



Vail Mountain To Go Green.

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

What Vail Resorts Giveth With One Hand, It Taketh Away With The Other

August 14, 2017

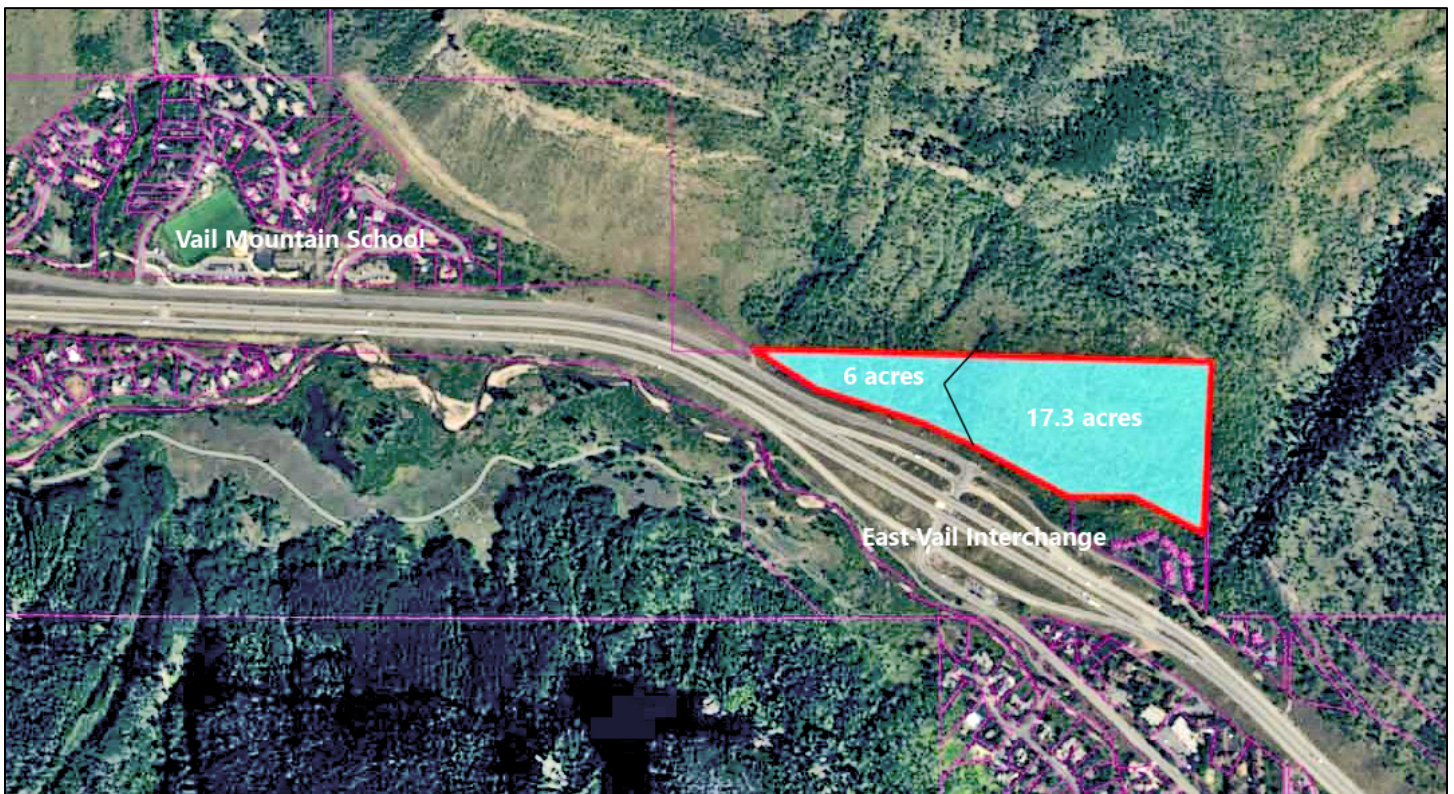
In recent weeks, two sides of Vail Resorts have been on display—the benevolent protector of the environment and the corporate goliath, who does what it pleases because it can. In the former role, VR announced a bold, far reaching program to go “green” in its operations. In the latter, VR announced it will seek to convert the zoning on 6 acres of vacant East Vail property that is currently zoned for duplex housing into an employee housing designation so that it can develop it into workforce housing for its employees. Unaddressed by either of these proposals was VR’s impact on community congestion. In this issue we examine those subjects.

VR’s Environmental Commitment. On the heels of the Town of Vail’s impending certification as the [first American sustainable resort community](#), Vail Resorts announced that by 2030 it intends to operate all its resorts with zero net emissions, zero waste to landfill and zero net operating impact to forests and habitat. Titled an "Epic Promise for a Zero Footprint," this is a broad sustainability commitment to operate so that VR’s guests and employees can enjoy the natural environment and mountain resources without leaving an impact. To achieve its goals, VR will work with leading sustainability experts in the industry.

At the same time, VR also announced that it was joining the RE100, a group of global companies committed to using 100 percent renewable energy. The group includes such industry leaders as Anheuser-Busch, InBev, Coca Cola, Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Nestle, Nike and Starbucks. VR is the first tourism business to join the group.

This appears to be the culmination of practices that began in 2008 when VR began to reduce its energy use. Since then it has been exceeding its goals, and part of the new plan includes continuing that commitment, upping the 2020 commitment by another 10% reduction and promising to cut net emissions in half by 2025. Kudos to VR for what could be a game-changing commitment to protect the environment.

At the announcement, VR's chief, Rob Katz, said, "This is not only doing the right thing; it's doing the smart thing." It remains to be seen what that means--whether this is just bottom-line oriented or whether VR has a real commitment that will involve using its size and political muscle to become a leader in the fight against climate change. In either event, because of VR's size and scale, the program will have an impact on vendors and suppliers alike, and as VR moves to only renewable energy, it can cause the creation of new renewable energy plants to feed VR's network of resorts. That will have a major impact in the Vail valley. And when coupled with the TOV efforts, the effects could be synergistic, bringing many important, positive changes to the Vail community.



Area of Vail Resort's Proposed Workforce Housing Project

VR's Proposed Workforce Housing. At the opposite end of the spectrum is VR's announcement concerning workforce housing. On the north side of I-70 and Frontage Road, between the Vail Mountain School and the East Vail exit, VR owns 23.3 acres that is currently zoned for duplex housing. At the present, this is vacant, open space land that is a major wild life corridor. VR has now announced that it is going to seek to rezone the property so that the western 6 acres can be used for employee (EHU) housing. The remainder would be rezoned as natural preservation land but would remain under VR ownership, and there would be nothing to prevent VR from later seeking to again rezone that property.

The twin lures of affordable housing and open space may be irresistible to Town officials—think what has already happened with the Roost Lodge property and the Mountain View development, where provisions for affordable housing have trumped zoning and neighborhood concerns. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that VR now seeks to subdivide its property and use part of it to satisfy its workforce housing needs.

EHU zoning would allow much greater development of this land. The current zoning has a maximum height allowance of 33 feet and setback and GRFA limitations. EHU has no height or setback limits, and while there are GRFA requirements, those can be side-stepped through a Special Development District application, a process that the Town seemed to have embraced anew. [VHA has criticized that spot-zoning process](#) as “zoning for sale” with the upper hand going to well healed developers, but so far, the TOV is proceeding with such applications as though they are the new norm.

Once VR has secured the rezoning, it plans to obtain a developer to plan and build the project. Most, if not all of the units would be master-leased to VR. Any unspoken for units would presumably be made available to the public. Financing would seem to be assured, as the development is supposed to be part of VR’s 2015 commitment to provide \$30 million in workforce housing across all its resorts.



Is this coming to East Vail?

What This Means. Beyond rezoning, VR has kept its plans under wrap, waiting to announce them until after it has secured the rezoning. However, a VR spokesperson indicated that the project would be on the order of 300 units (600-800± residents) and 5 to 6 stories high. Vail Resorts has however emphatically stated that it has no

present plans for development of the property and that it will not make any plans until after it has obtained rezoning of the property.

If this amount of density were to occur, to fit this within 6 acres, increased density and/or waiver of parking requirements would be required. One thing that is clear, a development of hundreds of highly concentrated units will change the character of the neighborhood. It will, also, be one of the first things that visitors coming from the east see as they enter the valley. Those considerations may be why no specific plans have been announced.

Also, yet to be addressed is traffic mitigation and the impact of such a development on the mass-transit bus routes to East Vail. Adding several hundred additional potential riders would overwhelm the current schedule.

Have the Skids Already Been Greased? It appears that VR has already cleared the way for its rezoning plans, and it is rushing to get them approved before any opposition can build or get organized. The Town Community Development Director immediately spoke positively about the plans, even promising “to do everything possible on our end” to help VR get its plan quickly approved. And, the first hearing is already scheduled in just a few weeks, on September 11th, which indicates that a lot of behind-the-scene work has already taken place. It is probably no coincidence that all of the zoning process is scheduled to take place during September and October when many are gone, and any opposition will be at its low ebb so that it will be a done deal by the time people return for the winter season. That would mean, however, that these plans would be voted on before the upcoming Town elections.



More of the Same

Nothing On Congestion. In the meantime, VR has done nothing about Town congestion. [As VHA has reported](#), VR’s “manage to” (i.e., capacity) number of 19,900 skiers per day on Vail Mountain is based in part

on the availability of 3,000 parking places in the TOV. As set forth in the Vail Mountain Master Development and Operating Plans that number includes a projected 750 spaces at Ever Vail and an additional 200 spaces at the Lionshead structure. Of course, neither of those has been built, and it doesn't appear that there are any prospects of that happening in the future. In addition, some of the other parking spaces listed in VR's inventory of available parking has either disappeared or been reduced by intervening development. As a result, currently, there are more or less 1000 parking spaces than necessary to support 19,900 skiers on Vail Mountain.

The Red Sandstone “Solution” Does Not Fix The Problem. Plans are currently underway to create a joint venture between the TOV and the Eagle County School Board to build a 160 space, 4 story parking garage as part of the Red Sandstone Elementary school renovation. VR has announced that its long-standing \$4.3 million parking commitment can be utilized for this project. Recently, someone has suggested that the structure be increased to 6 stories, a height that would dominate the area and block any views from the school. VHA opposes that increase and questions the [wisdom of a parking structure at that location](#), but even if it were to be built, regardless of which version is selected, the addition of a Red Sandstone parking garage would fall far short of making up the difference to support a 19,900 skier use of Vail Mountain.

It's Past Time For Action. The deficit of TOV parking has existed for a number of years. The resulting public safety issues from having to use on-street parking—already 35 days this year with Labor Day weekend still to come—only grows worse. If VR is not willing to make a major commitment to correct the problem, then its “managed to” number of 19,900 skiers should be proportionally reduced.

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.



Wildlife removal awaits TOV's approval and VR's bulldozers.

VHA [Membership:](#)