

VHA Governance And Inclusivity, Frontage Road Parking and Quality of the Vail Experience

Reader Comments 09/10/15

Governance and Inclusivity Accessibility

The last two bullet points addressed by the Vail Homeowners Association in its questions for consideration about the future of Vail had to do with various questions about Governance / Inclusivity, and Community Accessibility. Concerning the former, the following questions were raised:

- : how to encourage a higher degree of collaboration among various factional interests?
- : what projects should be addressed through public / private partnerships?
- : what can be done to expand community involvement in decisions about Vail's future?
- : what can be done to increase voter participation in TOV elections, such as mail balloting?
- : is there a need for more transparency in TOV governance?

These are very difficult and sensitive questions to address – with the answers subject to wide variations in opinion. These issues are addressed on a continuing basis by the Vail Homeowners Association by monitoring reports of the proceedings of the monthly meetings of the Vail Economic Advisory Council. I believe there is a, perhaps understandable, tension between the Town of Vail and Vail Resorts which don't always share the same goals, but are forced to live together for their mutual benefit. Whatever one's point of view, it is helpful to remember that without Vail Resorts (formerly Vail Associates), there would be no Town of Vail.

Certainly, transparency should be a cornerstone of all government / citizen relationships, but is too often lacking. I suspect that some appearances of a lack of transparency arise from the "devil in the details". One example is the overwhelmingly popular vote to use the long-disputed funds raised from tax revenue for the controversial, and four times voted down, conference center for the re-development of the Vail golf course clubhouse and athletic fields at Ford Park. I was still on the Vail Economic Advisory Council when that was discussed at length and endorsed by the Council. It was a "no brainer". However, subsequent, more detailed plans for the clubhouse led to the proposed relocation of one of the golf course greens near a residential area, to be replaced by paved parking for events at the clubhouse, which led to litigation, allegations of misrepresentation, misunderstanding, etc. I have no idea what was the ultimate resolution of those disputes. However, transparency and community inclusiveness were major issues.

Concerning community accessibility, it is much to the benefit of the Town of Vail and to Vail Resorts to contribute to the financing of the Eagle County Airport and, perhaps, more importantly, to the subsidies of the various airlines which serve the airport. Subsidies are usually in the form of guaranteed revenue minimums which cost the guarantors nothing if the minimums are achieved.

For financing purposes, the airport authorities recently introduced, perhaps long overdue, paid parking at the Eagle County Airport and chose to implement one of the most inconvenient and difficult to use paid parking systems I have ever encountered. In lieu of the more common control gates for entry and exit, using date and time stamped tickets with cash and credit card payment options, the system has no gates, two obscure computer terminals inside the terminal which require memory of your license plate number, the date and time of your expected return and payment with a credit card. Of course, if you don't have your license plate number committed to memory, you must return to your car to get it. If the date and time of your return is delayed for any reason, I'm not sure whether your car is towed away or if the County just forgoes the extra revenue. This appears to be a paid parking system "on the cheap" and subject to misuse, abuse, or avoidance by going to the more distant free parking areas.

Joe McHugh
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Parking:

Jim,

I am a homeowner in Northwoods having owned property in Vail for over thirty years. During that period, we have all seen Vail grow, suffer through recessions, and then make dramatic expansions during healthy economic periods. Vail has never looked better or provided more amenities than now.

I believe that this issue of on street parking will seriously degrade our brand and tarnish a sterling reputation. I am an owner in a large commercial real estate development firm in the Southeastern area of the country and have built many parking structures as a part of large urban projects. I know how expensive they are to build and I also know that at the present time, there have been unprecedented increases in construction cost in commercial structures. I also know, however, that structured parking is just part of the cost of relatively high density, urban development to maintain a safe and pleasant pedestrian feel in a community. Vail was developed on the premise of a pedestrian oriented environment and having a sea of cars at the front door of the arrival experience into Vail is not in the interest of the community.

I believe that it is imperative for the town of Vail to halt all frontage road parking, bite the bullet, and provide an expansion to the existing town owned decks and construct new ones, if necessary, to accommodate the volume of vehicles that is being experienced on peak days. Sure it costs money, but that is why we pay taxes. Turning our back on this issue will have ill consequences for Vail in the future.

Don 073115

Hello Jim:

I read your editorial on parking and feel there is a serious omission. The editorial appears to put the onus entirely on the Town to find a solution. What was not addressed is Vail Resorts' expansion of various activities both summer and winter that contribute to congestion. The Epic Pass, increased uphill capacity and expansion of Adventure Ridge most recently impact parking. Is that something the Association has on the radar?

Regards,
Pam

VHA Editor reply: Yes, our radar has 360 degrees of coverage.

Concerning the Quality of the Vail Experience

August 19, 2015

Vail faces another threat to the quality of the Vail Experience and that is the serious and growing problem of safety on Vail Mountain in the Winter. It appears that Vail Resorts is unwilling to really crack down on the perpetrators of this threat for fear of damaging the "Vail Experience" for visitors. While VR can point to the growing numbers of lift tickets sold – so far, I believe that deteriorating safety on the mountain might damage the Vail Experience and a growing number of regular Vail skiers agree. "The code", posted in many places on the mountain and printed on paper napkins, is a list of long-standing common sense skiing guidelines.

Unfortunately, there is a growing societal lack of common sense reinforced by a growing sense of “me first” entitlement.

There is no count of the numbers of people who go elsewhere to ski, or stop skiing altogether, because they fear being hit and injured on Vail Mountain. One might say that that fearful group is predominantly a diminishing number of older skiers and not a part of the “target market” of younger skiers and boarders. However, the fearful group does include young families with children and they are part of the target market. The number of injured skiers and snowboarders that the ski patrol hauls off the mountain is only a fraction of the total number of unreported injuries which don’t require ski patrol assistance and the countless “near misses” which go unreported. The “zero tolerance” signs for straight-lining and speed, in general, are largely meaningless because there is zero enforcement.

I chatted with a “yellow jacket” supervisor last September who said that there would be major improvements in the coming 2014 / 2015 ski season. There were significant improvements in control mechanisms and staff at the confluence of Northwoods, Northstar and Flapjack – a very heavily used area by all levels of skiers and boarders. I even saw the yellow jackets apprehend one of three lunatics screaming through that area and ignoring all the signs. The other two ignored them at no cost to themselves.

I shared a ride on chair 2 with, perhaps, the same supervisor one quiet day and inquired as to how many crazies he had apprehended that day. He said, correctly, that it was a quiet, un-crowded day and that most people were just here to have fun and needed only a quiet reminder / caution to ski / ride more safely. That probably is accurate for the vast majority of “one week per year” vacationing skiers / boarders. And they are undoubtedly the cause of some portion of the collisions due to being out of control and paying inadequate attention to their surroundings. But his comments ignore the greater safety threat caused by, I am sorry to say, numerous local hotshots who consider themselves above those mundane safety rules and regulations made for tourists and, frankly, could not care less.

The improvements in uphill transportation – new high-speed quads (chairs 10 and 5), new six-packs (chairs 4 and, next season, chair 2) increase the numbers of people per hour getting up the mountain, all of whom are coming down the mountain in the same increasingly crowded terrain. Add to that the, fortunately, small, but growing numbers of people on ski bikes, virtually all of whom have zero experience and no clue as to what they are doing and you have a very dangerous mix. Those ski bikes used to be confined to nighttime use at Lionshead. Turning them loose all over the mountain borders on irresponsible. Too many older skiers automatically blame the snowboarders for all the safety problems on the mountain, but that dates back several years to when the overwhelming majority, if not all, snowboarders were high testosterone teenage males with little or no sense. Today, the snowboarder population has diversified and matured and there are just as many irresponsible and dangerous skiers out there (maybe more) as there are irresponsible and dangerous snowboarders.

Possible solutions:

1. the ski patrol should be tasked with patrolling and enforcing safety rules and authorized to revoke lift passes;
2. all uniformed employees of Vail Resorts should be empowered to enforce the code and revoke lift passes;
3. there probably needs to be a substantial increase in the number of County Sheriff deputies employed on all weekends, as some are on major holiday weekends.

Joe McHugh - 08/19/15

September 3, 2015

Kudos to Joe McHugh for raising the alarm on the growing problem of safety on Vail Mountain (Letters to the Editor, Wednesday's Vail Daily). It is not just a lack of enforcement. VR has its marketing machine in high gear to sell the maximum number of Epic Passes possible and then some, virtually guaranteeing more accidents and near misses.

There is suppose to be a limit of about 20,000 people on the mountain, but it is a limit without any meaning; there are no penalties or consequences for going over the limit. When the limit is exceeded all that happens is VR, the town of Vail and the Forest Service "meet." The only currently effective limit on the number of people on the mountain is I-70 and, in a "careful what you ask for" situation, CDOT and the various corridor governments are working to improve the number of cars that can travel to Vail and beyond. Makes one wonder if we are not just one good snow day away from a major disaster.

VR has claimed that it is all right to "oversell" the mountain, much like the airlines oversell flights, because only a certain number of pass holders ever show. That has really worked well for the airlines. It remains to be seen whether it will work for VR as the number of passes climb.

At the end of the 2013-14 season, a group of concerned residents met with VR to raise these issues but got nowhere. VR claimed there really wasn't a problem or at least the number of incidents was not increasing but we had to take that on faith because the "safety data" is a closely guarded secret. VR's policy is zero transparency on what is happening on the mountain. Even if the data were available, it would only be "reported incidences" but it would be interesting to see just how VR is collecting the data. Until VR someday releases the data, there is only anecdotal evidence, and that evidence points to a growing problem.

Larry Stewart
