



Vail Town Council candidates electioneering - The Town's election process and code of ethics needs updating.

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Vail Visioning Report – Needed Public Investments

Overview: The outcome of the 2015 Town Council election affirms the Vail Homeowners Association's perspective that there is a desire in the community for a new generation of Town of Vail leaders. There is now a four vote majority of the new generation. This new majority affirms a higher probability that more non-tenured candidates will seek to join the Council in the 2017 election.

The prospect is enhanced for acceleration of a more inclusive collaboration among permanent and part-time residents in the affairs of the Town of Vail. A key indicator will be if the incoming Council takes steps to increase opportunities to mentor the entire community in its governing processes and expands voter participation through mail balloting accompanied by a longer period for campaigning. [Voter participation rates](#) in this election remained low at around 21% with voter registrations having decreased by nearly 250 (4,012) since the 2013 election.

A New Day or the Old Ways? Affordable housing and parking remain the dominant issues; the Gore Creek cleanup is lurking in the background. Currently, the TOV is in a financially advantageous position. To invest in solutions, to do them the right way, to get to the next level, will require more money than what is in the Town's reserve funds. To get the necessary funding to take the next step up, the Town is going to have to convince the voters. They are going to have to aggressively sell the propositions. There is a case to be made that now is the time to take up that task. The question awaits an answer from the newly elected Council.

The TOV, in recent years, has pieced together funding sources for affordable housing, enough to show that it is being responsive, but not enough to get ahead of the challenge. Likewise, for centralized, structured public parking.

Public officials have few inexpensive solutions that match the scale of the affordable housing and parking challenges, as a mounting volume of feasibility studies attests. The best that can be managed, without going to the voters, are solutions that don't come near matching the demand.



First stage of the Timber Ridge Affordable Housing Redevelopment to be completed by March; some units are now occupied.

Affordable Housing: The Town, some believe, has set an unrealistic goal of providing 30% of its work force housing needs within the existing Town limits. There are few, if any, sites within its existing boundaries to add the number of housing units planners say that are needed. There is little discussion about the future needs of an expanding cohort of retirement-aged local workers who already occupy an increasing proportion of affordable housing.

The Town has limited ability to finance large scale development, even if there were ample land for development within the existing municipal boundaries. The Town has regulations that require private developers to fund affordable housing when commercial projects are built, but the pace of higher density development has slowed.

At the same time, the pace of tourism has increased, creating a higher demand for work force rental and owner occupied housing. If the Town were to pursue a strategy of increasing density (GRFA) in the East and West Vail residential neighborhoods, it would likely hasten the departure of local residents who would want to take advantage of the financial gains and leave town. The community is [feeling growth pressure](#) as an increasing number of Americans are moving to rural recreational counties throughout the Rocky Mountain West. Vail, is also experiencing growth stresses from an influx of Latin American tourism and property investment. Eagle County, [State demographers say](#) is now the 7th fastest growing county in Colorado. The high cost of workforce housing may be a primary factor in slowing job growth, which is a major component of the estimated 41,000 population increase projected for the next 25 years.

What Are Some of the Options? There is a growing awareness that the [Town may have to acquire land beyond its present boundaries](#) to build more rental and permanent resident housing for working and retired employees. There are large neighborhood-sized State and Federal owned sites in the area of Dowd Junction that could be turned to this purpose and be annexed into the Town of Vail. Each is fraught with complications, the least of which is other jurisdictions may well covet these sites for their own purposes. Even if Vail were to prevail in acquiring these sites, the question of finding the millions of dollars to develop hundreds of housing units is daunting. It is doubtful that it can be accomplished without, at some point, voter approval.

Parking and Transportation: A goal of sustainable tourism is to get arriving consumers out of their cars quickly and into the shops, restaurants and attractions. Vail has successfully done this for 40 years through its strategically located parking structures in the heart of the community's commercial Town Center.

It has been nearly 30 years since the Vail Village parking structure was expanded and the Town of Vail last increased its inventory of structured public parking.

The Town's Vail Village and Lionshead parking structures were built beginning in the 1970's to meet the commercial needs of Vail Mountain and the Town Center. The voter- approved general obligation bonds used to build these parking structures were paid off in 2012, leaving the Town of Vail debt free. For years, planners have estimated that the Town Center has a shortfall in parking of nearly 1,000 spaces. A shortcut approach has been taken by expanding parking on the Frontage Roads, which is fraught with public safety and image issues.

Vail's summer on-mountain attractions are poised to take a quantum leap in the number of tourism visits; the schedule is overlaid with special events being held on public streets throughout the Town Center and could overpower all forms of available parking and seriously congest roadways. This would send the wrong message to consumers.

Planners are looking at ways to make improvements that could help alleviate the problems. One of these is the Simba Run Underpass, now under construction. Traffic engineers say this underpass will improve traffic flow at the Interstate 70 interchanges, move traffic efficiently along the Frontage Roads and provide for express bus service between all of the Town's commercial centers. When other associated Frontage Road improvements are completed, the Town will gain a free flowing landscaped main boulevard with no stop lights, strategically placed roundabouts and turn lanes onto neighborhood streets.

Over the years several parking studies have been conducted that give indications of methods to increase the capacity of both the Vail Village and Lionshead parking structures. The municipal site could be redeveloped for structured parking. Incentives are now in the Town's regulations to entice private developments to provide public parking. While this can be a long-term strategy, it is not in the short-term because the inventory of new residential and commercial development has slowed to since 2007.

Increase Taxes or Turn a Blind Eye – A Matter of Leadership: If the town moves forward with acquiring locations for affordable housing outside of the town, it will need to provide either more parking spaces in town or enhanced bus service from these new neighborhoods. Is it a wise investment for the Town to build parking for commuting workers when the cost of a structured parking space can rival the cost of a new affordable housing unit? Or, would the taxpayers' money be better spent in augmenting the existing regional and in-town bus system, so that it meets the needs of Vail's work force, residents and guests?



Prankster satirizes Vail's parking shortage.

The Town, by paying for major projects out of the general fund, avoids letting the voters decide priorities; this does a disservice to the community. Keeping the voters in the dark by withholding their access to the ballot box keeps citizens from evaluating the relative importance of issues that are central to the future of the entire community. If the voters are unwilling to support financing of these types of projects, it begs the question, why does the Town government persist in pursuing actions that result in higher levels of growth?

Long term solutions to these nagging issues will need taxpayer support. The time is coming when the community's leaders will need to go to the voters to consider both a sales tax and property tax increase.

How well public officials balance the Town's cash on-hand, with borrowing against the future through bonding, will be central to gaining the trust of the electorate and the community at large. These issues are equally important and are interlocking; one cannot be solved independently of the other.

2015 TOV Milestones: The success of the 2015 World Alpine Championships aside, Vail, as a ski resort, continues its decline in the annual [Ski Magazine consumer survey](#) dropping from 5th to 7th place. The reasons for the slide are attributed to high prices, difficult access, and the urbanization of the Vail experience. A researcher at the Steyer-Taylor Center for Energy Policy and Finance at Stanford University speculates that [snow-reliant companies could experience potential financial losses](#) from warmer early and late winter weather conditions. Vail Resorts says its focus is upon growing its summer business not in reaction or in anticipation to any concerns about its winter business. It is an opportunity that the company feels will be an incremental addition to its continued strong winter business.

The Town's economic diversification model is seeking ways of moving beyond incentivizing seasonal events to creating year round venues. It is anticipating increasing medical tourism as a result of its consideration of the expansion of the Vail Valley Medical Center and potential redevelopment of the Evergreen Hotel and Municipal Center sites. It is likely that the diversification effort will be further augmented by a push toward educational tourism, through the recently announced desire to pursue the development of a [lifelong educational program and facility in the Vail's Town Center](#).

The Town's success is indicated by the growth in lodging occupancy. Predictions are being made that peak periods of full occupancy will soon occur in the summer as it already does during winter. This, at first blush is a good thing, but cumulatively in the long-term, there could be unintended consequences if the present attitude of "growth-for-growth's sake" remains dominant without an accompanying investment in public infrastructure.



Ever More Frontage Road Parking Forevermore?

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