



The Ever Vail Master Plan – Vail’s Fourth Portal

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Ever Vail - Back On The Agenda

May 15, 2018

Town of Vail planning and development concerns will likely focus for the next 18 months on Vail Resorts’ Ever Vail project. VHA believes that the proposed public parking and transportation terminal included in the plan are essential to serve the proposed expansion of venues on Vail Mountain and in the community, and that great care should be taken to use associated undeveloped lands in a manner that does not diminish wildlife, fisheries or other environmentally sensitive habitats.

The project was envisioned as an extension of the town and a fourth portal to the mountain. But after preliminary approval in 2008, Vail Resorts announced that it was exiting the development business, and elements of the existing plan will expire in December of 2020 if the TOV does not grant an “extension” of their approval. Without an extension it is doubtful that the existing plan could be executed even if construction were started immediately since one of the first elements is the relocation of the Frontage Road, and it could take longer than 2020 to get that done.

The Town Council recently received a public *briefing on the status of the project* with respect to *what items remain to be resolved*. There were inferences in the council’s discussion that gave an indication that some officials believe that conditions had changed, and some elements of the plan need to be revisited.

The most notable was a reference to changes in affordable housing (inclusionary zoning) requirements. These changes will most likely include significant increases in the amount of affordable housing required of new development and expansions. This discussion is an outgrowth of a trend over the last few years to use negotiations to break long standing density restrictions.

Public parking and transportation facilities are key elements included in the Ever Vail plan. Central to the plan is the relocation of the South Frontage Road, moving it next to I70. The relocation would allow the consolidation of what is now a fragmented site into one contiguous development parcel. The consolidated site would provide for an efficient layout of subterranean parking and delivery/maintenance facilities over which commercial, residential, and a large bus terminal would be built.

The parking facility was to provide 683 publically accessible parking spaces, which would bring VRI closer to compliance with its 2007 USFS Mountain Development Plan. This amount of parking is sufficient to remove most, if not all, Frontage Road parking, which is a public safety hazard. However, a solution to replace the large number of parking spaces for employee vehicles that currently occupy the site should also be addressed.

The proposed bus terminal will be an important factor in relieving the commuter demand for public parking by adding an additional major terminal to handle commuter bus traffic. Trends are showing that there is growing demand to provide expanded bus service, which, if successful, can offset the demand to build expensive structured parking.

Increasing dependence upon buses means that additional dedicated travel and drop off/pick up (transfer) lanes will be required, which will be in conflict with maintaining on-street parking and landscape buffers that now occupy the frontage road right of way . The Town Council is becoming aware of an emerging conflict between losing on-street parking or landscaped corridors along the Frontage Roads as demand increases for throughway traffic and bus lanes. The town's frontage roads serve as a visual landscape buffer used to convey an appealing mountain resort image by visually masking the appearance of parking lots and large buildings as seen by motorist on both Interstate 70 and the Frontage Roads.

The Town Council recently discussed adding additional bus stops along the South Frontage Road at the Vail Village and Lionshead parking structures to handle projected increases in local/regional ridership and frequency of service. Current terminal facilities are being overwhelmed. Unobstructed and high volume rapid flowing traffic on the Frontage Roads is also critical to the community's emergency wildfire/mass evacuation strategy.

The Town is grappling with the relationship between preserving the natural environment and increasing urbanization to meet social equity goals directed at maintaining or increasing the presence of working and middle class populations in the community. Efforts to change the use of undeveloped lands that would diminish public open spaces, wildlife and fishery habitats have been met with opposition. The proposed amendments to the TOV's Open Lands Plan reflect some of the concerns of this opposition. So too has the reaction to increasing densities on development parcels, beyond existing limits, as a method to address a perception of social equity imbalances brought about by economic expansionism.

A presentation recently given to the Vail Town Council by government housing advocates says, to meet consumer demand for 5,900 "affordable" dwellings, enough to populate a town of 12,000 plus is needed to be built along the Eagle County I70 corridor by 2025. Their estimates, combined with guesstimates, project a 3,800 increase in retirement aged population in Vail alone, giving an indication of the potential demand and costs being placed upon public and private transportation related facilities and services.

The further away affordable housing is located from jobs the more costly is the transportation system to serve it. To bring housing closer to job generators, the more urbanized the density must become and the higher the costs of providing support facilities. Local governments are hard pressed, even now, to keep pace with current and future demand for housing or transportation. The sum of money required is probably, currently, beyond the means of both governments and the private sector, both individually or collectively, even with significant increases in urban densities.

Voters have repeatedly said that affordable housing and public parking should come from the private sector or not at all. Government officials go through elaborately choreographed approval processes to avoid conforming to public sentiment. There is an evolving awareness that “tourism can kill community.” Overcrowding and associated imbalances are self-correcting, i.e., if the experience is unpleasant, tourist will stay away. Perhaps the most cost and time effective strategy to bring unsustainable demand into balance is to do nothing to subsidize or incentivize growth.

In the meantime, it doesn't appear likely that Ever Vail or any other development will occur in the near term. Not only is the current plan going to expire with no prospective buyer in sight but it is doubtful that any buyer will come forward to undertake the entire project. A more likely scenario is subdivision of property and sales of smaller parcels, but that leaves no one to pick up the cost of the relocation of the Frontage Road. How the TOV will deal with this eventuality remains to be seen.

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