



Triumph’s design for Booth Heights, set standard for the developer’s proposals for Residences at Main Vail and West Timber Ridge.

Letters to Vail

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION Vail Workforce High-Rise Housing - Part One March 19, 2024

The Town of Vail’s (TOV) acceptance of stereotyped high-rise design began in 2019 when the Design Review Board (DRB) and Town Council approved the design for Booth Heights on an East Vail parcel owned by Vail Resorts (VR). Triumph Development (TD), the developer, had prior affiliation with the TOV, having built the 32-unit Chamonix Vail subsidized resident housing project in West Vail.

Public outcry to preserve the East Vail parcel as bighorn sheep habitat prompted the TOV to offer alternate locations to VR for workforce housing. The site for the Residences at Main Vail, a 72 unit/130 bed high-rise was offered to VR by the TOV in exchange for leaving the Booth Heights property as undeveloped open space. At



Triumph Development’s 2020 design for Residences at Main Vail

the urging of wildlife conservation interests to preserve the bighorn sheep habitat, the TOV went further offering the western portion of the Middle Creek open space in exchange for the Booth Heights site.

Vail Resorts rejected the exchanges offered which caused TD to back out of their development agreement with VR on Booth Heights. Subsequently, the TOV awarded TD the rights to develop the Residences at Main Vail.



Similar Triumph Development design for West Timber Ridge, Residences at Main Vail and Booth Heights

In a separate arrangement, the TOV gave TD the opportunity to redevelop West Timber Ridge, 294 units with 548 beds, on the western portion of a 5.5-acre site situated on the South Frontage Road, east of the post office. The same stereotypical high-rise design is being applied to West Timber Ridge as was used at Residences at Main Vail and proposed earlier for Booth Heights.

Rejection of the Residences at Main Vail Triumph’s design was based upon the DRB’s previous criticism in 2009 and 2010 of a high-density proposal for workforce housing on the Timber Ridge site. The Town Council overturned the 2022 DRB rationale, rejecting the design for the lack of compliance with design guidelines. Subsequent to Council’s repeal of the DRB denial and Council’s promise to “make it yodel”, European alpine architecture stylistic changes were added in an attempt to gloss over the design limitations of high-rise prefabricated modular dwelling-pod construction.

Addition of dense landscape and planting larger trees can help minimize the limitations of harmonizing modular housing construction technology with Vail’s unique character, streetscape and landscape. Council should have gone further in requiring off-set and stair-stepping building heights, and landscape to reduce the boxlike uniformity of high-rise modular construction. Offset, stair-stepping and sloping roof guidelines have been used for most high-rise structures built in the community since the early 1970s. The approach has helped retain the human scale and visual links with nature which has been important since the conception of Vail Village and the development of the Village core and surrounding areas.

During the design and approval process for West Timber Ridge, with strong support of housing advocates, TOV housing officials, Triumph Development and other self-interest developers, the TOV zoning and design standards were modified for workforce housing projects. Changes to zoning and design standards to fit the stereotypical

high-rise work-force housing design exempts TOV designated work force housing developers from regulations that apply to all other non-Town of Vail affiliated or subsidized developments.

The practice could be a potential violation of standard American zoning and land use protections of property owners rights if not corrected. As a result of the change in the zoning code to benefit itself, the West Timber Ridge project may become the most densely occupied site outside of the Vail Town Center. The long-term result of the zoning and design changes of these projects are out of character and keeping with the originating intent of the TOV land use regulations.

VHA believes that equal treatment standards in zoning and design require that all property owners be treated equally in the same or similar circumstances. The appearance of, or actual, conflict of interest could arise should the TOV set itself apart from all other property owners by granting itself special privileges not readily available to all property owners in the community.

While design and density conversations were going on, scrutiny ensued about the TOV’s competitive bidding practices after awarding development opportunities on two projects to Triumph Development without an open Request For Proposal (RFP) process.

West Middle Creek, a large tract of open space was recently rezoned by the TOV for West Middle Creek work force housing. In the 1990’s, additional portions of the same open space tract, then known as the Mountain Bell site, were rezoned for work force housing, which became the sites for the Middle Creek Apartments and the Residences at Main Vail. The site in the 1970s had been conveyed by Vail Associates to the TOV with the stipulation it was to be used as open space.

The process used to convert open space to work force housing is in itself a highly controversial practice fraught with the complexity of potential litigation. The development contract for West Middle Creek was awarded to a developer who has not been involved with the Booth Heights related projects. There will be more to come on West Middle Creek in future *Letters to Vail*.

At each step in the process, VHA and others have raised concerns about warehousing workers in sterile look-alike high-rise developments that lack ambiance and suitable amenities for high-density living.

An accounting of housing needs correlating to the number of jobs in Vail and on the mountain with the number of units and beds available to house workers has not been made publicly available. This raises additional questions about how much housing, over and above that needed to sustain Vail-specific commercial interests, needs to be subsidized by Vail taxpayers.

VHA serves the Vail community with information, having a perspective not readily found elsewhere. Our publications and activities are funded by membership dues and contributions from paid-subscribers and readers. 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.

VHA strives to provide clear and concise discussion 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 discussion of issues facing the Town. If this is an issue that concerns you, please make your views known to [town officials](#).

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