure for their Chamonix affordable housing development in West Vail, located near the new fire station. If the plan meets the Council's financial parameters, they will initiate utility installation this year and begin construction on the [first phase of the housing units](#) in 2016. The Council is also considering amending the current plan which will [increase the size of the project](#) by 20,000 square feet and raises the unit count from 53 to 67.

In Lionshead, the Strata project (formerly the Vailglo and Enzian Lodges) is coming out of the ground and a number of other projects, holdovers from the Great Recession of 2008, are in the development pipeline awaiting financing and a decision to get underway. And, in Vail, plans for the Vail Municipal site continue to evolve. Site clearance is also complete on the Roost Lodge site where a new Marriott Lodge is to be built; however, the [project is now on hold](#) and developers do not intent to proceed with construction at this time.



**Proposed Chamonix project illustrating where additional density could occur shown in pink and green**

**Will It Include an "Educational Center?"** The possibility of an education/meeting center continues to percolate. In April the Town Council put an "education center" back on its agenda when it assigned it as a planning responsibility to the Commission on Special Events (CSE). The Education Center has in recent years been envisioned by advocates as hosting economic conferences such as those held in Davos, Switzerland, the Gerald R Ford World Forum conferences convened by former President Ford in the 1980's, and the Vail

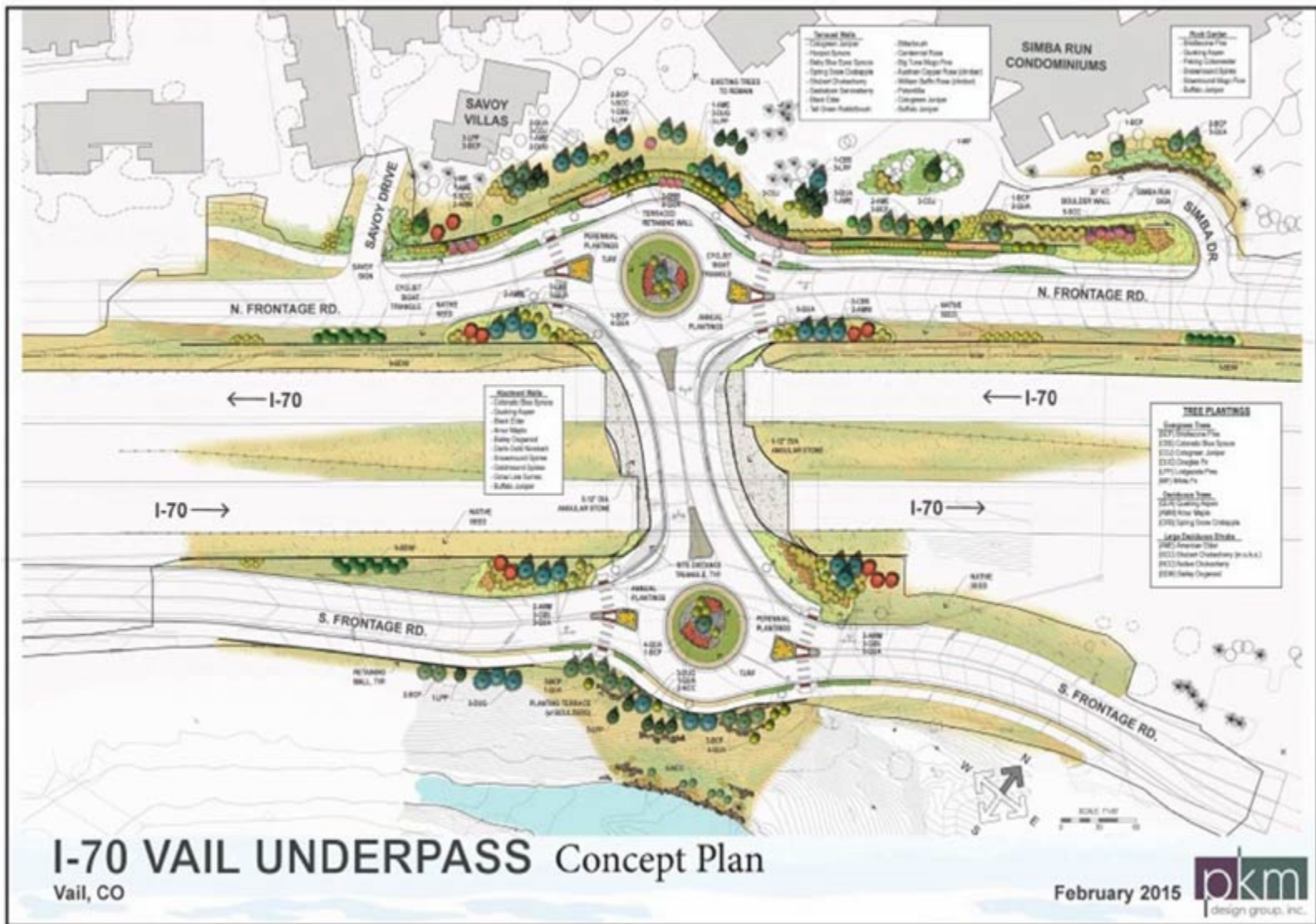
Global Energy Forum. Vail has also been the site of high level discussions between American and Mexican officials within the last year. Such international assemblies bring the need for state of the art communications and higher levels of security. Other types of entertainment venues are being considered.

The municipal complex and charter bus parking lot on the east side of the Lionshead parking structure are among the potential locations for these types of new facilities. In the past decade there has been study of building a venue to house a medical conference center, which included investigating adding conference space above the Dobson Arena. The search for sites on which to build new venues comes amid a growing awareness that the hosting of events is having the effect of increasing traffic and parking congestion in Vail's Town Center.

The Education Center may well become [another iteration of a conference or convention/event center](#), ideas that have been rejected by the electorate several times in Vail's history. Construction and operating costs have always troubled voters. The [last proposal in 2005](#), to be located on the Charter Bus Parking Lot, was defeated because construction costs escalated due, in part, to the need to provide additional public parking. In the meantime, hotel development and expansion has largely met the need for such facilities.

**Simba Run Underpass receives another approval in the review process:** The Vail Town Council voted to approve an additional \$2.8 million to meet its 29% local to 71% state/federal participation in the \$30.1 million Simba Run Underpass project. The [proposed underpass](#) is located midway between the Vail Town Center and the West Vail commercial center.





Simba Run I-70 Underpass Concept Plan

The initial budget for the project was \$20.8 million. The \$9.3 million increase is due, in part, to adjustments to satisfy the desires of adjacent property owners or Town officials, increases in labor costs and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) engineering/administrative fees. The Town has ample financial resources to pay for the project out of its available fund balance. This, according to a [Town Staff analysis](#) of the budgetary requirements of all Town infrastructure projects listed in its 5 year capital improvement inventory of projects to be completed.

The state portion of the increase, \$6.5 million, must still be approved by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Transportation Committee at their funding meeting in June. If a funding gap still exists, the project would be shelved until funding becomes available. State officials have said, if the Town of Vail unilaterally nullifies the underpass project, it will be a cold day before it will be considered again by state and federal authorities.

If the project proceeds there will be seasonal disruptions during the two years estimated for project construction. Depending on which phase of the project is underway, traffic on I-70 will be reduced to one lane. In a cost saving measure, South and North Frontage roads

will be made one way. Engineers are studying the option of alternating frontage road traffic with temporary traffic signals. The project must be completed by 2017, the deadline required by the state/federal funding program under which the project is being approved. The next step, should funding be allocated by the state/federal authorities, is land acquisition which would occur this summer.

Three million dollars is estimated for additional right-of-way land to be acquired from the Simba Run Condominium complex property. The \$3 million value was estimated by a CDOT appraisal process; a representative of the Simba Run Condominium Association said that estimation was well below the price expectations of their owners. Some of those opposed to the project are in disagreement with the urbanization that is occurring in the community. Limitation of traffic infrastructure is an effective method to frustrate development.



**View east from North Frontage Road of Simba Run Underpass showing enhancement to adjacent properties**

**Will Parking Interfere?** Parking continues to be a major problem in Vail. The number of Frontage Road overflow days has increased, resulting in Frontage Road parking becoming a nearly regular event on peak days. There are, however, no concrete plans to solve this public safety and congestion issue. Theoretically, there are 15 day caps for Frontage Road parking in the winter and summer but they have yet to be enforced, and adding additional Town parking is expensive. Recently the TOV looked at adding another level to the Lionshead parking structure, which could yield about 200 more spaces. Adding a 4th floor would require structural upgrades to the existing structure of about a half million dollars. The cost to build the additional deck for the 200 spaces was estimated in 2010 at \$19 million, since then, according to Town officials, construction costs have increased by 15% (\$109,250/space) pushing the project cost to \$21.9 million. By comparison, the cost was estimated to be \$120,000 per space to build structured parking from the ground up. In May, the Town Council [rejected a proposal](#) for a 250 space parking structure to be built on the Municipal Complex site to potentially be shared with the Vail Valley Medical Center.



**Proposed parking structure, on top of which an Education Center could be built, and a new municipal building, in blue**

How all this plays out will make for a busy year for the Association as it continues to monitor, advocate for the public good, and report on events. If you are already a member, urge your friends and neighbors to join as well. As our membership increases, so does our influence. We keep watch and make aware when your interests are being affected by local decision makers. [VHA Membership](#) makes a difference!

**Vail Mail Balloting Takes a Backward Step Forward:** [The Town Clerk reported](#) in April to the Council that Vail voters who wish to vote by absentee ballot no longer must request a ballot for each Town poll election. Now, when a voter requests an absentee ballot, they can sign up to be included on a list of voters who will automatically be sent an absentee ballot for Town poll elections. This feature was replaced by the State legislature after having been previously removed. Voters will still need, only for the upcoming election, to obtain an [absentee ballot request form](#), and then they can check the box which will place them on the automatic send absentee ballot list for future elections.

This reinstatement of the permanent absentee ballot voter list is a [nod to the importance of mail balloting](#), which has been shown to increase voter participation rates in local elections. Vail's voter participation rate has been in steady decline for several years, as was [reported by the Vail Homeowners Association last August](#) (\*see excerpt below). This trend was not identified in the Town Clerk's report or discussed by the Town Council in their consideration of the voting method at this year's upcoming Council election. The Homeowners Association advocates mail balloting for all Vail elections.

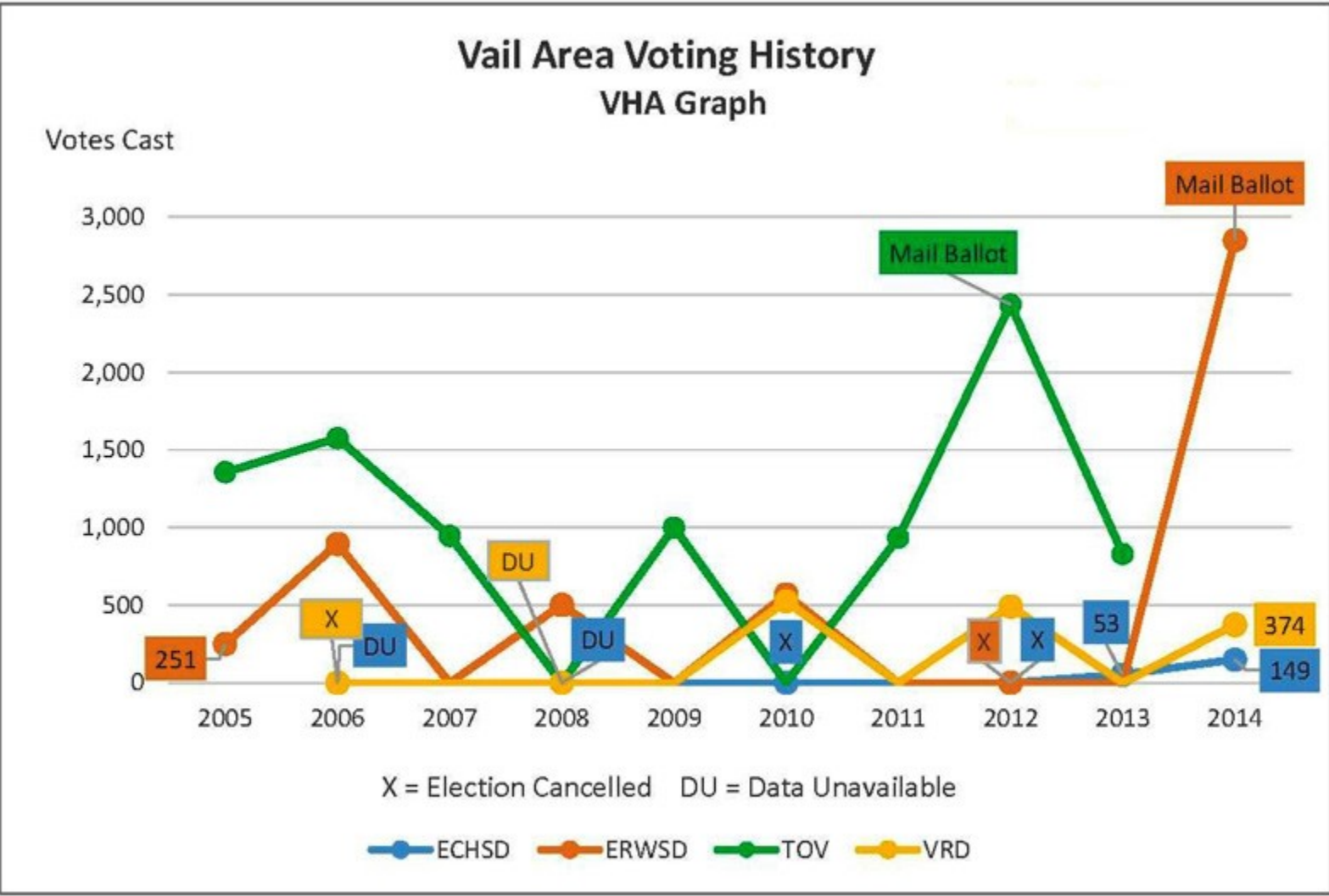
To some elected officials it was more important to be seen standing outside the polls waving to voters as they go to vote, than having more time to go door to door and have face to face or social media interchanges with them. Mail-in balloting would begin the nominating and campaigning process 5 weeks earlier than would poll voting. Voting would begin 10 days earlier.

Given the complexity of the issues before the community, the electorate should be given more time to consider what the important issues are and to assess each candidate's agenda and position on those issues. Perhaps the time is coming for candidates standing for election to consider that waving to the voters is less important than actually communicating with them.



The Town of Vail's existing election process favors incumbents, as can be shown by the high percentage of previously serving councilpersons being returned to elected or appointed office in recent elections. The trend of cycling former councilpersons and political appointees through influential boards and commissions does not encourage diversity or incent new participants to enter public service. Likewise, there is the appearance of conflict of interests when council members serve on the Boards of non-profit organizations that receive Town funding. Perhaps the longer nominating and electioneering process of mail balloting would inject greater debate, expand participation and rebalance what has become a revolving door for Vail's political establishment.

Reflected below is data available on the voter turnout over the last 10 years for the Town of Vail and 3 of the special districts in the area.



**VHA Chart & Data Comparing Poll Balloting with Mail Balloting for Vail Municipal & Special District Elections Over the Last 10 Years**

\*Participation in the mail balloting 2014 Eagle River Water and Sanitation District (ERWSD) election jumped by 402.11%. While some of the ERWSD increase might be attributable to get-out-the-vote efforts by VHA and others, as well as voter interest in the issues (ERWSD proposed bond authorizations for construction of new facilities), it seems clear that the convenience of a mail-in ballot was a large factor in the increased turnout. That conclusion is backed up by the results of the TOV 2012 elections in which the TOV also used mail-in ballots as part of a coordinated election with Eagle County and voter participation leaped to 58.61% of registered voters. ERWSD is to be commended for their execution of the mail-ballot requirement for their 2014 election and the corresponding increase in voter turnout.

VHA encourages the ERWSD, the Town of Vail and all other special districts in the area to use the mail-ballot system permanently.



**Spring in Full Blossoms**

**Membership**



[Membership Information](#)

## **Quick Links**

[Special Events Calendar](#)

[Local Media Links](#)

[Visit VHA Website](#)

[What's on Your Mind? Send Your Comments](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

[View Our Newsletter Archives](#)

[VHA Newsletter Reprint Policy](#)

[VHA Collaborative Consensus Guidelines](#)

## **Production Credits**

### **Content Editors:**

Larry Stewart, Gail Galvin Ellis, PsyD

### **Copy Editing & Distribution:**

Elizabeth Bailey, General Partner  
Books Plus

[books\\_plus\\_more@msn.com](mailto:books_plus_more@msn.com)

### **Email Design and Layout:**

Jill Gordon  
Gordon Group, LLC  
[gordongrp@comcast.net](mailto:gordongrp@comcast.net)

Copyright ? 2015 Vail Homeowners Association  
All Rights Reserved

[www.vailhomeowners.com](http://www.vailhomeowners.com)