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## From the Director's Desk

### Trusting Government and the F-Word

Let's talk about the F-Word

Heard about fraud lately?

I sure have. At CCCMA in February this year, Charles Jones in The Shape of Ethics: Two Columns, Three Triangles presentation said, "Ethics and policy have a human face." He urged city and county managers to open a conversation with staff to share stories of "ethical failure" to raise awareness while illustrating the human consequences of fraud. Jones shared "The Fraud Triangle: Rationalization, Pressure, Opportunity" noting that to protect against fraud, managers must recognize the first two, and put systems in place to remove the third. His whopper of a personal story ended up with highly respected family members going to prison. His life was never the same. It is no surprise to CIRSA how many of us are touched by fraud which is why CIRSA, or your in-house systems guru will gladly help with templates. The resulting checks and balances may not be popular with employees eager to disprove the public perception of how inefficient they are.



We talked fraud in our last two NWCCOG staff meetings, explaining why so many policies & procedures have recently been updated, and why separation of duties, awkward as they seem in such a small organization-40 employees-can feel like the classic public works joke. **How many COG employees does it take to cut a check? Four ... who are never in the office on the same day.**

Doug Jones, our Energy Program Manager shared how an employee a few years back was observed filling up a 5-gallon gas can. Turned out mileage data showed he had been doing so on the company fuel card each time he filled the company truck for quite some time. He was let go.



We underscored why directors and I both review credit card statements before the fiscal office processes them. When I was an Eagle County Commissioner, I shared that in the attorney's office a young office manager was quietly let go for purchasing groceries for her family on a weekly basis with the attorney office card. She was a single mother who was proud of her job. That is what Jones means by "pressure." Jones would say (brutal and stereotyping as it may sound) that potential rationalization and pressure which her director might have anticipated. Instead,

review of statements was delegated to her. That is opportunity. My memory is fuzzy, but I recall someone in finance joking to the attorney-"you guys sure do eat a lot up there." During that same time a longtime [female employee in the Clerks office went to prison](#) on felony theft charges for stealing from a cash account. I'm sure she had a whole host of internal rationalizations to justify why she needed the money more than the Clerk's office-who doesn't feel they are paid enough or that the world is entirely fair. As it is in many such cases, many people reflected at the time about how much they really liked her. More recently, a [male Sheriff's Deputy was charged](#) for using his company vehicle for personal business. This is not to pick on Eagle County, but to illustrate that systems of oversight cannot be delegated to the finance department or assumed to be performed by others.

I remember as an elected official assuming the annual audit was a decisive scan of potential fraud. Wrong. If you believe that a clean audit "proves" there is no fraud in the organization, then you need to ask more questions. Fraud can become another dog whistle for the self-appointed government watchdogs.

This past staff meeting, we watched [All the Queens Horses](#), a riveting documentary about how one municipal employee in Dixon, Illinois stole \$53M over 20 years with a hidden account and a whole lot of fake invoices. No one questioned her extravagant purchases over the years - motorhome, horses, trips. For anyone in a position of public trust, that film is scarier than anything produced by Hollywood. If you need to be scared into action to review your systems, I suggest you watch it.

Local governments need to be the bulwarks of public trust today with Washington D.C. an open sewer pipe flowing with investigations, indictments, and daily stories about those appointed to positions of power openly leveraging the public trust for personal gain. Some apparently have been appointed to override public protections to benefit the industry they were recently paid to represent. No doubt they will exit the revolving door of "public service" and be rewarded. I predict that we are in a time that will be remembered for fraud at a national level, and hopefully history will tell of how it was followed by significant reforms. It is not just a government problem, Marketplace on Public Radio recently reported out a ten-year recap of the financial crisis and explained why so executives who profited from fleecing American consumers didn't end up in jail. Basically, the Attorney General in the Obama administration chose steep fines for companies instead of criminal indictments. Boo. Paying fines is not justice. The public understands that. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, like her or not, is proving why we need leadership from different backgrounds and generations. She has been calling out the structural [corruption in Congress](#)-whose officials are supposed to be protecting us. It will be interesting if reforms gain a foothold in the den of thieves. I'm not holding my breath, but I believe in the healing power of our governance structures.

With fraud and abuse of power in the news every day, local government's managers must work doubly hard to focus on ethics systematically as they once learned to manage safety. It is becoming more challenging to earn the public trust and overcome skepticism. This has consequences when you want to get voters to pass the next ballot measure. Don't think it is inconsequential to your citizens or employees when The Washington Post reports that the [President averaged 15 false claims \(lies\)](#) per day in

2018. He succeeded wildly in business as his former lawyer said, "as a con artist", and now is gaming all of us. Be aware that the swamp in D.C. provides an instant rationalization recipe for employees. Just add opportunity.



Ask yourself what effect the fraud, lies and waste your employees and citizens hear about on a large scale has as employees confront "minor" opportunities for fraud on a daily basis. Today the news is a pile of rationalizations in waiting. Are more reams of paper disappearing from offices these days? Fraud, like an entry drug can start small.

Jones would suggest you talk about ethics with your team, share stories if you have them, let everyone be aware that it is on your radar screen, and for goodness sake, assess how your systems are diminishing the opportunities for someone who might be thinking about how unfair the world is today. Or not. Just because "everyone is doing it" from college admissions to Congressional insider traders, as a manager, like it or not, what your people do is on you.

## Member Highlights

It's always a pleasure to see our Region 12 Members recognized by others in the community. It continues to reinforce the positive contributions being made both in government and in people's personal lives. Recent articles in the [Summit Daily News](#), and the [Emerging Managers Connection](#), have highlighted two of our Members in a way that showcases their achievements both on and off the job.

### Carolyn Skowyra, Dillon Town Mayor and NWCCOG Secretary - Treasurer

Carolyn was recognized in the Summit Daily News, as Mentor of the month for her work with the community-based mentor-ship program. Mountain Mentors, which matches volunteers with children ages 8-16 in an effort to help Summit County's youth to lead healthy lifestyles through a consistent, one-on-one relationship with an adult.

For her part in the program, Skowyra was paired with a girl named Marina.

Since joining the mentors program, Marina has started making lists of new things the duo can do together, and Skowyra said it feels good to check off items from it.

"The most fun we have has been going out on the paddle boards," Skowyra said. "Marina is fearless and loves adventure so exploring different parts of the lake is a win every time."

Research shows these kinds of connections help young people overcome many of life's challenges, as well as learn skills that prove valuable in the child's development.

"The kids just want to have a mentor," she said.

"You don't really have to rearrange your schedule at all. It's a few hours whenever you can work it in, and it really has been easy to add to my schedule."

Anyone who's considering becoming a mentor can go to [CO.Summit.CO.US/332/Mountain-Mentors](https://www.co.summit.co.us/332/Mountain-Mentors) for more.

*Excerpts from SDN*



*Photo courtesy of Mountain Mentors*



## Preston Neil - Acting Town Manager, Avon



Preston was recently recognized as a Colorado Emerging Manager by the CCCMA. His career choices move him far afield from his childhood dream of becoming a NASA astronomer. Through his educational journey, having attended the University of Northern Colorado for his BA, then his MPA at Arizona State University, his fate was sealed as a Public Administrator.

When asked what he's been most proud of in his work for Avon he replied, "I am very proud of the efforts I made in leading the research, implementation options and community engagement process related to the Town of Avon's ban on single-use plastic bags. Prior to the required ordinance readings, I worked closely with Avon's big and small retailers on the proposed legislation. I secured sponsorship from a local bank to have 8,000 reusable

bags generated to be given out to residents for convenience and education purposes. Once the legislation was adopted, I worked with residents and retailers to fully prepare them prior to the implementation date."

To read what he's learned about how to handle failure and more [click here](#).

## Critical Conversations - Mental Health and Youth Tobacco

*Join us at 11:00 a.m. at our March 28th Council Meeting in Gypsum to hear Chris Lindley*



Recently, Mental Health seems to finally be an open topic for discussion across the state of Colorado, whether how it is affecting [youth](#), how [1 in 8 Denverites has depression](#), the recently passed [red flag gun law](#) or how [suicide is ravaging the high country](#) (NPR), suddenly mental health stories seem to be everywhere. Agencies and jurisdictions are rapidly developing policy and programs to address mental health. Eagle County has been on the cutting edge of that trend since Chris Lindley, Eagle County

Public Health Director was hired from CDPHE. In November of 2017, NWCCOG listened in as Chris Lindley, Public Health Director, presented to Eagle County Mayors and Managers immediately after the passage of 1A Mental Health initiative had passed with a 75% approval. In the year of its passage, there were 12 suicides, including a 15-year old in Basalt immediately after the election. Eagle County was creative in writing the ballot language. The County attorney, Bryan Treu believed at that time that other counties would follow, and they have, including the City of Denver. We asked Lindley to share with NWCCOG Council what Eagle County has been doing in the year and a half since being the first county in the state to pass a ballot measure targeted to address mental health issues. And he was correct.

Chris Lindley will once again be speaking to the NWCCOG Council Meeting on March 21, and will bring us up-to-date on ballot initiatives and progress made - along with an update on efforts to raise the minimum age for purchase of tobacco products to 21 instead of the current 18. With the vast majority of cigarette smokers start young, almost 90% started at 18 or younger. This becomes even more important with the introduction of candy flavored and vape products that entice young non-smokers to experiment.



In fact, a 2018 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study of high school youth vape product

use across 37 states found Colorado's youth using at the highest rate in the nation at more than twice the national average.

Lindley is working hard to address both issues and will have a complete report at our next Council Meeting - see below for time and place. [For additional information see page 68 - 75 of the 3/28 Council Packet.](#)

## NWCCOG 2019 Regional Economic Summit on May 2 in Silverthorne!



**2019 REGIONAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT**

The economic Summit promises to be an entertaining, and information rich seminar with the theme of the day asking the question: "What are the Ingredients of a Resilient Regional Economy?" The main focus areas are:

- Supporting the Workforce
- Diversifying the Economy
- Creating Sustainable/Responsible Tourism

The DRAFT agenda is being developed and it is sure to provide something for everyone.

Speakers include:

Elizabeth Garner, State Demographer, State of Colorado Demography Office who will provide a Demographic & Economic Overview of the NWCCOG Region and a peek at Census 2020.

Jessica Valand, Regional Director, NW/RR Workforce Regions will give us her perspective on creating higher-paying jobs and career pathways.

Betsy Markey, Executive Director, OEDIT is our lunch time keynote speaker.

Afternoon sessions will be focused on ways to support our workforce including Workforce housing with Public/Private Partnerships, Healthcare options and Mental Health initiatives, and sustainable tourism relative to protecting our natural resources.

The day promises to be thought provoking and will provide actionable ideas that each county may want to replicate. If you haven't already reserved your spot, [register here!](#)

## QQ CELEBRATES COLORADO RIVER COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT BENEFITS

The historic Colorado River Cooperative Agreement (CRCA) was signed more than five years ago, and QQ took some time to celebrate the benefits that members are already receiving from the agreement. The CRCA established a partnership between Denver Water and the West Slope along the Colorado River from the headwaters to the Utah state line. It provides a framework for numerous actions by the parties to benefit water supply and the environment on both sides of the Continental Divide.



*Frisco Town Marina, top photo aerial of current configuration; bottom photo from Town's 2018 Master Plan concept. Photos provided by Tom Hogeman.*

At the most recent QQ meeting, Summit County Commissioner Karn Stiegelmeier, Grand County Assistant Manager Ed Moyer, and Frisco Bay Marina Manager, Tom Hogeman, commented on the various ways the CRCA has benefited the QQ region already. Ed recounted benefits in Grand County, including the Learning By Doing cooperative effort. LBD completed its first restoration project on the Fraser River that includes half a mile of public fishing access, with Denver Water volunteering early payments of funding under the CRCA. With court approval of the Blue River (water) Decrees in 2018, Summit County and municipalities received \$4.5 million in payments for projects, including the excavation of the Frisco Town Marina. Tom recounted this project and the economic benefits of utilizing the marina for longer periods in the summer and developing safer, more practical multisport access to Dillon Reservoir.

Karn reflected on how, along with wet water and funding, the CRCA has helped usher in a new era of cooperation and strengthened relationships with Denver Water. QQ members see this outside of the water world, on issues like forest health, transportation, and affordable housing.

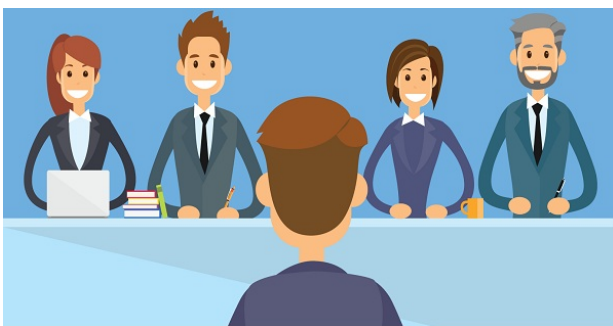
[Read here for the complete report.](#)

## Searching for A Manager by Jon

Forgive me for really enjoying participating in a day of interviews this month with Town of Avon staff, and stakeholders.

It is an honor to fulfill our mission at NWCCOG in assisting or advising local governments in their many roles, not the least of which periodically is choosing an appointed leader. My first advice to a council or board is to begin by realistically scanning the situation, seeking clarity of intent so it can be accurately communicated through the process, and full understand what the group (board, or organization, or community) wants to accomplish before defining what kind of leader being sought.

Believe it or not, there is not an aisle of full of perfectly fitted managerial talent waiting for a posting, and there is no generic, one-size-fits all best-fit manager-type either, unless you think of your place is a generic one.



Sometimes it doesn't take much Google searching or phone calling colleagues for potential applicants to read a hot mess from a distance. How well are you broadcasting your initiatives, goals and plans on your website? Is there an understandable transition story? Is the board aligned? Does your jurisdiction read like a dumpster fire in the local paper, by word of mouth, in social media? Is the correction already underway? All that is easier said than done. Avon has had challenges, but nothing that dramatic.



The process, and who is included is itself a message to applicants. The well-organized day of interviews reflected well on Avon for all involved.

Thinking about how your organization and board look to the outside world is of consequence not just for top talent, but for all talent you hope to attract. Every day. There has been something of an epidemic of turnover lately. Off the top of my head, town or county manager searches that have occurred among our 28 member jurisdictions since I started this job in November of 2016: Frisco, Dillon, Vail, Granby, Basalt, Minturn, Eagle, Eagle County, Gypsum, Winter Park, Kremmling, and now Grand County, Avon, and Aspen. That is 50% turnover -- a couple of those twice. Most councils don't have a very good idea how they are perceived beyond their boundaries or to talent looking in from the outside. It is very important to send the right signals.

I've been asked to participate directly in a couple of interview processes in this role. Avon for this second time around had a process that was managed as well as any. As one interviewer among 20 others on three different panels mixed with staff, citizens and community stakeholders who after a morning of interviews, sat at a round table and one-by-one advised the board of their thoughts over lunch. Many boards fail to include a broad group of stakeholders-especially staff. This can lead to a myopic view of candidates.

Such a transition can be awkward for all involved. I've been especially impressed with those jurisdictions that after going around once, all the way to identifying finalists were brave enough to reset and go around again. In every one of those situations-Granby, Vail, Eagle County and now Avon, Council patience seems to have paid off with a solid hire.

## NWCCOG knows wellness

### NWCCOG Certified Leader 2019 Healthy Workplace



NWCCOG continues to set an example in terms of providing leadership in the focus of Workplace Health. Once again, we were certified as a 2019 Leader by CO Health Links.

In an article for their website, they asked us a few questions:

**Health Links (HL):** Why did your business decide to become a Health Links Certified Healthy Business?

**Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG):** NWCCOG recognizes the benefits of understanding and improving employee well-being and how that starts where employees spend most of their waking time - the workplace. The happier and healthier our employees, the more productive and enjoyable the

workplace.

**Health Links (HL):** What benefits did the Certification bring to your business?

**(NWCCOG):** The Healthy Business Certification enhanced our employees' and surrounding communities' vision of wellness. Having a certification is the first step in educating employees and the public about what it means to work healthy. Being a healthy employee has become a value for each of us - participation in wellness activities is up and the majority of our office employees even choose to order standing desks for their offices! Our view of wellness is then spread regionally through our newsletter and through those we interact with on a daily basis. The certification has also given us

connections to local healthy business resources. These businesses have facilitated workshops or presentations at our site regarding topics such as proper ergonomics (Howard Head, Will Kruger), financial planning (Choice Advisors, Michelle Martinez), benefits of meditation (Internal Balance, Thotme), surviving at high altitude (Ebert Family Clinic, Christine Ebert-Santos, M.D.), and teamwork (Ascent Life Planning, Claudine Norden). Most importantly, employee morale has increased due to the benefits that came from becoming a certified healthy business.

For the complete interview [click here](#).

## 2019 NWCCOG COUNCIL MEETING SCHEDULE

**Thursday, March 28, 2019**

***Full Council Meeting***

Location: Council Chambers, 50 Lundgren Blvd. Gypsum, CO

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of final 2018 financials; program updates.

**Thursday, May 23, 2019**

***Full Council & EDD Board Meeting***

Location: Breckenridge Grand Vacations Community Center Hopefull/Discovery Room

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Review/acceptance of the 2018 audit

**Thursday, July 11, 2019**

***Full Council Meeting***

Location: Colorado Mountain College, 1402 Blake Ave., Glenwood Springs, CO

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of 2020 dues; approval of 2019 budget revisions; discussion re: Annual

Planning Meeting Agenda

**Thursday, August 22, 2019**

***Full Council & EDD Board Annual Planning Meeting***

Location: Summit County Community & Senior Center Hoosier Room, Frisco, CO

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Agenda Items: Strategic Planning for 2020

**Thursday, October 24, 2019**

***Full Council Meeting***

Location: Grand View Community Space, 395 E. Lionshead Circle, Vail, CO

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Review of draft 2020 budget

**Thursday, December 5, 2019**

***Full Council, EDD Board & Foundation Board Meeting***

Location: NWCCOG Office, Silverthorne, CO

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: 2019 budget revisions; approve 2020 budget; adopt 2020 meeting schedule; annual

NWCCOG Foundation Board meeting.

**Northwest Colorado Council of Governments**

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