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News

Beyond BV: Town directs review of Comp Plan

By Steve Alldredge

Sun Staff Writer

A little less than 10 years ago, the Town of Snowmass Village embarked on an ambitious creation of a regulatory document to guide elected and appointed officials, staff, local businesses, developers, property owners and everyone else concerned with the town's future. A shortened version of that process is expected to occur again with the approval for a review of that 1998 Comp Plan.

Russell Forrest, Snowmass Village's town manager, and his staff directed a Request for Proposal (RFP) process that concluded with the hiring of Winston and Associates for a targeted review of the 1998 Comp Plan. At the August 20 Town Council meeting, council unanimously approved a request to spend up to \$275,000 for this review that is expected to take between six and eight months.

"There was some very good direction in the original Comp Plan," said Forrest, commenting on why he thinks this review is important to spend the time and money on now. "But things have changed over the last 10 years. The Snowmass Center and West Village projects are moving forward. I think it's important for the town and its community to have a say in 'where we want to be' in the future."

After the creation of the 1998 Comp Plan, the discussion over Base Village took precedence. Some community members felt that plan was "tossed out the window."

This time, the town would like to create a document, with input from all stakeholders, that provides a guide for more community-wide consensus on future development of large town projects.

Carey Shanks, speaking for Related WestPac, welcomed the Comp Plan review and the public process: "We think of this as a unique opportunity for collaboration as we look at all of the alternatives at the mall. We want the Base Village, the Snowmass Center and West Village to be complementary, yet at the same time have their own unique offerings."

A good many people in town have said over the last few years that if more consensus had been created on Base Village then the referendum and community division would not have been so severe.

With that in mind, it appears the town is hoping to learn from past mistakes and create a vision for the remaining two significant commercial developments planned for Snowmass Village, the Snowmass Center and West Village.

A first step in gauging what the community of Snowmass Village wants is the chance to be heard on Friday, Sept. 7, from 8-9 a.m. in Town Council chambers. At that time, the consultants will be available to hear from the community on what issues they believe are important in guiding Snowmass Village forward.

"The town can react in a reactive way or proactive way," noted Town Manager Forrest. "We need to be able to say to developers and everyone, 'yes' or 'no,' based on clear expectations after we have engaged the community on what they see as appropriate uses."

According to Forrest, after this targeted review of the Comp Plan this new information can be turned in the future land use code governing town. The Comp Plan is intended to be a comprehensive statement on the town's current growth and development and overall land use philosophy. The Comp Plan is frequently updated, responding to changing community needs.

Values and vision

So what does the community need and want as West Village is planned? Will we approve (even if the government pays for most of it) a new regional transportation center? What type of variances in the way of height, mass and scale will the town allow the developer and what will the “community benefits” be for granting that expansive construction?

With this review of the Comp Plan, and through future community meetings, the town is looking for public input and collaboration with full- and part-time residents, workers, the development community and local businesses in creating this future planning document.

“How do we create balances?” asked Russ Forrest.

Group business has been one of the mainstays for Snowmass Village business over the last 30 years.

But group business is evolving and changing, noted Forrest. How can Snowmass Village respond to these changes? If there is a trend toward smaller groups, how can Snowmass Village create our own niche, Forrest asked?

He noted that Aspen has been successful in promoting arts and culture in addition to winter sports, and that Snowmass Village had to create and market its own unique reasons to come here.

Why do people want to continue to live in Snowmass Village? What will happen when skier days dwindle even lower than they have the last 25 years (some estimates says we now have 30 fewer days)? What will happen to our affordable housing program when workers begin to retire?

Town Manager Forrest invites such visioning and summation of values. He had full support from members of Town Council at the August 20 meeting.

“I think it is important that we do this Comp Plan Review,” said Councilman John Wilkinson. “We need to be able to say this is what our community wants.”

Mayor Douglas “Merc” Mercatoris encouraged the public to turn out and participate. “More opinions mean a better product,” he noted, adding that he hoped this Comp Plan review could “bring this community together.”

Skico’s renewed commitment

Recently, Forrest met with representatives of the Aspen Skiing Co. on their future marketing plans. According to Forrest, he came away from the meeting with a feeling of Skico’s renewed sense of commitment to Snowmass Village.

Many criticized Skico last year for a “cut and run” philosophy after they sold their interests in the Base Village partnership to Related WestPac. The company countered that talk with a public message that focused on the long-term.

That long-term philosophy toward Snowmass will begin to hit the marketplace this winter. While Skico will once again spend significantly to market Aspen/Snowmass, this winter Snowmass will be more of the “star” because of the new features being promoted, especially with the opening of the \$17 million state-of-the-art children’s center, The Treehouse.

International and U.S. skiers and riders can be expected to learn more and more about “what’s

happening in Snowmass?” since half of Skico’s skier days come from one mountain, Snowmass, and the company plans to spend over \$50 million in new mountain improvements over the next few years, with a good deal of that investment already underway.

As the town and Skico go forward in their marketing collaboration, they focus on how to create differentiation between Snowmass, the resort, and other winter resorts.

As the town and the developer go forward they need to figure out how to create more of a year-round economic base in Snowmass and Snowmass Village.

Your first opportunity to give them your thoughts is Friday, Sept. 7, from 8–9 a.m. in Town Council chambers.

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