



From the Director's Desk

Winter of our discontent? We Got this?

Listening to voices from around the region there is equal parts excitement and concern about the coming winter. Will snow come? Will visitors come? Will we manage ourselves and our visitors well enough to stay healthy and in business?

One thing that will likely be settled early in November is the Election. The national backdrop poses enough uncertainty to worry anyone. Two weeks before the presidential election, anxiousness is justified about the virus and equally justified about the integrity of our democratic process, about the integrity of the national vote, the integrity of our leadership, about four more years, or about a peaceful transition of power if it comes to that. Widely shared experience of COVID19 and our need to act collectively to contain it have not brought us together as it might have. It still may after election season. That story yet to be written.



Other people's reactions to all this compound our own anxiety, and threaten to unhinge us. Hopefully the election outcome will not. A lot of the political rhetoric this year has roots from decades back in our history. This situation is bringing the meaning of the rhetoric home to be seen openly. There have been some riots, some looting, a lot of mania, an inflection of conspiracy theories, a lot of election rhetoric, a lot of triggers for any of our individual or collective fears which don't bring out the best of us, but so far in a historical context these have been extremely minor. The coming years may provide an awakening on many issues. In that, there is cause for hope. Whatever "side" you are on, the collective "we" that is America is not well. There is much that needs to be addressed.

Though there is not a Hollywood breakthrough yet, there is cause for hope with the virus. The medical community has learned much about managing cases. Collectively and individually this is on us. Cases go up based on our behavior and go down based on our behavior. We each have control over that. There are facts. Masks work. Personal hygiene works. Distancing works. Keep an eye on the data. There are

dashboards for that. the [State of Colorado has a good one](#). Some counties are trending up in cases, pointing towards another call to “shelter in place,” a few local dashboards which point to an open door to reopening. In the high country, a lot of work task-forcing the ski area openings, Eagle County had two representatives on the Governor’s task force, Commissioner Jeannie McQueenie and Public Health Director Heath Harmon. This winter, it will still come down to how personal behavior impacts the numbers. These numbers matter since local control is directly tied to meeting certain state guidelines. This isn’t over by any stretch. I like Eagle County’s marketing in their toolkit on this: We got this.

Another good thing right now? Mental health challenges are being normalized—and recognized as a community issue, not to be pushed into the shadows. I don’t know about you, but personally, I am not so well by any conventional measure, and getting help for mental health has been de-stigmatized just in time. I got a referral to a therapist through my urologist. Thought it may seem counterintuitive, the pressure of this situation has opened some cracks, which as Leonard Cohen says, “is how the light gets in.”

Cause for further optimism? NWCCOG’s mission for better regional communication as a source for good governance is happening in unprecedented ways during this extended crisis. Local managers and officials are communicating and collaborating relentlessly, and more frequently than can be tracked. This is happening within counties, within worksheds, between levels of governance from HOAs, to Metro districts, to municipalities, counties, the state, and representatives in D.C. No, it is not all smooth, not always amicable, but communication lines are open. Places that have frameworks for this are thriving, moving forward. Those who didn’t are building them. There is no other way to forge positive outcomes. Those relationships which seemed ad-hoc, why-so-many-meetings, calls and coffees are paying off. We will not go back to the same kind of siloed approach with separation being a default will succeed anytime soon. That is a good thing. One of the many bright spots.

Setting Realistic Expectations

Observing large employers tells us to plan on this continuing into next summer. The AI Tompkins, Poynter briefing for journalists says that “You are not going to the office anytime soon.” Poynter notes that DocuSign in SF and other major employers decided that work from home is going to be normal until July 2021. And 73% of employees are worried that going back to the workplace could pose a personal risk. Another survey says [that 94% of workers](#) want to return to work at least one day a week but on their own terms.” This should tell us locally to be careful about overly optimistic expectations about a solution or return to “normal” before next summer. Many leaders worry that heightened hope about solutions will lead to more peak cases and more restrictive orders in many places before we are ready. Count on it.

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Expansion Funding for Steamboat Whiskey Company provided by NLF

Veteran supports veterans

Veteran Navy Seal Nathan Newhall had a few passions in his life – one was helping returning veterans, one was crafting spirits, one was skiing. On his honeymoon with wife Jessica to Steamboat Springs, the Newhall’s realized this booming ski town lacked a critical element -- a distillery. The wheels began turning and in 2015 the Newhall’s began to transform their dream into a

reality. Jessica remained in Minnesota to finish her MBA, while Nathan moved to Steamboat to find the perfect location for their new venture.



They needed a space that had plenty of room to operate a distillery and wanted it to fit with the “western” feel of the community. They found the ideal building, originally built in 1947 as a ranching co-op with plenty of high ceilings and old barn wood. Nathan and a few friends lovingly and meticulously remodeled the building creating just the right atmosphere. They were able to get a rare cross distillery/pub license enabling them to sell not only the spirits they make on site, but also beer, wine, and food. This is a distinctive competitive advantage adding to their success.

Since their opening in 2017, their products have won numerous awards and they have become famous for their Warrior Whiskey which was created as a veteran tribute product. With a portion of the proceeds of the sale of each bottle going to support a select list of veteran assistance organizations, they have donated over \$50,000 in support of their mission of helping vets.

With the success of Steamboat Whiskey and the distribution of their product through local restaurants and liquor store sales, both locally and in several states throughout the country, they realized it was time to expand their operation.

The Northwest Loan Fund's Director of Business Lending, Anita Cameron and Scott Pugsley, Business Lending Assistant worked with them to help secure funding enabling the establishment to add inventory and additional staff.

As one might imagine Veteran's Day (November 7) is a holiday near and dear to the hearts of the Newhall's who plan to celebrate with a fundraiser at their location. “Operation Warhorse” will feature live music by Buffalo Commons, a raffle with awesome prizes, and proceeds will benefit [Warhorse Ranch](#), whose primary mission is to reduce the risk of suicide among Veterans. Suggested donation is only \$25 per person and will include one raffle ticket, and the event is from noon to 6:00.

Of course, this event will be held in compliance with COVID19 mitigation protocols and social distancing will be enforced.

Even if you are unable to join the festivities, you can participate by purchasing a bottle (or more) of Warrior Whiskey sold in local liquor stores in your area and many locations on the front range. In these challenging times for many businesses and veterans, this is a good news story about a business that is thriving, growing, and giving back to the community.

For additional information about Steamboat Whisky company check their [website here](#). NLF information can be found [here](#). Or you can reach out to Anita at Anita@northwestloanfund.org

Energize Colorado Gap Funds awards \$548,748 to NW Colorado Businesses

NLF plays key role

The Northwest Loan Fund at NWCCOG has been unexpectedly busy these past few weeks. On August 31, The Energize Colorado Gap Fund, created by the State of Colorado to provide more than \$25 million in loans and grants, invited applications from small organizations that are the economic engines throughout the state. Grants up to \$15,000 and loans up to \$20,000 were offered in this first round.



Energize Colorado Gap Fund

Each application from Covid-impacted businesses in NW Colorado were scored, by independent reviewers, based on criteria set forth by the Colorado Legislature. The Northwest Loan Fund (NLF) processed almost 400 applications in just 4 weeks, ultimately awarding \$545,748 to 41 well qualified

businesses.

The procedure for each round of applications requires the scoring of every application by multiple reviewers, and uses the score based on specified criteria. Dollars are distributed to each region based on applicant demand which are then distributed to the highest scoring applicants.

Scoring was done by Anita Cameron, Director of Business Lending – NLF, and Scott Pugsley who joined the NLF in August as Business Lending Assistant. “Scott has been extraordinary; we are fortunate to have his demeanor and 13 years of business lending experience. This effort has taken Scott, myself and several others to process the volume of applications.” says Anita Cameron, Director of Business Lending for the NLF. The volume of applications speaks to the continuing need of financial assistance for businesses in our communities.

The NLF service areas received the largest number of applications second only to the Denver Metro area.

The Northwest Loan Fund is proud to have participated in the vetting of applicants for the Energize Colorado Gap funds across Regions 12 and 11, which serves the West Slope of Colorado from Rocky Mountain National Park to the Utah border including NWCCOG’s member counties of Pitkin, Eagle, Summit, Grand and Jackson in addition to Routt, Garfield Rio Blanco and Moffat in Region 11.

The work being done for the Energize Colorado Gap Fund, is in addition to processing loans for business expansion, purchase, working capital and start up in the NLF Territory. The NLF reviews loans for local business at the pace of 5-10 each year with approved loans totaling about \$600,000 annually. The loans are analyzed similarly to any commercial loan, but through the lens of economic development, specifically jobs created, and with more flexibility than traditional commercial loans. Since 2014, the Northwest Loan Fund has made over \$4 Million in business loans to over 50 companies creating 186 jobs.

The final round of grant funding closes Monday, October 26th. Loans up to \$20,000.00 will be available in Round 3. The program administered at the state level by Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA). For more information about how to apply [see here](#). To learn more about NWCCOG’s Northwest Loan Fund, go to (northwestloanfund.org), or contact anita@northwestloanfund.org.

I scream, you scream, we all scream for... social interaction



A recent study entitled [Experiences of Nursing Home Residents During the Pandemic](#), details the depressing reality for those living in long term care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stringent restrictions were put in place by both federal and state agencies to protect the health of both residents and staff, and while protecting individuals who may be at higher risk of disease is important, the unintended consequence of such severe restrictions took a toll on the mental health of many residents.

According to the data, “76% of respondents reported that they felt lonelier under the restrictions, an unsurprising finding given that 64% of respondents also indicated that they no longer even leave their rooms to socialize with other residents.”

Vintage’s Long Term Care Ombudsman, Tina Strang, experienced firsthand the grim outcome of the social isolation requirements in facilities. Tina was restricted from visiting facilities due to State guidelines and brainstormed ways she could continue to connect with and support residents. Tina purchased a Radio Flyer wagon, decorated it, and packed it with ice cream and other sweet treats. Since Tina is still not allowed inside facility, she delivered one such wagon to Whitcomb Terrace in Aspen. Staff then held a mini ice cream parade for the residents via the ice cream fun wagon.

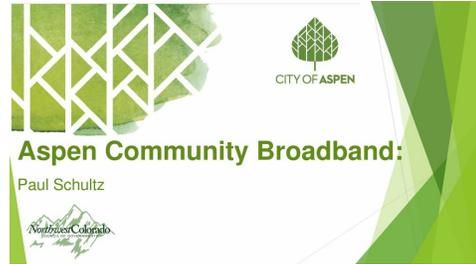
This moment of “sweet” interaction is a drop in the bucket for what residents need during this time, but Tina and Vintage remain actively engaged with older adults and their caregivers as we constantly reassess how we can best support our community.



Project THOR Success Stories - Aspen

Aspen Community Broadband

NWCCOG celebrated The City of Aspen's "Aspen Community Broadband" project which was recognized for one of three annual Excellence Awards from CGAIT (Colorado Government Association of Information Technology in 2020 for "Enhancing Public-Facing Communications and Services."



This is the announcement from CGAIT: *Aspen's remote geographic location and the adverse impacts from periodic commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP) network outages led the City of Aspen and Pitkin County to improve communications network resiliency by delivering better and more cost-effective broadband. Additional community benefits of Aspen Community Broadband include net neutrality, no monthly data caps and fostering healthy broadband competition. The City of Aspen leveraged their existing fiber optic network, which before February 2019 served only City and Pitkin County government operations, to deliver broadband services to community anchor institutions including Aspen School District, Mountain Rescue Aspen, Grassroots Community Network, City of Aspen, Pitkin County, Pitkin County Broadband Initiative and three local ISPs. The Aspen team learned broadband service delivery business and technical skills by collaborating with Northwest Colorado Broadband (NCB), Glenwood Springs, the NWCCOG Project THOR partners and Mammoth Networks. Team Aspen's Lean Startup approach achieved positive results with no additional staff! The exemplary regional collaboration led by NWCCOG continues to improve broadband services in Aspen, Pitkin County, the Roaring Fork Valley and throughout Northwest Colorado.*

Paul Schultz, Director of Information Technology for the City of Aspen and his team have leveraged their hosting of a Project THOR meet-me-center (MMC) more rapidly than any other MMC host and have become the first host to need to increase their originally envisioned capabilities of their network and are responding by increasing their Project THOR connection speed as a MMC host. This change upgraded both their network equipment, capabilities and the amount of bandwidth available on the Project THOR network to match increasing demand. Their direct engagement with community anchor institutions is driving the increased need and so is leveraging THOR to serve three local broadband providers. Aspen was one of the first to experience the value of Project THOR's redundancy when fiber up the Roaring Fork Valley was cut in the summer of 2020 and the network seamlessly failed over to a redundant path that goes directly to Denver without any interruption in service.

Schultz says of NWCCOG's Project THOR, "with current events increasing our demand for critical communications and remote working, Project THOR is reliably delivering the robust broadband services required by the Aspen community, including city, county, school district, GrassRoots Community Network, local ISPs and emergency operations."

Energy Program gets new wheels



As you're driving around Region 12 and beyond, you may see new Energy Program vans. The fleet is being upgraded to vehicles that enable more efficiencies. In addition to better gas mileage than some of the older models they also include a long list of safety features. And after all, we are all about safety.

Safety features include:

- ALL WHEEL DRIVE
- Rear sensing system
- Back up camera with an 8" screen
- Fog lights
- Cruise control
- Blis system (Blind Spot Information System)



Demographics and Stats tell the recovery story

If you're a numbers wonk – you'll want to check this out

October 1, the VVP hosted a Big Picture Breakfast event for interested Eagle County businesses to discuss a regional economic gap analysis presented by NWCCOG Executive Director Jon Stavney and EDD Director Rachel Lunney.

Using statistics from DOLA, LMI Gateway, the Colorado Demography office, US Census Bureau, and Stats America, Lunney created a powerful presentation showing important changes in the shifts in statistics from 2008 to the present day.

Moderator Chris Romer, CEO of VVP introduced the topic saying, “How Eagle County stacks up is important to understand in terms of the economic realities, opportunities, and challenges we share with our neighbors to learn what they may have already accomplished that we can also use. Many of these issues, like housing, healthcare -- we're all familiar with, but this presentation gives us an overall view of the economy and how it's changed over time.”

It's a sentiment that most municipalities or counties would like to know – how do we stack up?

The data on the EDD Website and help you get a handle on it. Most counties in the NWCCOG region will be reassured with what they already know:

- You're likely to be **industry top-heavy** with the prime industry being driven by tourism – and by definition it means it's likely to take longer to recovery when that industry is hit hard – like by a pandemic. The county in our Region that doesn't fit that model is Jackson – by far the most diverse county and who should see a rebound quicker than others.
- **Wages are increasing, but** not at the level of the state or of the US in general. Part of the reason for that is the low-wages paid by business in the tourist industries. As Mark Hoblitzel (CO Workforce Center) explained, “It will be challenging to identify what happens with wages for the next few quarters post-pandemic. It is likely that wages will increase in the short-term post-pandemic as leisure/hospitality/tourism jobs were hit the hardest. So average wages will increase as low-wage workers are out of work. It may be a few years before we see what impact the pandemic has on wages.”
- The number of **Sole Proprietor licenses are higher than normal** “Watch sole proprietor numbers. There are lots of factors that go into this sector – there are record numbers of EIN numbers since COVID –which is encouraging – we'll watch to see how many of these will turn into growing businesses. It's important to keep an eye on it – it could mean high-end consultants making life style choices to thrive in the Valley and an increase in employee providers – or for other folks it might not be their first choice – it could mean a lot of different things.”
- **Businesses are still challenged to find workers** – primarily because housing continues to be a challenge - we continue to lose housing stock to second homeowners and STR's. Additionally, skilled workers tend to migrate out to find higher paying jobs and more affordable living spaces in which to raise their budding families.

To find data for your county, check out [EDD site here](#).

Eagle County: 2008 vs. 2019

Jobs				
	2008	2019	# Chg	% Chg
Eagle County	32,256	33,932	1,676	5.2%
Colorado	2,310,865	2,736,105	425,240	18.4%
U.S.	134,805,659	148,105,092	13,299,433	9.9%
Wages				
	2008	2019		
Eagle County	\$ 40,877	\$ 48,605	\$ 7,728	18.9%
Colorado	\$ 46,614	\$ 61,820	\$ 15,206	32.6%
U.S.	\$ 45,563	\$ 59,209	\$ 13,646	29.9%

The worst losses during the height of the Great Recession came in March 2009, when 800,000 jobs were eliminated. The highest unemployment rate ever recorded (since record keeping began in 1948) was 10.8% in 1982 during the recession in the early years of that decade. Forbes, May 8, 2020

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages

Next Council Meeting:

December 3, 2020 - 10:00 to 1:00

Full Council, EED Board & Foundation Board Meeting

Zoom Call

Agenda: 2020 Budget Revisions, approve 20201 budget, annual NWCCOG

Foundation meeting