



Refashioning Vail’s strategies and priorities to meet the challenges of changing times.

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Letters to Vail

Town Council Election Issues:

Part 6

October 15, 2023

Candidates seeking a seat on the Vail Town Council and those desiring to hold the position of Mayor and authority are invited to submit their qualifications and positions on the following issues to the Vail Homeowners Association for publication.

This edition completes VHA’s series about Vail Town Council election issues begun on August 10th. All 10 editions are available on the Association’s website www.vailhomeowners.com.

Why Is Vail gridlocked by indecision and factional infighting?

Overview: All areas of Vail were intended to evolve as residential neighborhoods containing dwellings for short and long-term occupancy with supporting commercial services to sustain the residential community and resort under all conditions. The location of residential short-term occupancy was not encouraged within residential neighborhoods planned for long-term occupancy for reasons of compatibility.

The current versions of Vail Master Plans call for increasing open space, residential, commercial and recreational uses. When residential and commercial occupancies are expanded, governmental and philanthropic investments need to accompany the expansion. These investments are not solely for worker housing. They included a full range of public and community services. In current Master Plans, there is to be an inclusionary mix of residents, both short and long-term, that balance residential and tourist or short-term occupancy.

Vail's Stewardship Roadmap has the wherewithal to continue the TOV policies of dispersing demand for inclusive resident and tourism housing throughout the surrounding region. The transition toward bringing resort tourism in balance with the residential community need not be disruptive or divisive for either commercial or residential interests.

Part 6 : HUB Sites and Renovation of Dobson Arena:



Important decisions affecting the renovation of Dobson Arena are pending before the Vail Town Council.

The Town Council is evaluating its options to proceed with a major renovation of the Dobson Arena. By virtue of Dobson's location, it has sparked discussion of development of the Civic Center Area or Hub Site that would include the Vail Public Library, Lionshead Transportation Center and Parking Structure, and currently, Children's Garden of Learning day care. High stakes financial, design and operational issues are involved. The discussion has opened a competitive challenge regarding what will be built on the site and which entities will be responsible for managing and operating the renovated facility.

The Civic Center Site is a large acreage situated midway between Vail Village and Lionshead. The site was acquired by the TOV from Vail Associates (now Vail Resorts) in the early 1970s. There were strings attached to the acquisition; the Town of Vail took ownership with an understanding that it would become the community's civic center. It was also to provide for public transportation and visitor parking for Lionshead and Vail Mountain. The facilities and uses were to be a compelling expression of Vail as a community and as a resort.

For decades, the Town and community-oriented groups or individuals have been involved in visioning development of the Civic Center site which Dobson Arena is part of. The original reasoning behind the TOV's acquisition of the land is as relevant today as it was at the time of its purchase. Properly done, renovation of the

Dobson Arena in the community's interest can be the impetus to coordinating development in ways that complement adjacent commercial and institutional uses that also benefit the community.

As part of development, permanent public buildings would be built on land east of the Lionshead parking structure. The structures would include public functions that represent the heart and soul of Vail. The facilities are envisioned to inspire the cultural, athletic, educational, spiritual and aspirational principles that form the basis of the special qualities that constitute the Vail lifestyle and community. The first buildings to be built was the Dobson Arena, followed by the Lionshead parking structure and Vail Public Library which today are exhibiting signs of fatigue and obsolescence.

Over the years, the TOV and a variety of special interests have made several attempts to rebrand and repurpose the site. Nowadays, the redevelopment of the TOV's municipal complex could also join the mix.

If historic tendencies hold true, there will be consternation over arriving at an agreement on finances, uses and operational control to meet the intended purposes of the TOV's acquisition of the civic center site. Currently, some individuals question whether the community's aspirational goals should continue to be pursued, and instead suggest turning the entire effort over to resort commercial interests operating under the guise of serving the community's public interest.

Prior attempts to develop the additional facilities on the civic center site failed, largely caused by ambitious expectations propelling ever higher construction and operational costs. Should historical trends hold true, it is likely these same obstacles will arise in the proposed makeover of the arena. There are high dollar risks involved with the renovation. In the past, Vail has been considered a lifeboat of relative stability in chaotic economic conditions. Today, there are concerns about overloading the lifeboat with spiraling taxpayer debt. Concerns are further heightened by appending other aspiring proposals through the HUB initiative for a new municipal complex, additional amenities and added workforce housing.

Decisions to accumulate escalating debt to accommodate an agenda tied to expansive growth risks fostering an image of, if not actual, decline of both the community and resort.

The dilemmas before today's generation of community leaders remain unchanged from their predecessors. What has changed is a seeming indifference to the precepts of a shared sense of community. As in the past, given today's factional climate, will there be philanthropic interests that step forward to complete the vision for the Vail Civic Center? Can Vail rise above factional commercial self-interest?

History of the Civic Center or Hub Site:

The TOV acquired the civic center site justifying it as an overflow area on which to locate the facilities the community had described as needed in the planning of another major project, Ford Park. At the time, Ford Park had been recently purchased through a friendly condemnation. A design for the park was prepared by an eminent nationally recognized landscape architectural design firm. At the time, the design firm was the leader in advanced environmental city planning and landscape design.

The planning consultants recommended, after conducting a series of public meetings, that a large community center be built in the heart of Ford Park. The Community Center was to house a variety of community cultural educational, recreational activities and facilities.



The aspiration of an earlier generation of Vail visionaries that remains a possibility for Dobson Arena and its surroundings.

The TOV commissioned Frei Otto, the world-renowned architect of the Munich Olympic Stadium, to design a similar building for Vail's community center to be built in Ford Park. The resulting design for the proposed community center emulated the undulating transparent glass roof of the Munich stadium. The undulating roof, was similar in form, but much larger than the present entrance pavilion to the Ford Amphitheater.

The advanced technology required to build the structure drove construction costs beyond acceptable limits. The project was put to the voters. It failed to gain support. The vote also decided the community's priority, raised during the park planning hearings, to leave the park primarily as open space. Design standards were subsequently adopted that required any enclosed large structures built on the Park to be partially subterranean so that its appearance blended into the surrounding natural landscape.

In response to the unfulfilled calls for a community center, the Town Council decided to acquire another site for the purpose. The TOV was able to negotiate the purchase of the tract of land mid-way between Vail Village and Lionshead from Vail Associates (now Vail Resorts). The TOV, aided by a sizable donation from a philanthropic resident moved quickly to design and build the Dobson Arena as a multipurpose event center on the eastern edge of the civic center site. It was followed by the construction of a heavily landscaped grass roofed public library designed to blend into its natural setting along Gore Creek.

The design for the Dobson multi-purpose event arena was commissioned by an eminent architect with credentials for designing buildings that fit with the natural landscape. The commission included an Olympic size artificial ice rink fitted out to convert to the hosting of trade shows, conventions and concerts.

Neighboring residential property owners objected to their views being blocked by the arena roof line. Their objections dictated a low-profile shape for the arena roof. The roof of the arena was designed and built to be acoustically perfect, necessary to handle amplified sound for large audience events.

Once in operation, the dual functionality of Dobson Arena was successful until years later when fire and building codes became more restrictive. These unanticipated restrictions limit the variety and size of events that can occur within the Arena. As a result, it has become less of an economic generator to supplement commercial or resort development and host large community events.

VHA provides clear and concise discussions 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 discussions of issues facing the Town. If these are issues that concerns you, please make your views known to candidates and [town officials](#). 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. See back editions of VHA communications on the Association’s website.

To receive VHA letters and reports as a Reader, Paid-Subscriber or Member.

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