
STATE OF THE VALLEY: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Issues & Trends in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys

DRAFT

2003-2004

Compiled by Healthy Mountain Communities



The mission of Healthy Mountain Communities is to help communities collaborate, innovate and prosper. HMC organizes ongoing forums for regional dialogue, collaboration and networking and offers a package of data, strategic planning and decision support tools to help community leaders better understand issues and implement solutions at the local and regional level.

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INTRODUCTION

This publication, the State of the Valley: the Year in Review is a compilation of articles from local news sources on some of the key issues and trends affecting the residents and communities of the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys. The timeframe covered in this review is roughly from May 2003 to April 2004.

The categorization of a “key issue” is a subjective one that is influenced by mission of Healthy Mountain Communities- to help communities collaborate, innovate, and prosper in an ever changing world. The articles in this review are also influenced by what gets regularly covered by the media. Consequently, this review is far from comprehensive, but we hope that the scope of issues covered within reflect the range of issues that effect the health, welfare of the communities in our region. We also hope that this review offers a perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing our region and how together, we can create a place we are proud to call home.

As the articles compiled in this review illustrate, the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys make up a dynamic region with dynamic problems. There are also a number of innovative efforts to address these problems. It is our hope that HMC’s efforts to foster regional dialogue, provide quality information, and facilitate collaborative strategies contributes to the rich ecology of solutions taking shaping in the region.

“We are organized to address challenges and deliver services at the federal, state, and local levels, but the tough challenges are not respecting jurisdictional boundaries. They are primarily emerging at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels.”

William Dodge

“We produce what we do not intend because we enact systems we do not see.”

Peter Senge

“We have not invented all the institutions we will ever need in order to live in the West.

Donald Worster

“People make decisions based on what the facts mean to them, not the facts themselves.”

Annette Simmons

CITIZEN INITIATIVES AND REFERENDA

GLENWOOD VOTERS CLIP RED FEATHER RIDGE'S WINGS; ANNEXATION NIXED

Red Feather Ridge was defeated in a special city election Tuesday by more than 1,000 votes. The final tally was 1,886 no votes to 671 voters in support of the proposed development.

Red Feather Ridge was a 149-lot subdivision planned for 132 acres on the east side of Four Mile Road, just outside the city limits of Glenwood Springs. The plan included open space, park land and land for a new city cemetery. City Council approved annexation and zoning for the project in a 4-3 vote Jan. 8.

More than 1,000 people who oppose the project signed a petition circulated by CVRG asking City Council to refer the project's fate to voters. Council agreed to refer the question to voters. With the city annexation and zoning rejected, MidFirst Bank will move forward with selling the 57 lots approved under the original county plan.

Edited from article by Greg Masse and Heather McGregor, 6.25.2003 www.postindependent

MARKETPLACE SHUT DOWN IN CARBONDALE

Carbondale residents defeated Crystal River Marketplace 787-601 Tuesday in what is believed to be a record voter turnout. The vote means California developer Brian Huster must come up with an alternative plan to build a shopping center on his 24-acre property on Highway 133. It is already zoned for commercial uses.

A total of 1,388 of Carbondale's 2,700 registered voters cast ballots in the special election, which followed approval in February by the Carbondale Board of Trustees. The previous turnout record was 957 in the 2002 trustee election.

Crystal River Marketplace opponents, first led by Mountain Folks for Global Justice and later the Carbondale Town Mothers, objected to the 125,000-square-foot big-box anchor tenant the developer promised. They said the shopping center would create traffic impacts on Highway 133, and was out of scale with the rest of the town. Supporters, including the Carbondale Chamber of Commerce, said Carbondale needed the increased sales tax revenues the Marketplace would bring, and residents needed the shopping opportunities

Edited from article by Lynn Burton, 7.16.2003 www.postindependent

SNOWMASS INITIATIVE SHOT DOWN

Snowmass Village voters on Tuesday rejected by 64 votes a divisive initiative that could have threatened Base Village and other future large developments.

The vote, which drew 822 of Snowmass Village's 1,673 registered voters, was 443 against the initiative to 379 in favor of it.

If passed, the initiative would have changed the town's land use code, requiring the public to vote on all future developments that exceeded the code by a certain percentage.

While it was questionable whether the initiative would have even applied to the Base Village project, the vote has at least momentarily eliminated the uncertainty surrounding the review process.

A joint proposal from Intrawest and the Aspen Skiing Co., Base Village would add 641,371 square feet of residential space to Snowmass Village, including 349 condos, 264 hotel units and 10 townhomes, and 63,927 square feet of commercial space.

Citizens for Responsible Growth (CRG), which feels the project is too large, launched the initiative in December to counter what they claimed was an unresponsive Town Council.

The Town Council's final decision on the project is perhaps months away. The possibility of a referendum now looms, which would force a final yes/no vote from the public regarding Base Village.

Edited from article by Steve Benson, 3.17.2004, www.aspentimes.com

ECONOMY

WILL SOUTH RIFLE'S BOOM LEAD TO NORTH RIFLE'S BUST?

The furor over Wal-Mart's impending arrival and other commercial development in south Rifle has been running at a fever pitch long before the first shovel of dirt was tossed at the groundbreaking on March 11, 2003. The south Rifle commercial development is expected to bring in more than 75,000 new shoppers a year, generating more than \$1.6 million in annual sales.

But as much excitement and anticipation that has come since the official announcement that a 145,000 square foot Wal-Mart was coming, there's also great anxiety stirring among the business owners of north Rifle. As south Rifle booms, mystery will shroud north Rifle for the next year and beyond. Can they survive as south Rifle becomes the core of business activity in a city of a little more than 7,000 people?

Most businesses in north Rifle offer shoppers unique or specific items. Destination-based businesses like the banks, Rifle Packing and Sausage Company, Columbine Ford and others don't need visibility to help them survive. Other stores, however, would benefit from extra foot traffic and visibility.

With the Wal-Mart Supercenter offering residents the convenience of groceries as well as other items, many shoppers will choose south Rifle over north Rifle, but a new 50,000 square foot City Market will be an attractive lure to many in the area. Most agree that commercial growth in south Rifle will be good for Rifle as a whole. Where the mystery lies is how will the business sector two and three miles to the north adapt, adjust and survive once the south Rifle commercial monster comes to life?

Edited from article by Dale Shrull, 7.31.2003, www.citizentelegram.com

FOR SECOND MONTH, RIFLE'S TAX GAIN IS GLENWOOD'S LOSS

Glenwood Springs took another big hit on sales tax revenues in December 2003, while Rifle collected almost as much as Glenwood Springs lost.

Glenwood Springs December sales tax revenues fell by \$130,783, or 11 percent, compared to December 2002, and Rifle's December 2003 revenues climbed by \$110,750, or 47 percent, compared to the same month a year earlier.

December marked the second straight month for big gains in Rifle and painful losses in Glenwood Springs, largely explained by the opening of a Super Wal-Mart in Rifle on Oct. 29. In November 2003, Glenwood Springs lost \$92,000 in sales tax revenues compared to a year earlier, while Rifle posted a \$120,000 gain.

As a result, Glenwood Springs ended 2003 with a 2.5 percent total drop in sales tax revenues, collecting \$10.2 million in 2003 compared to nearly \$10.5 million in 2002. The difference was \$261,620. The city collected a record \$10.7 million in 2001, on a sales tax rate of 3.45 percent.

Rifle ended the year with a 17.8 percent increase in sales tax revenues, up by nearly \$400,000, for a total of \$2.6 million in revenues. The city's sales tax rate is 2 percent.

In December alone, Rifle's retail sector jumped from \$26,500 in sales tax revenues in 2002 to \$120,100 in 2003 — an increase of 352 percent.

Sales taxes collected by Garfield County government reinforce the view that Glenwood Springs tax dollars have migrated westward to Rifle. Collections of the county-wide 1 percent sales tax climbed by a modest 3.45 percent in 2003, rising from \$5.9 million collected in 2002 to \$6.1 million collected in 2003.

In other words, total sales in the county did not climb much in 2003 compared to 2002, meaning that much of Rifle's gains were offset by losses in Glenwood Springs.

Rifle's Super Wal-Mart may continue to erode the Glenwood Springs sales tax base for the next year and a half, until the Target and Lowe's big box stores open at Glenwood Meadows. They are projected to open in fall 2005, with construction to start this spring.

Edited from article by Heather McGregor, 2.16.2004, www.postindependent.com

ASPEN SALES CONTINUE TO SIZZLE

The \$44.7 million in total sales eclipsed the record February of 1998 and came on the heels of a record January when the city saw \$45.3 million in total sales activity.

Virtually every segment of the local economy posted gains in February. Tourist accommodations were up 13.3 percent, and restaurant/bar business jumped 6.3 percent. Clothing stores and other shops all did well; the sports equipment/clothing category was up 22 percent, compared to the same month a year ago.

Business last year took a nose dive with the start of war in Iraq following President George Bush's State of the Union address in late January.

This year, retail sales are up 15 percent, compared to the first two months of 2003.

In the 1990s, retail sales grew by an average annual rate of 6.8 percent per year between 1994 and 1998, before the economy stumbled, and sales either remained flat or dropped each year, noted Paul Menter, City of Aspen Finance Director.

Had the upward trend the city enjoyed between 1994 and 1998 continued through to 2004, the city would have seen more than \$560 million in additional sales, he said. But those sales didn't take place.

Edited from article by Janet Urquhart, 4.6.2004, www.aspentimes.com

CATALYST JOB FOR DOWNTOWN GETS ASPEN COUNCIL'S NOD

A "downtown catalyst" will be hired to spearhead efforts to improve Aspen's retail scene, the City Council decided Tuesday.

And after two hours of arguing, a council majority agreed the catalyst will technically be employed by the Aspen Chamber Resort Association and will answer to a three-member executive board.

Council members also agreed to form a broader, advisory board to assist the catalyst, comprised of representatives from a cross section of primarily the business community.

The city's Commercial Core and Lodging Commission drafted a job description for the position. It calls for the catalyst to meet with retailers and represent their interests, initiate a Business Improvement District and generate ideas for revitalizing the retail environment.

Councilman Torre alone opposed creating the post, contending the city staff should be able to handle the tasks without spending \$70,000 — the proposed salary for the post. He noted the city is already moving forward with ideas to revitalize the downtown, including installing fire pits on the mall and instigating last year's Friday Afternoon Club concerts.

His council colleagues, however, agreed the position is a wise investment to make things happen more quickly. The city will front the money for the post for the first six months of work. A surcharge on business license fees, collected in December, has been discussed as a way to recoup the cost.

Edited from article by Naomi Havlen, 3.4.2004, www.aspentimes.com

EDUCATION

RE-2 MILL LEVY OVERRIDE FAILS

In 2001, Garfield School District Re-2 voters passed a \$39 million bond referendum by a healthy margin, with 62 percent approving it.

But what a difference a couple of years can make. When voters were asked again in November 2003 to boost their property taxes — this time, to fund a yearly \$4 million mill levy override — they said no.

In September, the override vote seemed like a natural win to school board members and district administrators. The 2001 bond question was designed to pay for new district buildings and improve existing ones. The mill levy override would pay for the ingredients inside the schools: staffing, full-time kindergarten, before- and after-school programs and equipment upgrades.

In October, confusion over what the override would actually cost property owners further divided voters. Opponents challenged superintendent Gary Pack's statement that the mill levy would cost \$34 on a \$100,000 house, when Garfield County Assessor Shannon Hurst said the figure was actually \$93.85.

By the time of the election on Nov. 4, Re-2 district officials were cautiously optimistic about the mill levy passing. But those hopes fell as election results came in. The question was defeated 56 percent to 44 percent.

The defeat wasn't as convincing as 2001's bond issue win, but district administrators know they've got a challenging election ahead as they look to November 2004 to receive approval from voters.

Edited from article by Carrie Click, 12.31.2003, www.postindependent.com

ASPEN SCHOOL DISTRICT: TUITION PLAN INEVITABLE

Charging tuition for kindergarten in the Aspen School District is all but inevitable, but the charges may not go into effect until 2005, the school board revealed last night. The board also promised to set up a financial aid fund for lower-income families if the charges go ahead.

The school district recently launched a three-year program to balance a nearly \$1 million deficit. One of the measures recommended for next year is to scrap a long-standing district policy of offering free full-day kindergarten. Because the state only reimburses schools for a half day of kindergarten, the district loses approximately \$400,000 a year by offering full days for free.

All five members said they support the idea of tuition, but three of the five (enough to pass a decision) said they would delay charges for a year in order to give parents, teachers and administrators ample time to prepare.

Parents, residents and teachers all expressed concern that parents who could not afford the tuition, or would rather spend more time with their children, would opt to send their students only for half days. They said this would be detrimental to the emotional and intellectual development of the students.

The district said tuition will be paid on a sliding scale ranging up to \$320 a month. Support will be need-based and determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's income guidelines for its free lunch program in high-cost living areas.

Edited from article by Eben Harrell, 4.8.2004, www.aspentimes.com

ENVIRONMENT

VALLEY'S PIÑON FORESTS IN JEOPARDY

The Roaring Fork Valley is ripe for an infestation of a beetle that will wipe out piñon trees covering thousands of acres, according to a top forestry expert on the West Slope. John Denison, the district forester for the Colorado State Forest Service, said the conditions in the valley make the piñon susceptible to a specific pest known as the Ips beetle.

"There are too many trees competing for too little water," said Denison recently after touring the site of a potential forest-thinning project on the slopes above Basalt.

He said the Ips beetle favors piñon, which is the predominant tree covering the valley walls from Glenwood Springs to Woody Creek. Piñon can also be found on the south-facing slopes of the upper valley, like in the Hunter Creek Valley, according to Pitkin County wildlife biologist Jonathan Lowsky.

Denison said there are spots in the Roaring Fork Valley where the beetle has already attacked. Drought has stressed the trees, making them susceptible. The valley's piñon and juniper forests also tend to be older, and they haven't been cleared or burned for decades, he noted. Similar piñon forests in the Cortez and Durango areas have been wiped out in recent years.

"As far as you can see, it's just brown trees," Denison said. "The whole Roaring Fork Valley will be surprised how quickly it can affect it."

He estimated that 80 percent of the trees could die. The needles of dead trees change from green to yellow to reddish brown. Denison said thinning of piñon forests could also reduce competition and stress among trees and make them less susceptible to Ips beetles. However, he suspects the spread of the beetle will be quicker than the thinning of the thousands of acres of piñon forests.

Edited from article by Scott Condon, 12.16.2003, www.aspentimes.com

SNOWPACK LEVELS: ECHOES OF '02

Snowpack readings in the Upper Colorado River Basin — which includes the Roaring Fork Valley — are getting eerily close to 2002 levels. Sparse snow in the basin during the winter of 2002 made that spring's runoff one of the poorest ever. In turn, there were water restrictions across the state and the low snowpack, combined with a dry spring, contributed to one of the worst fire seasons in the Colorado history.

As of late March, the basin's mountain snowpack was listed at 69 percent of average — just 3 percent higher than March 29, 2002 — by the U.S.D.A. Snow Survey Office's Snotel sites, which are set up at various locations and elevations across the state. The seven sites in the Crystal, Fryingpan and Roaring Fork basins currently show that snowpack is just 61 percent of average, 2 percentage points lower than March 29, 2002.

"We had a pretty good recovery last year. Right now we're right about where we were going into 2002," said Dave Merritt, an engineer for the Colorado River Water Conservation District in Glenwood Springs. "We're nowhere near where we were coming out of 2002."

One possible piece of good news is that John Henz, a long-range weather forecaster who works at HDR Engineering in Denver, predicts that Colorado will have a stormy spring. Henz said storms are building throughout the globe that have the potential of bringing moisture to Colorado.

After a dry winter in 2003, Henz predicted a wet spring in Colorado — and that's exactly what happened. A huge blizzard on the Front Range and a steady flow of storms on the Western Slope brought snowpack levels up to or above average for the season.

Merritt said even if the drought matches the severity of 2002, residents of the state will be much more prepared. "We're more attuned to it. For the Front Range folks in 2002, it took them a while to respond. Now they're very sensitive to it," Merritt said. "It is a desert, after all, and people tend to forget that."

Edited from article by Greg Masses, 3.30.2004, www.postindependent.com

BACTERIA MAJOR WEAPONS IN WEST NILE WAR

Garfield County will rely heavily on biological weapons in its battle against West Nile virus in 2004. West Nile virus, potentially deadly to humans, is expected to peak on the Western Slope this year. To counter the spread of the disease, county officials have hired Colorado Mosquito Control Inc. of Brighton on a \$100,000 contract to control the insects known to carry West Nile.

Colorado Mosquito Control's principal efforts in Garfield County will be against mosquitoes in their larval stage, which live in still water and are easier to eliminate than adult insects.

The anti-larvae campaign will rely primarily on biological methods, using specialized bacteria to attack mosquito larvae, said Michael McGinnis, the company's president. Areas that need to be treated with larvicide will be identified by mapping areas with standing water early in the season. These include stagnant ditches, flood-irrigated pastures, natural wetlands and wet stream bank areas. A third method, a chemical called Altosid, will be used to control mosquito larvae in areas that technicians can't easily return to. Altosid is an insect growth regulator, a type of hormone.

West Nile virus infected 2,945 Colorado residents last year, and killed 55 in the state. Steve Anthony, Garfield County's vegetation management specialist, said the disease is known to be most virulent in the second year it affects an area. West Nile was first seen on Colorado's Western Slope in the summer of 2003, so 2004 could be a bad year.

Edited from article by Jeremy Heiman, 3.18.2004, www.postindependent.com

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ROARING FORK VALLEY HEALTH PLAN UNVEILED

A 10-year effort to bring affordable health insurance coverage to the Roaring Fork Valley finally paid off with the unveiling of an experimental program unparalleled in the country.

A nonprofit organization called the Roaring Fork Valley Community Health Plan signed a contract with regional insurer PacifiCare to provide "competitive" coverage for employees of valley businesses. The contract is good for three years and can be extended.

The Community Health Plan is essentially an insurance cooperative that is open to any business in the valley, from major corporations to mom-and-pop operations and self-employed individuals operating as a business. However, individuals without affiliation with a business cannot join. Health care providers such as the hospitals in Aspen and Glenwood Springs and physician groups have agreed to participate in the program.

The program is intended to be an antidote to the health insurance crisis facing western Colorado and rural areas in general. Many small businesses cannot help employees pay for coverage while others cannot offer insurance at all.

Information about the new community health plan is available at www.RFCHP.com or by calling 704-9421 or e-mailing info@rfchp.com.

Edited from article by Scott Condon, www.aspentimes.com, 6.20.2003

FOUNDATION WORKING TO FUND YOUTHZONE

YouthZone, the region's 26-year-old nonprofit youth agency, is facing severe cuts in federal and state funding. According to executive director Debbie Wilde, this year's budget cuts alone total more than \$320,000.

So what's a nonprofit organization to do? Throw a party.

Friday night, YouthZone invited more than 50 donors and potential donors to the Glenwood Caverns Adventure Park for an upscale dinner, complete with cocktails and complimentary rides on the Iron Mountain Tramway to and from Exclamation Point, the park's mountaintop restaurant.

On the surface, the event might seem like a needless expense for a nonprofit hit hard by cutbacks. But actually, the entire soiree didn't cost the youth organization a dime - and it generated a lot of good will.

In order to deal with deep budget cuts, YouthZone started a separate organization this past March. Called the YouthZone Foundation, the new nonprofit is designed to ultimately serve as the agency's funding entity.

It seems to be working. In just eight months, foundation members have generated more than \$110,000 for YouthZone's programs and operations, surpassing their \$100,000 goal for the year.

For more information about YouthZone, call 945-9300 or visit www.youthzone.com.

Edited from article by Carrie Click, 10.26.2003, www.postindependent.com

GARFIELD SOCIAL SERVICES LACKS ADEQUATE FUNDING

The Garfield County Department of Social Services is feeling the effects of cutbacks in state funding.

"Over the last two years there has been a huge amount of budget cuts at the state level," said Lynn Renick, director of Garfield County Social Services.

Renick presented a mid-year report for the fiscal year of July 1, 2003, to June 30, 2004, to the county commissioners on Tuesday.

Renick said while the population and social services needs of Garfield County have continued to grow, the funding the state provides has remained the same, or in some cases, been cut back.

One example of the social services needs in Garfield County is evident in the child services department.

Social Services is projecting that it will go beyond its allocated funding by the end of this fiscal year, June 30, in its residential treatment center, child welfare, and child care programs, according to the report.

Renick cautiously said the department might go over its allocated funds by \$400,000.

According to the report's projections, however, the department looks as if it could go over by as much as \$750,000.

Edited from article by Ryan Graff, 2.18.2003, www.postindependent.com

AVH IN CRISIS AS LOSSES REACH \$11.7 MILLION

Aspen Valley Hospital officials announced last night that due to faulty billing practices, they will be forced to write off \$11.7 million in uncollected hospital bills, a full \$5 million more than anticipated.

The loss has dangerously depleted the hospital's coffers, forcing officials to renegotiate hospital loans, look into significant cuts of hospital staff, put a halt to AVH's long-term renovation project and spend nearly \$2.5 million to fix its billing process.

Limited billing codes prevented the hospital from charging for all services performed, and outdated software failed to alert officials when a bill had aged past five months, making it impossible to distinguish between bills that were 5 months old and 2 years old. Insurance companies rarely pay for bills sent out six months or more after treatment.

All this adds up to nearly \$12 million that officials say they will be unable to collect, although they are in talks with insurance companies to reclaim some portion of the loss.

The hospital has gone to great expense to fix the billing process. Approximately \$900,000 has been spent on diagnosing its faults, and around \$1.5 million to install new, state-of-the art billing software. Officials hope these changes will mean AVH can turn its loss last year into a forecasted revenue of \$600,000 for 2004.

Within the next month, the hospital will also announce extensive changes to staffing, including cutting down on overtime, varying employee hours to coincide with Aspen's tourist seasons, renegotiating lucrative physician contracts and even some layoffs.

Edited from article by Eben Harrell, 4.13.2004, www.aspentimes.com

HOUSING

BASALT WEIGHS OPTIONS FOR RELOCATING TRAILER PARK RESIDENTS

With the Roaring Fork Trailer Park under new ownership and in the flood plain, Basalt and Pitkin County officials are working with residents and the developer to relocate the 52 families in the trailer park.

The Town has known it will be necessary to relocate residents out of the floodplain since it learned about the dynamics and dangers of the river in the River Master Plan process last year. The park property was recently purchased for roughly \$4 million by an Illinois-based development group that wants to redevelop the site into a mixed-use commercial project.

The trailer park, although in the heart of Basalt, is actually in Pitkin County. The County has previously said that it will not change the current use for the parcel. If there is to be redevelopment, the developer will need to be annexed into the Town of Basalt, which has an ordinance that 100% of existing affordable housing on a site must be replaced if the site is redeveloped. While there is no guarantee that the displaced families will get the new housing, the Town is working hard to help them make the transition equitably.

In an effort to work more closely with trailer park residents, the Town hosted a River Corridor Plan Design Charette between July 14-18. Roughly 200 people attended the open house, half of which were Latino residents of the trailer parks along the river. The charette was the first step in community planning process that could help relocate trailer park residents in town. Basalt is planning to use relocation of the mobile home park residents as a condition of annexation. Contact Kay Philip at 92704701 or Kayp@basalt.net for more information.

HOUSING REGULATIONS REJECTED BY EAGLE COUNTY

In a two to one vote, Commissioner Arn Menconi voted in favor of the regulations the Eagle County Planning Commission had recommended approving. But Commissioners Mike Gallagher and Tom Stone voted against the requirements that have been in the works for three years.

In a second vote, Menconi and Gallagher directed county staff to propose the regulations as guidelines rather than laws. And the commissioners unanimously passed another motion to create more incentives for the developers of affordable housing.

The requirements would have ensured that new developments in unincorporated areas of Eagle County provide affordable housing to local residents through three programs called inclusionary housing, residential-housing linkage and employee-housing linkage.

The requirements would have told developers what percentage of affordable housing they must provide with their projects. During several hearings on the requirements, county commissioners made several changes to the proposals, including lowering the proposed percentage of affordable housing provided by developers from 20 and 30 percent to a final 10 percent.

A two-bedroom unit would have been available to a three-person household with a household income of \$50,850 for \$187,103. The market price for that unit is \$223,125.

The county currently has just an advisory document for affordable-housing mitigation, said Rebecca Leonard, senior planner for Eagle County. If the regulations had passed, Leonard said it would have made it possible to require this of all developments, making it more equitable since the county had been negotiating on a case-by-case basis.

Edited from article by Veronica Whitney, 9.16.2003, www.vaildaily.com

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT IN EDWARDS BECOMES REALITY

Miller Ranch, Eagle County's largest public-private affordable housing development, which broke ground in late 2001, represents a unique partnership between developer ASW Realty Partners, Eagle County, Eagle County School District and Colorado Mountain College. ASW Realty Partners, the developers, have sold over 100 homes, mostly through a lottery system that gives priority to qualifying Eagle County workers. The development is expected to be finished in 2005.

The new neighborhood consists of lofts, condominiums, row houses, duplexes and single-family, detached homes. They range in size from 820 to 1,511 square feet and the prices range from \$120,000 to \$260,000.

Miller Ranch is a development within the larger Berry Creek development in Edwards. The public-private development joins privately held ASW Realty Partners with Eagle County, the Eagle County School District and Colorado Mountain College in a plan to build a community that provides affordable housing, education, open space and recreation in a neighborhood setting. County commissioners also have agreed to advance money to build a community center and a day-care facility at the project.

The homes at the Miller Ranch affordable housing project will appreciate as much as wages grow annually in Eagle County. Last year, Eagle County commissioners approved a floating deed restriction

cap between 3 and 6 percent that will change according to the average increase of wages in the county.

Although the town of Vail accepted a \$1 million offer from Eagle County to step out of the Miller Ranch project, the agreement says half of the homes will remain available for employees within the town of Vail.

Edited from article by Veronica Whitney, 10.15.2004, www.vaildaily.com

BURLINGAME HOUSING A GO

After emotional pleas from a standing room-only audience, the Aspen City Council voted 3-2 Tuesday to move forward with the Burlingame Ranch affordable housing project.

The council directed city staffers to begin seeking bids in January for installation of utilities and a road to the housing site. That work will cost an estimated \$8.5 million.

For more than two hours, the council heard overwhelming support for the project from citizens. Parents, some holding infants or toddlers, described their frustration in securing housing so they can remain members of the community.

While most in the crowd urged the council to move forward with Burlingame — up to 330 units on a site west of town — some criticized the size of the development and decried the project as urban sprawl. Others expressed concern about its impacts on wildlife and open space, or questioned the need for that much additional worker housing. But others said Aspen is in danger of losing its sense of community — a consideration that overrides the drawbacks to Burlingame.

Mayor Helen Klanderud and Councilman Terry Paulson both opposed the development, while council members Rachel Richards, Tim Semrau and Torre all voted to proceed. Klanderud acknowledged she was taking an unpopular stance, but said she favored smaller projects that would be more in character with Aspen. The Burlingame site is open land that is not served by utilities and roads, she noted. "That, to me, is sprawl," she said.

A first phase of 110 units has been the expectation, but council members said yesterday they want further debate on whether that's the right amount for the initial phase.

Edited from article by Janet Urquhart, 12.10.2003, www.aspentimes.com

OIL & GAS

WILLIAMS GETS OK FOR 500 MORE GAS WELLS

Williams Production received formal approval Monday from the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission to significantly increase its natural gas production in Garfield County.

The approval clears the way for the company to drill up to 500 wells on 16,000 acres of land using existing and pre-approved well sites. This can be done by using directional drilling to drill multiple wells from one well pad.

"It could mean up to 500 wells over a period of five to 12 years," said Williams' Parachute district manager Steve Soyche Soychak. "Depending on the assumption of prices, that could mean over \$100 million in ad valorem, or property taxes, to the county." He also said the additional wells could create 200

new jobs in the oil patch.

The new wells will be drilled in three of Williams' major producing fields — Rulison, Parachute and Grand Valley. All are located north of the Colorado River and Interstate 70. Drilling on the new wells is slated to start in 2004, following environmental assessments that are part of the permitting process.

Edited from article by Greg Massé, 8.21.2003,, www.postindependent.com

COUNTY TO FORM ADVISORY BOARD ON DRILLING ISSUES

Garfield County's Board of Commissioners took the first step toward establishing a natural gas advisory board Monday. The board, proposed by Garfield County oil and gas auditor Doug Dennison, is tentatively being called the Garfield County Energy Advisory Board. It does not yet have any bylaws or board members.

Its mission statement calls for providing "a forum for industry, the public and local government to prevent or minimize conflict associated with oil and gas development through positive and proactive communication and actions, and to encourage responsible development of these resources within Garfield County."

Conflicts between landowners and the natural gas industry have increased in recent years as hundreds of wells have been drilled on public and private land in west Garfield County, and hundreds more are planned.

One of the board's main goals, included in a draft paper Dennison presented at Monday's county commission meeting, is to "provide a forum for managing the conflict between landowners and operators by improving the communication between both parties." To accomplish that goal, Dennison envisions the board establishing "best practices" that should be followed by both parties to encourage early and continued dialogue between the parties. The Energy Advisory Board will also educate local governments and the public by compiling and sharing information.

Edited from article by Lynn Burton, 12.16.2003, www.postindependent.com

STRETCH OF COLORADO LAND BECOMES BATTLEGROUND

At the base of the 3,500-foot-high cliffs of the Roan Plateau sit dozens of gas wells, evidence of an energy boom in western Colorado. Laced by creeks and canyons, with broken carpets of sagebrush, aspen and fir, the mostly undeveloped Roan boasts one of the richest collections of plants and animals in western Colorado.

Deep beneath the plateau rests 5.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, enough to heat 2.5 million homes for 20 years. Drilling on the plateau for natural gas, which the Bush administration has signaled it favors, would bring jobs and more than \$100 million for the local county. So it is supported by some local chambers of commerce and regional government associations.

But local opposition here is surprisingly strong. The town council in Rifle and other communities, hunters and recreational users who treasure the Roan as an unspoiled preserve fear the Bush administration will ignore their concerns when it proposes a plan for the Roan in the next few weeks.

"I'm not sure I would be able to find someone who is 100% enthusiastic unless you talk to industry people," Rifle Mayor Keith Lambert says.

The Republican Bush administration has reversed many of the conservation policies of President Clinton's Democratic administration to side with those who want to expand the commercial use of publicly owned forests, rangeland, parks and water resources.

Both the Clinton and Bush approaches have caused controversy in the West, where public land is a source of livelihood and a recreational backyard for many residents. The federal government owns nearly half of the land in the eight non-coastal Western states.

A generation ago, the federal government's massive oil shale project was to be developed on the Roan, with predictions that huge quantities of oil would be extracted by crushing and cooking the plateau's shale.

This part of Colorado's western slope began to boom. But on May 2, 1982 -- known as Black Sunday -- the project collapsed because of technical hurdles and falling oil prices. Overnight, Rifle and other nearby communities plunged into an economic tailspin that lasted for years as workers fled and the real estate market collapsed.

Here and in many parts of the West today, another energy boom is building, pushed by an administration determined to expand oil and gas drilling to help make America less dependent on foreign sources. Unlike the Clinton administration, it is seeking development of sensitive areas such as Montana's Rocky Mountain Front and Wyoming's Jack Morrow Hills.

Here in Colorado's Garfield County, energy companies insist that they can drill the Roan Plateau while protecting wildlife, and they promise to reclaim the land when they're done in 20 years or so.

"We work hard to minimize the disturbance," says David Cesark, an environmental specialist with Williams, one of two big energy companies operating near the Roan. "We believe there can be some natural gas development on top of the Roan Plateau, and there needs to be to meet America's huge appetite for energy."

The money that flows from Garfield County's 1,800 existing wells provides major benefits to residents. More than a quarter of the county's property tax revenue comes from gas companies. The county's share of state and federal severance taxes and royalties has provided \$2.7 million for two new schools and more than \$1.1 million toward a local college and fire and water districts.

Edited from article by Tom Kenworthy, www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-03-04-colo-land_x.htm

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

GLENWOOD SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL APPROVES MEADOWS 4-3

The major development permit for the Meadows shopping center, with 51 special conditions, was approved by City Council in a 4-3 vote. The commercial plans for the Meadows shopping center include a Target and a Lowe's Home Improvement store. Other retailers have also expressed interest, Meadows developer Robert Macgregor said.

Meadows is a large commercial and residential development that will be located between the

Community Center and the Municipal Operations Center along West Midland Avenue.

The Meadows will be the biggest development in the history of Glenwood Springs. The Glenwood Springs City Council approved 490,000 square feet of total commercial and office space, as well as 475 apartments, townhouses and single family homes.

Construction is slated to start this summer and the first store, Lowe's, is set to open in July 2005. Target's opening is planned for August 2005. Plans call for Target to be 124,000 square feet and Lowe's to be 129,000 square feet.

Edited from articles by Greg Masse, 10.12.2003 & 1.1.2004, www.postindependent.com

LOVA TRAILS CORRIDOR PLAN COMPLETE

The LOVA Trails Committee has been running its completed corridor master plan up and down the I-70 corridor for review by local planning commissions and is now approaching town councils. The Garfield County Planning Commission has adopted the document as "advisory" to the County Comprehensive Plan. LOVA has received CDOT Enhancement Funding for preliminary design in South Canyon, and continues to receive support from area foundations and municipalities. Next steps are probably seeking funding for an organizational 'office' with a very part time coordinator/grant writer to generate necessary matching and project funding. For more information contact Brian Brown (brianjmbrown@earthlink.net) or Janet Steinbach at the town of Silt (janet@townofsilt.org).

GARFIELD COUNTY CLUSTER ZONING APPROVED

Garfield County hopes to reduce cookie-cutter residential development applications, and preserve hay fields. County planner Randy Russell told the commissioners the new minimum lot sizes should discourage unimaginative "cookie cutter" residential developments, and encourage creative projects that preserve open space and agricultural uses.

Previously, Garfield County required two-acre minimum lot sizes in its agricultural/industrial, agricultural/rural/residential density, and resource/land zoning districts. With this zoning code amendment, called the "cluster option," the commissioners dropped the minimum lot size to one acre. At the same time, it requires more of the property to be kept in open space or agriculture.

Property owners still have the option of developing land in two-acre parcels. The incentive for using the cluster option comes because property owners can develop more lots if they preserve more open space.

Russell said if property owners choose the clustering option, they must build a central water system, and impose a conservation easement to manage the property. Property owners already had the option of developing one-acre or smaller sites as a planned unit development, but that approach is expensive and requires an extensive public review process.

Edited from article by Lynn Burton. 3.11.2003, www.postindependent.com

GARFIELD COUNTY BEGINS CODE RE-WRITE AND STATE MODEL CODE DEVELOPMENT

Garfield County is well underway on its rewrite of Subdivision and Zoning regulations, and have hosted several meetings designed to reach out to the agricultural community, developers and private consultants, conservation/environmental interests, and the general public for the solicitation of issues and concerns about how the county currently conducts business in its zoning and subdivision processes. All issues and concerns are captured, and will be made available on the County web site at www.garfield-county.com under Building and Planning, Code Rewrite. Issues from previous meetings are being posted, and there is a 'White Paper' of potential regulatory options developed by consultants Sullivan Green Seavy as a discussion piece. The White Paper contains some very interesting options gleaned from around the country, presented for discussion purposes.

This Code rewrite also leads to the development of a statewide Model County Code, which is funded through a Heritage Planning Grant from the Office of Smart Growth. Garfield County is also meeting with each of our Planning Commissions and other officials in our six municipalities as part of this project.

For more information contact Garfield County Long Range Planner, Randy Russell at rrussell@garfield-county.com.

OBERMEYER PLACE WINS APPROVAL IN ASPEN

After heaping praise on ski-wear-icon-turned developer Klaus Obermeyer, the Aspen City Council gave his Obermeyer Place redevelopment project unanimous approval. Developers plan to begin construction next spring, transforming a funky corner of Aspen into a new mix of residences, space for service/industrial businesses and medical offices. Two levels of underground parking, including 20 spaces designated for city use, are part of the plan. So is sprucing up the recycling center in the park and creating a pedestrian walkway through the development that will link Main Street and the park.

The project saw a year of review and revision by a city-appointed task force as part of the city's COWOP (Development Reasonably Necessary for the Convenience and Welfare of the Public) process, working with a development team assembled by Obermeyer. Under this section of the city land use code this type of land-use review process allows for a private property owner to be a co-applicant with the city on a land-use project. Obermeyer Place is the first development to go through the COWOP process.

In all, Obermeyer Place will include up to 265,000 square feet of space, including nearly 39,000 square feet for service/commercial/industrial uses; 21 free-market residences; 21 deed-restricted units and roughly 9,000 square feet of medical office space. Aspen Valley Hospital has an agreement with Obermeyer for a long-term lease of the office space with an option to purchase it.

Edited from article by Janet Urquhart, 4.15.2003, www.aspentimes.com

PITCO BANS DENSE HOUSING IN COUNTY'S OUTLYING AREAS

Pitkin County closed the door Wednesday on dense housing projects outside urban areas over the objections of Commissioner Shellie Roy, who urged her colleagues to keep open the option for enclaves of worker housing on rural parcels.

Commissioners voted 4-1 to amend the county's land-use code to prevent future rezonings for dense developments outside of the urban growth boundaries that have been established around Aspen and Basalt.

The move has been in the works for about a year, but commissioners held off on a final decision this week until the Aspen City Council made its decision Tuesday on the future of the Burlingame Ranch affordable housing project. The council agreed to move forward with the development, which is within the boundary.

Had the city abandoned the plan, Commissioner Patti Clapper hinted she might have had to rethink a ban on big housing projects in rural areas.

By prohibiting zoning for high-density housing outside the urban areas, the county prevents the potential for another application for an inappropriate development, Commissioner Mick Ireland said. He offered the defeated plan for 778 affordable units at W/J Ranch on McLain Flats as an example.

Yesterday's action eliminates the potential use of the county's AH-3 zone district outside the urban boundaries. It is typically used for projects that mix affordable and free-market housing. Pitkin Iron, with four free-market homes and 15 deed-restricted units; and West Ranch, with one free-market residence and 10 affordable units, were both built under the AH-3 zoning.

Aspen's urban growth boundary stretches from roughly the downvalley end of the airport to the Mountain Valley subdivision east of town.

Edited from article by Janet Urquhart, 12.11.2003, www.aspentimes.com

TRANSPORTATION

RFTA UNION ENDS BY ONE VOTE

Roaring Fork Transportation Authority drivers are ending their union affiliation after union supporters came up one vote shy on Friday.

After two days of voting at RFTA facilities throughout the valley drivers voted 55-30 to keep the union, but by state law, the union needed 56 votes to stay in place. That's a majority of the 110 drivers eligible to join the union.

Supporters blamed the failure on state laws they said discourage union affiliation, and poor timing that saw the vote come as several of RFTA's roughly 40 union members were out of town.

This week's vote was the second decertification vote in less than two years for RFTA drivers. In February 2002, drivers voted 60-36 out of 114 eligible to remain in the union.

By state law, the union needed a majority of eligible drivers to vote to keep its affiliation this week. Those who don't vote are counted as "no" votes.

Edited from article by David Frey, 8.30.2003, www.aspendailynews.com

RIFLE-TO-GLENWOOD BUS CARRIES TWICE AS MANY RIDERS

Ridership appears to have doubled on the Roaring Fork Transit Authority's Grand Hogback route between Glenwood Springs and Rifle since it began in April, 2002.

In June of 2002 the Grand Hogback line carried 1,667 riders. Through the June 14, 2003, the Grand Hogback had 1,664 riders, just three short of the total for the entire month of June, 2002. Though numbers for the second half of June were not yet available, ridership was on track to have doubled on the Grand Hogback line in just one year

Edited from article by Ryan Graff, 7.2.2003, www.postindependent.com

RFTA BUDGET STRUGGLES

Faced with a budget crisis that threatens the long-term existence of the valley's bus service, the Roaring Fork Transit Authority's board of directors remains fractured over how to solve the problem.

For the third straight month, the RFTA board decided Thursday to delay a decision on how to work itself out of the tough financial situation. Some board members acknowledge privately that seeking a sales tax increase from voters in November is probably out of the question now.

The latest stumbling block to plotting a course was the city of Aspen's insistence that an outside auditor be hired to make sure RFTA is running as efficiently as possible.

At the heart of the dispute is the structure of RFTA's governing board. Each of the governments that belong to the organization appoints one of its elected officials to RFTA's board of directors. There are representatives from Aspen, Snowmass Village, Basalt, Carbondale and Glenwood Springs, as well as Pitkin and Eagle counties.

The board members meet once per month but action often gets delayed because representatives feel they must get direction from their own boards. RFTA operates like the United Nations, except meetings are only held once per month. Swift action is next to impossible.

In addition to the structural challenges, different RFTA directors have different opinions on how to solve the budget crisis. Some members have pressed for the last couple of months to take a hatchet to expenses, but nobody seems to want to pull the trigger on service cuts.

At the prompting of other board members over the last three months, the RFTA staff has been forced to look at numerous budget scenarios with and without spending on trail construction and with budget cuts.

Edited from article by Scott Condon, 4.9.2004, www.aspentimes.com

STUDIES, REPORTS AND TOOLS

NWCCOG RELEASES STUDY OF SECOND HOMEOWNERS

Two out of every three people who own homes in Summit County don't actually live in Summit County. Indeed, in the four High Country counties about 60 percent of all residences are second or third homes.

That trend seems poised to continue, according to a study released Tuesday by the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) on the effects of second homeowners on the social and economic environments of Summit, Pitkin, Eagle and Grand counties.

"The study is trying to get at, "What is the meaning, what is the effect of second homes?" said Jim Westcott, the state demographer. "(Planners) need to know what services they're going to be confronted with."

Westcott said that the NWCCOG counties may see even greater growth than the study suggests because of the region's connection to the Front Range.

"The Front Range has a disproportionately higher range of baby boomers than the rest of the country," he said. "Not only does Colorado expect to keep its baby boomers, but there's a real expectation to attract more baby boomers."

One dimension he noted was the development of downtown Denver, which has experienced an increased focus on condominium sales that are marketed with the prospect of time also spent in the mountains.

According to the study, the majority of second home values, as expected, were well above those of primary residences. The median incomes of residents versus nonresidents were almost mirror opposites with nonresidents tending to earn at least \$100,000 per year and residents averaging between \$15,000 to \$100,000.

Although the direct connection of such phenomena to social impacts has not been yet been drawn (the social and economic indicators the data will help provide will not be available until at least this fall), it's apparent that the whole phenomenon of vacation homes is a major economic driver for the region according to Westcott.

For more information on the NWCCOG's study visit

http://nwc.cog.co.us/Second%20Home%20Study/second_home_study.htm

Edited from article by Aidan Leonard, 7.30.2003, www.sumitdaily.com

COMMUNITY AND COUNTY PROFILES ONLINE

Healthy Mountain Communities has put profiles of the communities and counties in the region on its website www.hmcolorado.org/commecon. The profiles were created using the Economic Profile System (EPS) software, which was developed by the Sonoran Institute in partnership with the BLM. EPS is free software. It is available by contacting Ray Rasker at the Sonoran Institute, ray@sonoran.org.

COLORADO CENTER FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INTRODUCES COLORADO SMART GROWTH SCORECARD

A key question for the future of our state and our communities is whether we can shape growth in ways that results in vibrant communities, strong economies, and a healthy environment or whether we will be consumed by the pressures growth can place on our roadways, schools, and natural assets. The quality of life in Colorado hangs on how we answer this question.

The Colorado Smart Growth Scorecard is a community self-assessment tool to help citizens easily identify areas where their community is doing well and how it can do better to grow smart. Whether the place where you live is growing too fast or too slow, the scorecard will help your community direct growth in ways that make communities great places to live – thriving downtown and business areas, vibrant public spaces, healthy natural environments – and a unique sense of place.

The Scorecard was developed by the Colorado Center for Healthy Communities (A Healthy Mountain

Communities Project), in partnership with The Orton Family Foundation. The scorecard has been made possible through the financial support from the Gates Family Foundation and local governments, and the financial and staff support of The Orton Family Foundation. The Colorado Smart Growth Scorecard is adapted from the Vermont Smart Growth Scorecard with the permission of the Vermont Forum on Sprawl.

The Colorado Smart Growth Scorecard is available for \$10 each (includes postage and handling). Scorecards are \$8.50 for bulk orders over 20. Workshops on the Scorecard are also available. Contact the Center at 970-963-5502 or send an email to info@coloradocenter.org to place an order.