



The Lion Under Construction Last July - the End and Beginning of Another Vail Renaissance

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

Vail's New Renaissance

What We Know and What It Means

March 24, 2017

The Town of Vail has launched what could be a new Renaissance of development and infrastructure improvements over the next decade that could be transformative. The overall scope of this work is difficult to grasp because of the incremental way it is being rolled out. Some parts have already been adopted; others are works in progress, and still other parts are only just beginning.

Altogether, the stage is being set to add to Vail more than 1000 middle class families, develop the Frontage Roads into a central boulevard, expand the Town's boundaries, make a number of infrastructure improvements, restore Gore Creek and perhaps even expands parking facilities. Included are increased densities that could change the character of neighborhoods.

Unlike the Billion Dollar Renaissance of the 2000's, there has been little fanfare, and the total scope of these endeavors is just now coming into focus. Much has been done out of view of any intensive public scrutiny or input. The price tag could be well in excess of \$300 million, and unlike the earlier Renaissance, which was primarily funded by private investment, these plans are to be publicly funded by the taxpayers and residents of Vail.

Development Plans. Plans, already in place, include a \$50 million Housing Plan to acquire 1000 deed-restricted housing units and \$95 million of transportation improvements. The Housing Plan is to be funded by, approximately, \$20 million from existing funds and Town budgets over the next two years with the remaining, approximately, \$30 million to come from a seven-year property tax increase, which if further pursued by proponents, could be scheduled for the November ballot.

The transportation improvements are to be funded by \$54 million from Town revenues and the balance--\$41 million—from a new Transportation Impact Fee that the Town has been busily working on for the last several months. While details remain to be finalized, it appears that commercial developments will cumulatively be assessed, approximately, \$20 million, and the remaining \$21 million will come from fees on new residential construction, including most re-models that expand beyond their current size. The current plan is to vary the residential fee on the basis of square footage, which could result in a fee of \$10,000 or more per home.

The Town has also reactivated its Transportation Task Force, which could address an estimated \$150 million in needed parking improvements. The Gore Creek \$5.4 million rehabilitation is already underway. And, coming up later this year is consideration of the Town's Open Lands Plan and a "sustainability" evaluation. For many months, the Town has been considering whether it should use its reevaluation of the Open Lands Plan to seek to acquire adjacent US Forest Service land that could be used for future development. The sustainability evaluation appears, for now, to be largely focused on the environment, but if done correctly, should examine all aspects of Town activities.

Some of this is needed and long overdue; some of it is ambitious, but other aspects need serious examination and even rejection. That will only happen if the curtains are pulled back and public scrutiny and input are the order of the day.



Chamonix affordable housing are priced at \$400,000 to \$700,000 on top of a \$200,000 per unit subsidy from the Town.

Vail Housing 2027 Plan. Due to the lack of available land and the high cost of construction, affordable housing, both in the Town of Vail and throughout Eagle County, has been a vexing problem; it has long been a top priority for the town. Over the years, Vail has responded by acquiring over 700 deed-restricted housing units. Soon to be added are 32 units at Chamonix and, the recently approved, Roost Lodge redevelopment, which will have 96 more deed-restricted apartments. That will bring the total Vail deed-restricted units to over 10% of current town housing.

Earlier this year, with virtually no public input, Vail launched an ambitious, ten-year, \$50 million plan with the goal of acquiring 1000 more deed-restricted housing units (an average investment of \$50,000.00 per unit). At \$50 million, it is one of the largest public works programs in Vail's history, and the plan acknowledges that that sum may have to grow in future years. To give some idea of the scale of this plan, the entire Vail Housing Program Fund (funded with Housing in Lieu Fees) today totals only \$3 million, and the Town's total capital budget for 2016 was only about \$32 million (which included \$15 million that was taken from capital reserves). If successful, another 1000 deed-restricted units would result in over 20% of all Vail housing being deed-restricted, and if the assumption that these will be middle class families is correct, more than 20% of Vail's population would fall into that category.

The plan has raised a host of questions: ranging from the size of this investment, to its viability given its dependency on tax increases, the failure to address down-valley alternatives and the desirability of this scale of social engineering. First and foremost, is the huge cost of this plan. While Vail is in excellent economic shape, is the commitment of \$50 million, to just housing, over the next ten years the best use of Vail's capital, and would such a commitment compromise other needed capital improvements? Funding for the plan, dependent on a major tax increase, also seems in jeopardy given the overwhelming defeat last year of Eagle County's proposed sales tax increase to fund affordable housing. It ignores that housing is a regional problem that will not be solved on a community-by-community, "only-in-Vail" basis. And, this plan would amount to the largest ever effort at social engineering in the Town's history.

Also, ignored is workforce, seasonal worker housing. It appears that, at least so far, the Town has taken the position that it is not its responsibility to subsidized business by providing housing; businesses should pay a living wage which will enable their workers to afford to live in the community. But the reality is, when a community's main economic base is tourism, it is dependent on a seasonal workforce. If the workforce continues to deteriorate, as it appears to be doing now, visitor experiences will suffer. It doesn't take a crystal ball to see where that leads.

VHA has long urged that the availability of affordable housing is one of Vail's most pressing problems; a sustainable community requires affordable housing for all its citizens. There is, therefore, a clear need for a comprehensive plan for both middle class and workforce housing. Crafting such a plan should be a public process, with full transparency and public input. The solutions must be comprehensive, realistic, respectful of existing property rights and within the financial ability of Vail to sustain. Those solutions should also recognize that Vail no longer has the necessary land for "only-in-Vail" solutions, and down-valley alternatives, where multiple sites and opportunities could be available, must be considered. Indeed, 77% of respondents, in the most recent Town survey, see this as necessary.



The \$60 Million Simba Run Underpass, currently under construction, enables Vail's central boulevard to be completed.

Transportation Improvements. Planned transportation improvements include a host of improvements and upgrades to the Frontage roads: including new and improved roundabouts, turn lanes and medians (\$61 million), improvements to and new pedestrian walks (\$23 million), lighting improvements (\$5 million) and improved bus stops (\$3 million). The plan is so far-reaching that it intends to recoup Vail's \$9 million investment in the Simba Run Underpass. Not included in the transportation improvements are any funds for

additional structured parking or additional mass transit. If approved, as presently planned, it will surpass the Housing Plan for the largest public works program in Vail's history.

The final plans for financing this massive program are scheduled to be adopted this summer; even though, there has yet to be an effort to have extensive public input. While details remain to be finalized, the broad outlines of a so-called "impact fee" are already in place and have raised serious questions. Impact fees are imposed to mitigate the impact of a project on surrounding infrastructure and the community. Taken to their logical extension, every project would have to pay such a fee, because every project affects the community in some way, but, traditionally, communities have used tax financing to develop infrastructure and capital improvements.

In its present iteration, the new impact fees have no time limit on their duration. And, while only \$41 million of the total cost is projected to come from impact fees (the balance of \$54 million is scheduled to come directly from Town revenues), it is still a huge amount to be imposed on future development within the Town. This could be in the job-killing magnitude. Thus, while development went on in the Town for years, achieving essentially maximum build-out, it is only future development that is to be burdened with these transportation improvements; even though, the entire community will benefit.

Clearly, at least some of the proposed improvements are needed or desirable; others are, at best, questionable like the recoupment of expenditures on the Simba Run Underpass. Approval of these plans should be a public, transparent process with full provision for public input. The same should be the case for any proposed impact fee. Any such fee must be carefully calibrated so as not to unduly burden future development in the Town, and for those portions to be funded by the Town, there should be public discussion of Vail's financial ability to undertake such commitments.

Parking. The availability of public parking is another of Vail's most pressing problems, as the use of Frontage Road for over-flow parking continues to be the Town's number one public safety issue. For years, Vail has had a \$4.3 million commitment from Vail Resorts to provide more parking, but gridlock has prevented any forward movement toward solutions. Now, it is estimated that it could cost as much as \$150 million to bring Vail's parking facilities up-to-date. As [VHA has pointed out, much work needs to be done.](#) Unfortunately, Vail is no closer to solving its parking needs than it was 10 years ago, and in the meantime, it continues to rely on Frontage Roads for over-flow parking with all of the attendant public safety issues. At the same time, the present Vail and Lionshead structures are in need of rehabilitation, and serious issues face mass transit within the Town and the county. These are matters that cry out for solution. It is, as yet, unclear whether the Transportation Task Force will take up these challenges. VHA urges that it should be leading to the development of a comprehensive plan for parking, mass transit and a unified management of all transportation activities.

Open Space. For many months, the Town of Vail has been considering obtaining land for housing development by expanding the Town boundaries through the acquisition of adjacent US Forest Service lands. This was being done without extensive public input. [Since VHA first raised the issue last November,](#) it is not clear what has happened, but the Open Lands Plan is reportedly moving forward. No price tag has been assigned to these endeavors, but it is clear that any such acquisitions must be at fair market value. And, any such acquisitions would require large infrastructure expenditures to make the land useable. In other words, this could be a hugely expensive, budget-busting endeavor.



Pending changes to Town's Open Lands Plan makes neighbors edgy.

VHA opposes any use of open space land, for development or otherwise. It intends to continue to monitor the progress of the Open Lands Plan and, publicly, report on all developments.



Town redefines neighborhood compatibility without master plan change, approves supersized Marriott to gain local housing.

Increased Densities and Super-sized Projects. Recently, over neighborhood objections, the Town used a Special Development District (SDD) to give “spot-zoning” approval to the high density, super-sized redevelopment of the Roost Lodge property. This may be a harbinger of things to come. In the 1990’s, in the Town’s Open Lands Plan, planners fixed the projected build-out of Vail at 900 more units. By 2010 over 1800 additional units had been built, which should have more than maxed out the Town’s capacity. But, planners are now envisioning ever increasing densities.

Already in the Vail 2027 Housing Plan, there is a proposal to “create a Housing Overlay District that allows for increased density” and a call for a Nexus study, which is the legally required prerequisite for any such action. Reconsideration of Vail’s Open Lands Plan is proceeding, albeit, mostly out of public sight of the larger community. In the Town’s current Transportation Plan, there is a projection of an [additional 2,000 new residential units in Vail](#), as the Town Engineer recently told the Town Council. With no available land to accommodate such exponential growth, the only way that scale of expansion could occur is through increased densities and more super-sized projects. With hints that the Town is now going to undertake the long awaited West Vail master plan, it seems that neighborhood compatibility might be the first focus of such initiatives.

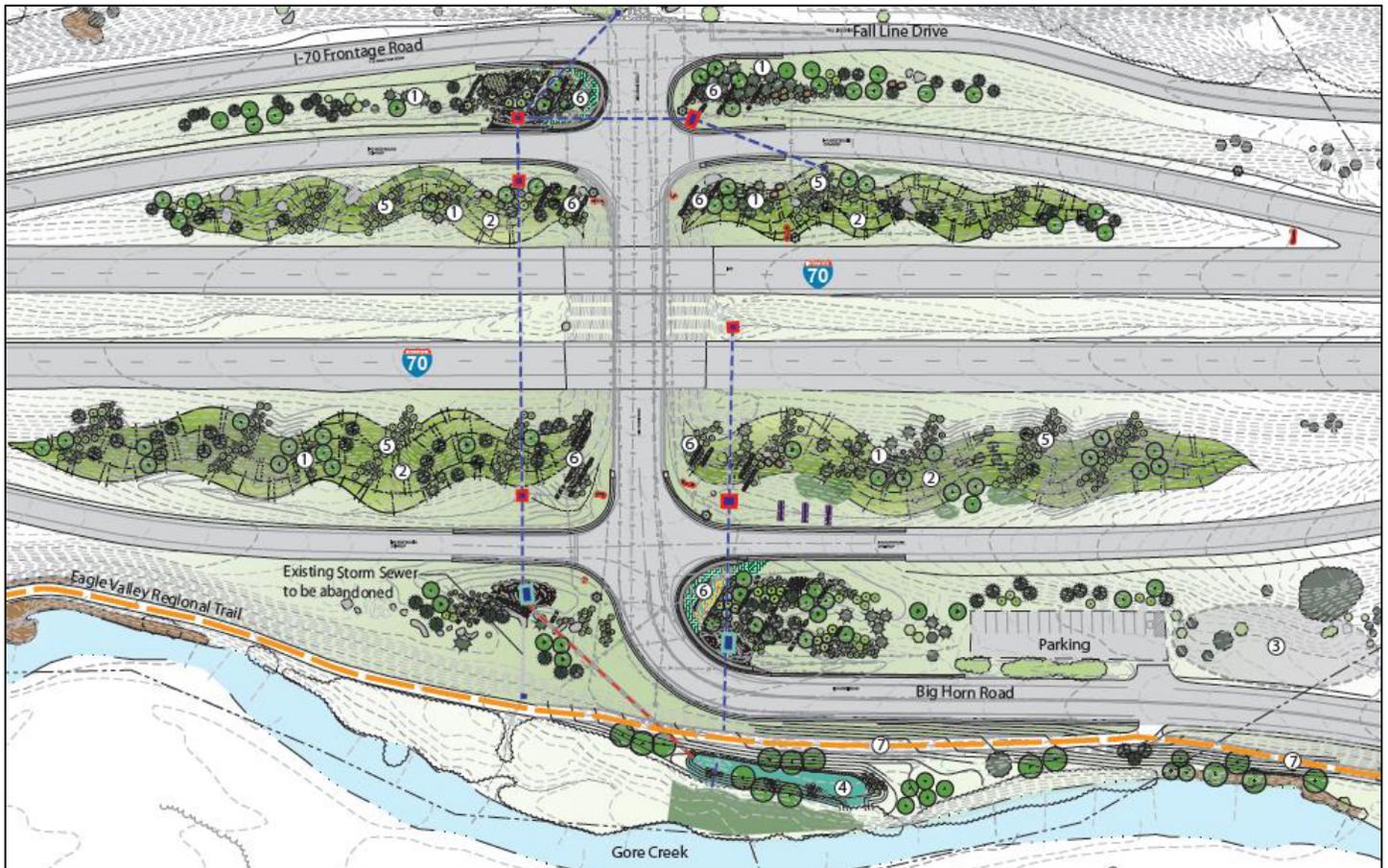
VHA opposed the Roost Lodge expansion. It will continue to oppose “spot-zoning” and will, also, oppose increasing densities that are not approved as part of a community-wide, public evaluation of existing Town capacities.

Sustainability Planning. Vail is moving forward with a sustainability evaluation. At the present, it appears that this will be mainly an environmental evaluation. True sustainability, however, involves all aspects of a community. In Vail’s case, it should include determination of the Town’s “carrying capacity” so that its facilities will not be swamped, and the quality of life can be maintained: matching the Town’s budget and activities to that capacity, having a master plan for development, and [solving the housing and parking crises with comprehensive, realistic plans](#).

Master planning is key to sustainable growth. Spot-zoning, on the other hand, leads to uncontrolled political decisions about community direction. Because of spot-zoning abuses, in the early 2000’s, Vail curtailed that practice in favor of master planning. Now, SDDs may be ushering in another wave of spot-zoning. Already in the wake of the Roost Lodge approval, a plan for a large six-story project on top of the Mountain View parking garage is being presented as an SDD, and other developers seem poised to try the same thing.

At the same time, special events in the center of town are causing significant noise issues, as promoters continue to seek to add more events to an already crowded calendar; there is no effective limit on on-mountain activities, and on-street Frontage Road parking is becoming the norm.

VHA believes that these issues require attention from the Town's leaders and the development of comprehensive plans to manage Vail's future for the benefit of all. To the extent that sustainability entails capital expenditures, it should be clearly spelled out. This will be a continuing focus of VHA's advocacy.



New I70 \$2.3 million storm water improvements being made to the East Vail Interchange benefit Gore Creek.

Gore Creek Rehabilitation. Vail is, also, moving forward with a host of efforts to rehabilitate Gore Creek. So far, these efforts have been relatively inexpensive, but larger, more expensive actions, \$5.4 million budget over 5 years, are in the offing. New storm water collection and filtration improvements to the East Interchange totaling \$2.3 million and is scheduled to begin this year. The cost of the project is split between CDOT \$700,000 and TOV \$1.6 million. The Town's portion includes extensive landscape enhancements. No price tag, as yet, has been announced for the overall program should these budgeted investments not be successful in correcting the water quality problem.

Financing. Taken all together, these plans could cost many hundreds of millions, much of it to be paid for by Vail taxpayers and residents and the rest to be funded by Town revenues. The magnitude of these plans exceeds, many times, what has been Vail's annual capital budget. And, while Vail is, presently, in excellent financial condition, having recently retired the bonds on its parking structures, there is no guarantee that expansive commitments will not undermine its future. So far, there has been no unified, comprehensive budget making it difficult to judge the full implications of these plans. Making evaluation even more difficult is that much of this work is going to be done on a pay-as-you-go basis. Ordinarily, the cost of large-scale capital improvements are spread over decades by the use of bonds or other kinds of long-term financing.

VHA believes that financial prudence calls for the development of a five, ten, and twenty year capital improvement budget. It would not bind future Town Councils and could be changed as needed, but it would provide a pathway that would show the affordability of these kinds of plans.

What You Can Do. If these are matters that concern you, get informed and become involved. Government responds to the public; silence only enables others with different agendas to act in your absence. If you are not already a member, join the Vail Homeowners Association. Together, we will continue to shine a spotlight on these issues that concern everyone.

VHA [Membership:](#)

The Vail Homeowners Association has entered into a sharing relationship with the following “community building” not-for-profit organizations. In this way, we increase the reach of our advocacy, and together we seek to improve our community in ways that will benefit all. From time to time, VHA will report on the agendas and activities of these organizations. This is a non-exclusive relationship, and other “community building” not-for-profit organizations may join our endeavors.



Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum and Hall of Fame
231 South Frontage Road East
Vail, Colorado 81657
970-476-1876
www.skimuseum.net

The museum’s purpose is to preserve and communicate the lore of the modern mountain winter sports movement in Colorado and its contribution to the evolution of Vail and the state’s mountain winter sports communities.

[Read more:](#)



PO Box 100 | Vail, CO 81658
P: 970-680-3525

C: 970-315-2675

www.vailcentre.org

The Vail Centre organization exists to provide learning experiences to those taking responsibility for inspiring Vail and the communities of the future.

[Read more:](#)



Walking Mountains Science Center
318 Walking Mountains Lane | PO Box 9469 | Avon, CO 81620
970.827.9725

www.walkingmountains.org

The mission of Walking Mountains is to awaken a sense of wonder and inspire environmental stewardship and sustainability through natural science education for the Vail community and Eagle County.

[Read more:](#)

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