



Will future high-rise community housing repeat the design flaws as the Residence at Main Vail?

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Letters to Vail

Vail Public Housing and Open Space Town Council Election Issues: Part Three – Community Design and Planning. October 5, 2023

Candidates for 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.

Have the Town of Vail land use, master planning, zoning and design review regulations outlived their effectiveness? How can they be made effective and uniformly applied to achieve diversity, equality and, inclusion by implementing the community's stewardship goals?

The TOV has recently adopted the Vail Stewardship Roadmap with policies and strategies that are forward looking having a perspective on environment protection, managed tourism and social equality. The stewardship strategies call for a comprehensive study of carrying capacities such as water supply, diversification of the economy, preservation of its indigenous community, and environment. In many respects the Vail's Stewardship vision embraces the aspirations of multiple generations. There are, however, substantive differences that are underway that are counter-productive and a distraction from achieving long-term goals.

The pressure to keep pace with the need for worker housing is driven by Vail's open door employment housing and economic development policies. Were these policies to be changed, whereby the TOV enables housing solely for those workers who are employed in Vail, the demand for worker housing would shrink to meet the community's needs rather than that of the entire county, as it does today. The same rationale applies to limiting the promotion of tourism, which if restrained, would reduce demand for a larger workforce.

There is an attempt by a faction of work-force housing developers to exempt themselves from the TOV's rules governing the exterior architectural design of buildings. Their agenda is predicated upon a misperception that the only way to provide worker housing is to build high-rises and abandon setbacks and guidelines on density.

Vail has for years used design standards to downplay the urban appearance of high-rise buildings by adhering to architectural characteristics that are reflections of its alpine setting and landscape. It succeeds by requiring developers of large buildings to build their project with pitched roofs, substantially off-setting portions of façades and floor heights. The design code was established to avoid the imagery that high-rise buildings give to a resort community that promotes itself as a place to get away from the city.

Exceptions began occurring when public funds were used to finance work-force housing projects. Currently, a fraternity of TOV housing interests are seeking to exempt themselves from design standards altogether. If the TOV were to adopt a double standard, which differentiates between public and private projects, the message conveyed is of insider politics and profiteering.

Confusion about landscape design is a result of the Vail Fire Department's landscape recommendations, encouraging compliance with wildfire containment policies. The department insists that trees located within five feet of structures be removed and irrigated lawns be planted close to all buildings or that fire resistant materials be substituted. Fire Department policies have been countermanded by new water conservation standards set out by the Eagle River Water and Sanitation District. The district's rules call for saving trees and doing away with irrigated lawn and replacing it with drought resistant landscape.

The attempt of bringing the Residences at Main Vail to minimally comply with design standards is insincere and ineffective. The building's appearance is not consistent with that of its neighbors or its natural surroundings. It is the intent of the design standards for buildings to be architecturally harmonious with adjoining structures and the natural surroundings. The TOV's standards have adequate flexibility to meaningfully achieve design standards that would minimally affect reaching the goal of providing a diversity of inclusive housing within the Town of Vail. The TOV Design Review Board made the point of non-compliance by rejecting the proposal. The Town Council subsequently overruled the DRB and approved the deficient design on appeal.

Efforts are underway with the intent to avoid the mistakes of the Residences at Main Vail in new proposed developments. They are the next phase of Timber Ridge and the Middle Creek community housing projects. These efforts are being taken within the context of an intention by the State of Colorado's to impose diversity, equality and inclusiveness housing standards by taking away mountain communities' self-determination powers (Home Rule) over land use and zoning.

Vail, Eagle County and the communities in the surrounding region have diligently evolved solutions to social equity challenges through localized land use controls. The TOV is in the process, in accordance with a recently updated master plan, of altering zoning throughout much of West Vail. The purpose of the zoning changes is to increase the opportunities for community housing, but is raising issues of compatibility, consistency and spot zoning. State or Federal authorities would be welcomed in this process should their involvement result in harmonious and inclusive outcomes.

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 concern 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.

Contact:

vailhomeownersassoc@gmail.com

Post Office Box 238 Vail, Colorado 81658

Telephone: (970) 331-2099 Email: vha@vail.net Website: <https://www.vailhomeowners.com>

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