

Summary of Estes Park Site Visit: Affordable and Workforce Housing Observations

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Participants:

**Tim Gagen, Town Manager, Breckenridge, Colorado
Laurie Best, Long Range Planner, Breckenridge, Colorado
Wendy Sullivan, Principal, WSW Associates, San Anselmo, California**

THE TEAM'S PURPOSE

This document provides a brief summary of the observations our team had upon visiting Estes Park on January 19, 2015. The purpose of the visit was to understand what workforce and affordable housing projects and programs Estes Park has in place, assets dedicated toward or available for housing, and general issues faced by the town related to producing housing. The visit was generously organized by the Colorado Association of Ski Towns.

Our itinerary included a site tour of Estes Park in the morning, followed by one-hour meetings with each of: the Estes Park Housing Authority, the Economic Development Corporation housing committee and the Estes Park Town Council. The intent of the tour and meetings was to gather information and learn about the housing issues facing the town, as well as to share ideas and observations on how the town may move forward in addressing its affordable, workforce and seasonal housing needs.

These recommendations are based on our brief introduction to the issues faced by Estes Park and a quick overview of current conditions in the town. More in depth analysis would help target these observations and likely raise additional considerations to help town to address its workforce and affordable housing needs.

OBSERVATIONS

The town of Estes Park has many resources upon which it can pull to create needed affordable and workforce housing. The current inventory of available affordable rental and for-purchase housing is also admirable. It was clear, however, that there is not a shared direction or vision for what type of housing should be built, where, when and for whom. Without a shared vision, it is difficult to know whether a particular project will get the town closer to its goals or to understand the contribution that a project will make to the well-being of the community. The town also has significant gaps in information related to what type of housing is needed and how and where it can and should be produced. Some of these holes should be filled to help the town prioritize allocation of its resources and adjust its programs to produce housing. The below observations reflect this understanding.

COMMUNITY VISION

Who does Estes Park want to be? No one could articulate this answer. The Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 1996 and a more recent vision has not been defined by the community. Without a unified vision of who your community should be, it is difficult to plan for the housing that is needed to get you there and difficult to overcome community opposition to potential projects.

***If you don't know
where you want to
go, how do you know
when you get there?***

No Change Scenario

If nothing changes then it's likely Estes Park will:

- Continue to be the oldest community in Colorado (2010 average age of residents was 51 years old); keep losing families and middle-income workers; increasingly become a town for second homeowners; and experience population growth primarily from retirees who made their living in other parts of the state (or other states).
- Continue to have a shortage of workers, rely increasingly on in-commuters to fill jobs, impair the operation of local businesses, decrease the year-round tax and revenue base attributed to locals, and compromise the visitor experience (your primary economic driver).

This is what happened in the 2000's and what will continue to happen if nothing changes.

Expressed Desired Direction and Concerns

No one articulated that any of the above was a preferred direction. Comments and concerns included:

- We are losing families – how do we and can we get them back;
- Our school enrollments are declining;
- How do we become a more year-round economy;
- How can we provide more housing for summer seasonal workers;
- How can we build more moderate priced housing for ownership;
- Our businesses have jobs available but no employees to fill them;
- How can we ensure a good visitor experience;
- We are reacting to, rather than leading, development;
- How can we overcome opposition to affordable projects when we have opportunity for them.

How Can Housing Help

Properly targeted and designed housing can address all of the above concerns.

- 1- By building housing affordable and attractive to families that are commuting in for work and who would prefer to live in town, you can bring families back. Building housing for residents wanting to start families can help keep these residents in town.
- 2- More residents living in town means more locals are spending money in town on services year-round. This is the most stable way to move toward a year-round economy.
- 3- Businesses had large numbers of unfilled jobs last summer. Unfilled jobs means overworked employees, potentially shortened business hours, longer waits for persons seeking services, etc. Happy employees provide better service to customers. Employees that can focus on their job and not the jobs of three people provide better service to customers. Businesses that can remain open for their full potential generate more revenue for themselves and the town. Tourism is your primary economy – providing excellent customer service and a happily memorable experience should be paramount.
- 4- The town needs to take the conversation away from “should we do this” to “how do we do this.” Make workforce housing a mandatory component of maintaining and shaping your community and determine how best to make it happen. If you pre-plan for workforce housing (location, type and number of units), you will lead its development, rather than react to its development.

What is Needed

The town should:

- 1- Establish a unified community vision – one that provides a common goal to move toward. A vision will provide the unity among all the players in the workforce and affordable housing arena to reach toward the same desired outcome.
- 2- Prepare an affordable and workforce housing plan with defined strategies directed toward achieving that vision. A housing plan can help build support and understanding for workforce housing and illustrate how housing contributes to town goals. It can also help place priorities on what type of housing is needed and where resources should be allocated.

The town should also develop indicators that can be used to track their progress toward achieving their vision and housing plan. Breckenridge develops housing goals and checks in at least yearly on their progress. Progress should be visited every year and the plan for implementation modified accordingly.

INFORMATION

There are many gaps in information that the town needs to fill to guide and create a successful workforce housing program. Beyond establishing a vision, mentioned above, this includes:

You can't know what you need if you don't know where you are or what will get you where you want to go.

Housing Needs Assessment. Your needs assessment is over 5-years old. A major housing market correction and rebound occurred in this time, plus a devastating flood that expedited the exodus of lower income and family residents. You need to update your inventory of housing, understand the current housing market, understand the change in your demographics and whether any changes were desirable, and what housing your residents and workforce (including in-commuters) need. This includes what type of units are in demand (ownership, rental, single family or attached), at which prices points, and for what types of households (seniors, young families, seasonal workers, singles, etc.). This information is key to developing an effective housing plan.

In-commuters. You have two very different demographics. One is your aging resident base and the other is your in-commuting workers. Many of your in-commuting workers would rather live in town than drive to Loveland or Fort Collins every day. You need to understand how many want to live in town, who they are (families, singles, etc.), and what type of housing they need to become a permanent part of your community. If a goal is to bring families back to Estes Park, in-commuting workers is the first place you should look. A well designed housing needs assessment (identified above) can provide this information.

Build-out study. The last update was in 2007 – a new inventory is needed, particularly in light of the flood. The prior study also simply recited how much potential housing could be built under present zoning and land availability. This should also be linked to needed housing for residents vs. second homeowners. For example, in 2007 you could build about 7,500 more residential homes. Presently 68% of homes are occupied by year-round residents. This means that 5,100 of these 7,500 units must be built to accommodate the needs of local residents if you do not want to lose more homes to second homeowners. This study is an important planning tool for the town.

Land and Redevelopment Opportunities. Inventory lands currently owned or available to the town, prime redevelopment areas and preferred locations for resident/affordable housing. This can be done in conjunction with the build-out update and development code analysis to understand different and preferred options for achieving the town's desired future. For redevelopment areas and areas that must be cleared due to FEMA requirements, inventory current resident housing that will be lost. **BE SURE TO REPLACE THESE UNITS.** You already have a shortage of housing, don't contribute to the problem.

Development code. Does the current development code meet the housing needs of residents and the workforce? Does the current development code produce the desired future direction for the town – does it help achieve what you want to be? The town needs to reassess and revise its development code to ensure that resident and workforce housing needs can be met. Concern that the redevelopment code is directed toward initial land development as opposed to redevelopment was expressed. The development code should support the creation of what you need, where it's wanted and not produce what you don't want.

Land and Funding. Key components of the most successful workforce housing programs are funding sources to spur projects and available land on which to develop projects. Efforts to land bank are always recommended and exploring options for funding will accelerate achieving affordable housing goals.

ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNICATION

You have four primary organizations in the affordable housing arena: the Housing Authority, the Economic Development Corporation, the Community Development Department and the Town Council. While we did not meet the Community Development department, all other groups indicated that affordable/workforce housing was a priority for the town. Each group, however, is moving forward in independent directions. While their goal to produce housing is admirable, without a unified direction it is difficult to know whether or how much of an impact their actions are having.

“It feels like we are pointing fingers and claiming that affordable housing should be someone else’s responsibility.”

A vision for the community and a housing action plan, discussed above, can help provide the direction; however, there also needs to be communication between all organizations, as well as the business community and residents, to ensure that combined actions achieve the desired direction and address community needs and concerns.

Also, everyone needs to be actively involved. A successful housing program cannot occur in a vacuum or come from just one organization. Each organization can undertake different roles (e.g. Housing Authority to build and manage housing; EDC for business community coordination, resources and redevelopment; Town Council for coordinated direction and resident education; etc.); however, everyone needs to understand town goals, stay educated on progress and opportunities and keep apprised of each other's actions.

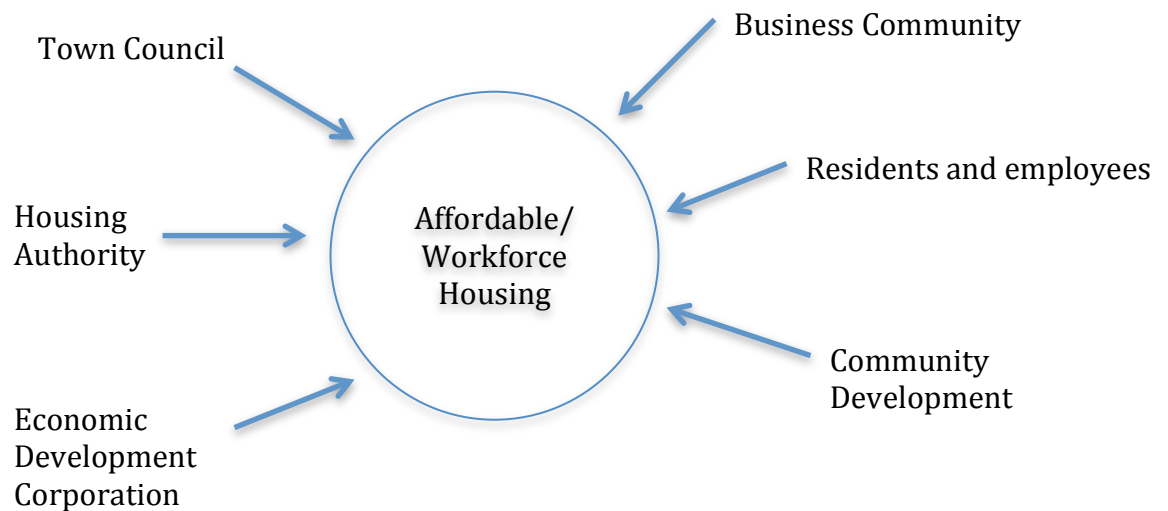
The town council in particular, given their role in approving projects, needs to be informed – they must understand what housing is needed, why it is needed, how it can help the community, how much is needed and how each project contributes to

getting the town closer to its goal. This education is an ongoing process and all involved organizations should take responsibility to inform and educate themselves, other organizations and their constituencies to ensure success.

What is Needed

- 1- Someone needs to take a leadership role to maintain regular communication and keep each organization's actions on track with achieving town goals. This could be the Community Development department, Town Council, the EDC or Housing Authority. A group should be designated to organize meetings to communicate on the town's housing issues and coordinate actions toward achieving the town vision. These meetings should occur more frequently at first, perhaps quarterly, before dropping to once or twice per year as coordination and focus becomes more established.
- 2- Everyone needs to be actively involved in understanding and addressing the town's housing problems. Housing is a complicated matter and it takes all organizations working toward a common goal to achieve desired results. One organization or resident group cannot achieve the town's needs without the understanding and support of others.

Needed Affordable/Workforce Housing Participants



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Again, a town vision and housing plan formulated in large part by the citizens and carried out by the town can help with this perception (e.g., we are implementing what you told us to do).

“Citizens seem to feel that the town is telling them what to do.”

With a population averaging over 50 years old, many of your residents are retired/not working. Opposition to and misunderstanding of workforce/affordable housing was noted as a problem when trying to develop and approve projects. It was also noted that projects that initially were resisted by residents were then supported once a component perceived as benefiting them (e.g. a senior center) was added.

You need to educate your residents on how workforce housing can benefit them and why it is needed for the health of the town. Affordable housing for the workforce should be less of a “them or us” conversation.

LEADERSHIP

No matter what you do, there will *always* be opposition to affordable/workforce housing development. The town, and particularly the Town Council, must have the confidence to recognize when the self-interests of a small handful of individuals do not reflect the vision, sentiment nor desired direction of the community as a whole. This also means that the town must be committed to building affordable/workforce housing and be “goal focused” rather than “project focused” – how does this project get us closer to (or further from) our goal. Resident education, discussed above, can also help shift residents’ focus as well and provide more resident support.

The town must take a leadership role.

Tools that can help establish this leadership and commitment include a coordinated community vision, housing plan, and development code that implements that vision. This can provide a base by which the town can measure proposed development, as well as suggested changes by residents, to determine when development will support or hinder the town’s desired direction.

SUGGESTED TOOLS

In addition to the above observations, some more specific tools regarding public engagement, housing resources and development opportunities were discussed. Once Estes Park defines its housing problem and desired direction, it will be in a better position to understand which of these tools can best address town needs and where resources should be focused.

Community Direction	
Vision	Designed by residents, not elected officials; input from everyone. Could be part of a Comprehensive Plan update or an alternative process. Not a short process.
Affordable/Workforce Housing Plan	Oriented toward achieving the vision; sets production goals for housing; indicators. Need data – housing needs assessment, build out analysis, land inventory, etc.
Coordinated development code	Development code should produce/support what is needed to achieve the vision.
Indicators	Set yearly goal for housing production with council – and check in each year on reaching that goal. Track indicators to make sure you are moving in the desired direction.
Communication	Between organizations, the council, the public to keep all informed of the vision and progress. Communicate on a regular basis to align housing efforts and understand where each organization needs to be focused to achieve housing goals.
Education	
Housing Marketing	Marketing materials for housing showing its benefits to the community; personal stories from affordable housing residents that resonate with the local population (e.g., my parents live here and the only way I could raise my kids near them was because of affordable housing, etc.)
Citizen Committees	For controversial projects, form citizen committees to learn about the project, gather input, give recommendations – reduces surprises at public meetings. This is used by Breckenridge.
Resident Education	<p>Websites, flyers, forums, town public meetings, etc. Take every opportunity to educate the public on the importance of housing (e.g., this business would not be extending its hours of operation if its workers still lived in Loveland, etc.).</p> <p>Reach out to business educated retirees in town – they can help draw the link between workforce housing and senior resident needs/services/interests and build resident support.</p>
Field Trips	Important and eye-opening education tool. Planning Commission, Town Council, etc. should visit existing housing projects. Tour developments that address the needs you want to address. See what well-designed, higher density

	projects can achieve. Takes away some of the unknown and provides ideas for what you want (or don't want). The Breckenridge Planning Commission has toured many of Boulder's housing projects (e.g., over 15 units per acre can look great, but can sound very scary).
Redevelopment	
Inventory	Lands available/prime for redevelopment; lands required to be redeveloped (FEMA directive, etc.)
Land banking	Buy up pieces until a larger whole is acquired on which a meaningful project can be developed. Elkhorn Lodge – oldest hotel in town. Unmotivated seller. Establish the goals of the owner (want to sell for redevelopment, or do they want part of the land to be preserved indefinitely); room for negotiations/partnerships?
“No net loss” policy	If a resident housing unit is going to be removed, then be sure it will be replaced. No net loss of resident housing/one-for-one replacement – adopt as a town policy. For example: FEMA hazard funds require the town to remove The Islander (will become park space). The town should determine how to replace these units before they are removed. For example, can this new park space be exchanged for other park/open space in town on which replacement housing can be built. Is neighboring land available on which the units can be rebuilt?
Development Code	Revamp to permit/produce/encourage desired redevelopment.
Town Land	
Inventory	Vacant, underdeveloped, town owned, school owned, open space, Bureau of Reclamation, other federal, etc.
Sell/Trade	Identify potential parcels prime for sale or trade potential. Identify where affordable housing should be built and what possible land sales or trades can make it happen. Hatchery property – may not be the best site for affordable/workforce housing, but a great resource for potential sale/trade to acquire lands where housing is wanted.
Land banking	Purchase desired lands as able/available. Collect and pool lands.
Housing Resources	
Taxes	2% hotel tax for town marketing – the group stated strong support for housing, can any of this tax be applied toward housing? Are there other tax options to dedicate for housing – either existing collections or future? Breckenridge: able to keep all of County's share of tax that is

	collected within town. Negotiation opportunity?
Town fund	Is the town able to dedicate a portion of its fund for continued investment in housing – e.g. can it retain its contribution to the housing authority, can it designate funds for land banking, etc.
Local bonds	Bonds sold by town to locals for public/community purpose. Public outreach/education campaign needed to sell bonds.
EDC	Has access to its own funding resources; business community organization/contributions toward housing
Fees	Explore development impact fees to help fund housing.
Business community	<p>Master leases? Will businesses contribute resources to help house workers? EDC is establishing relationships – engage this community in the conversation. If you make it easy for them to participate, they likely will.</p> <p>Hospital stated its wants to be out of the housing business – many hospitals in resort communities are in the housing business (Summit County, Co; Teton County, Wy; Mammoth Lakes, Ca.; etc.). Explore opportunities/partnerships/ redevelopment potential. E.g., can the 6 units be purchased at discount if retained for hospital workers; can properties be redeveloped to create more housing and will hospital support this effort.</p>
Home Rule	Evaluate whether Estes Park could expand its housing resources if it was a home rule community. What additional financing options/housing resources would this provide (e.g., tourism tax, development fees, etc.).
Housing Development	
Seasonal Housing	Purchase/revamp old hotels; master leases with businesses.
Moderate income (80%+)	Public/private partnerships; developer incentives; mixed-income projects (market rate combined with affordable homes); development code: inclusionary zoning, redevelopment, annexation requirements, fees.
Development Code	Waive fees (tap fees, etc.) for affordable units; density bonuses for affordable housing; ADU issues (rent, density); PUD regulation change – address commission concerns; TDR – move density away from areas you don’t want and into areas you do; large lot vs. higher density zones; revisit mobile home parks (can be attractive and affordable market housing); development impact fees or affordable housing development requirement on new or redeveloped properties; mixed use development (can provide rental opportunities downtown – it is difficult for residents to acquire financing to purchase units mixed with commercial).
Annexation Policies	<p>Ability to negotiate higher affordable housing requirements.</p> <p>Breckenridge: want affordable housing. Ups requirements on projects wanting to annex.</p>

No net loss/replacement	Particularly important for redevelopment areas. Require removed resident units to be replaced on site or another site or collect fee-in-lieu of development. If apartments are condominiumized, allow first right of purchase to existing residents.
Production Goal	Established in housing plan. Units per year to produce, unit types/price points, etc. Allows the town and others to measure progress and provides a goal that can help prioritize resource allocation. Meet yearly to discuss progress and define goals for the next year.
Supportive services	Day care and family housing go hand-in-hand. There are two licensed day care facilities in town – look at license requirements/options to increase this service. Public transportation – very limited in the winter. Other options – biking? Car share?
Affordable ownership	Breckenridge: retains right of first refusal to purchase homes when owners enter foreclosure; puts resale caps on all homes to retain their affordability (and the town's investment); requires all affordable homes to be purchased by local workers (goal: house the workforce). If you invest in producing housing and don't restrict its occupancy/resale to continue to serve your housing needs, then this investment will be lost.
Urban Renewal Authority	Can provide resources to create housing; dedicate portion of tax increment toward housing; need vote to establish.

ABOUT THE TEAM

Tim Gagen, Town Manager [bio pending]

Laurie Best, AICP was hired as a long range planner for the Town of Breckenridge, Colorado in 2000. She had moved to Colorado from the central coast of California where she earned a B.S in City and Regional Planning. Laurie manages the Town's workforce housing programs including related public policy, funding, and housing development. Laurie works to increase the supply of affordable housing because it promotes diversity, sustains the economy, protects the environment, and keeps Breckenridge real. Since Laurie has been with the Town over 600 homes have been developed and deed restricted, homeownership rates have increased, and the percent of households with children has increased. In 2006 the voters also approved a designated tax for affordable housing which provides some of the funding for the Town's programs.



Wendy Sullivan, principal of WSW Associates, is a housing planner and attorney, licensed in Colorado and California. She has near 15 years of community planning experience in both the public and private sector. Wendy has conducted and managed housing needs assessments, market studies and housing policy development for a range of communities in several states, with particular focus on mountain resort communities. Her work has helped towns like Breckenridge, CO, and Jackson, WY, maintain successful affordable and workforce housing policies and programs. She previously worked as a planner for Blaine County, Idaho (home of Sun Valley ski resort), as a senior housing analyst for RRC Associates, Inc., in Boulder, Colorado, and as a contract attorney in municipal and affordable housing law. Wendy has a Bachelor's degree in computer science and minor in math, a Master's in Regional Planning and a J.D. from the University of Colorado in Boulder.

