

## From the Director's Desk

### *2024 April Economic Summit, Quality of Life, MillionDollar Towns and Cruel Outcomes*

#### **Homelessness Law at Supreme Court. Is being poor and without shelter a crime?**

On April 22, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments for *Grants Pass v Johnson*, a case that many local officials and police believe could provide greater latitude in fining and clearing homeless camps. It can be framed as a local control issue. Advocates for

Constitutional rights being applied as equitably to homeless as to the housed worry that this will let municipalities off the hook without any responsibility for the

consequences. [Vox reports April 17<sup>th</sup>](#), that the case could “make the entire criminal justice system far crueler,” by turning homelessness into a crime. The likely outcome this summer will probably be celebrated by local governments overwhelmed by a problem rooted in problems they don’t appear to have the ability to change: severe income inequality, soaring housing costs, rising substance abuse issues, a mental health system that is broken. Following a day of arguments [Vox reported](#) that the decision is “probably going to end badly for homeless people,” while the Court also appears reluctant to act too broadly.

[The National Association of Counties](#) noted that “highly localized decisions” would move to Federal Court, and along with “substantial financial implications” for local governments that current law (Boise) provides a “perverse incentive” to provide temporary solutions like shelter beds rather than more systemic solutions. Related court cases since 2018 have made clear that local governments can only clear homeless people from the streets and close homeless encampments if they have enough beds and shelter space to accommodate those dislocate by their actions (Martin v Boise). Prior cases upheld that punishing citizens for “mere status” was “cruel and unusual punishment” prohibited by the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Police pushed by elected officials to “do something” have few options. The Vox story is very much worth reading even though few NWCCOG communities are **visibly** inundated by homelessness the way many metro areas are. If the Court overturns Boise, supporting lower court decision on Grants Pass, it will be yet another indication that the United States is a nation failing to address core social issues with proactive legislation, instead forcing broken economic and social policy onto the criminal justice system, and ultimately punishing those least able to fend for themselves. It is estimated that California has the highest homeless population at 180,000. [The Colorado Sun](#) has a couple articles about Denver’s homeless population and a recently released [report](#) which is about 9,000, larger than the population of each of NWCCOG’s 24 municipalities except for 2.

Though we may have an image in our minds of an unwashed vagrant person beside a tent on a sidewalk, or begging on a street corner those who monitor homelessness remind us that most homeless people got there from circumstances not unfamiliar to many of us, substance abuse, financial insolvency, medical conditions without insurance, or being unable to pay rent. Those without shelter, living out of a vehicle, have difficulty emerging from their circumstances without first getting stable, affordable shelter. That should sound familiar to those of us in the high country.

*Jon Stavney*

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## Welcome to our new NWCCOG Office Manager, Moira Vander-Meer!

Moira Vander-Meer started at NWCCOG in March and is a long time local of Summit County. One of her hobbies is scuba diving all over the world. "I'm PADI open water and deep water scuba diving certified! I got certified in Mexico and recertified in Honduras. I love getting to see so many unique fish and get such mental stimulation

from all the beauty," said Moira. She has been living, playing, and working in the area for 29 years. Moira's pride and joy is her 7.5 year old Chocolate Lab/Vizsla mix, Watson. Helping others achieve their goals and dreams comes naturally for Moira. "I love helping others get started with their own businesses and business plans. There are really amazing people that live here who are doing really amazing things," said Moira. She and her husband own an angel investing company where they provide small and beginning businesses with the seed funding, tools, and support they need to be successful. Moira also has an extensive background in bookkeeping and she is currently taking 13 credit hours at Colorado Mountain College to deepen her knowledge and earn a certification.



Say hi to Moira and get to know her more! [mvandermeer@nwccog.org](mailto:mvandermeer@nwccog.org)

## Vintage Program Updates



### NWCCOGG Certified as an Age-Friendly Employer

NWCCOG has been recertified for an additional two years as a Certified Age-Friendly Employer, recognizing our commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment for individuals aged 50 and above.

To achieve this certification, NWCCOG collaborated closely with the Certified Age-Friendly Employer team, addressing key aspects such as recruiting and employment policies, practices, and programs. The comprehensive evaluation covered twelve categories of recognized best practices for age-friendly employers.

This milestone is not only a testament to NWCCOG's commitment to its employees but also reflects the company's strategic approach to attracting top talent. "As a Certified Age-Friendly Employer, we are not only enhancing the lives of the older adults we serve, but also create a workplace where experience and maturity are celebrated," said Erin Fisher, Director of Vintage. "We believe that by fostering an age-friendly environment, we not only attract the best talent but also create a culture of inclusivity and respect."

### Colorado's AAAs Receive Additional \$2M in State Long Bill

We have an update for you if you've been following the Aging Network's 2024 funding request to the JBC to increase the state's Area Agency on Aging funding by an additional \$5M in the state budget through [SB247-040](#). As we've discussed in [recent Council meetings](#), the end of both Federal ARPA and State Homestead funding, coupled with going back to pre-COVID funding allocations, has resulted in about a 20% [decrease in Vintage's budget](#). This impacts Vintage's internal programs, like financial vouchers for older adults, and sub-contracts with local providers.

While there was hope that the State's sixteen AAAs would receive an additional \$6.1M, after the budget amendment made it past both the House and Senate, the JBC ultimately decided on \$2M in additional funding. While this is still not enough funding to keep Vintage from having to make cuts, it does slightly lessen the budgetary blow. Vintage staff would like to thank DRCOG and their Director of Legislative Affairs, Rich Mauro, for leading the advocacy charge at the Capitol. Erin Fisher, Director of Vintage said, "Rich keeps all the AAAs informed and works tirelessly for additional funding for the aging network and Colorado's older adults. We're so thankful for his critical advocacy work and for legislators like Senators Ginal and Danielson and Representatives Willford and Young, who introduced SB247-040 and continue to promote and support Older Coloradans."

For more information, contact Erin Fisher at 970-455-1067 or [efisher@nwccog.org](mailto:efisher@nwccog.org).

## Bridge over Blue Mesa Reservoir closed indefinitely

Late in the evening on April 19th, [the bridge over Blue Mesa Reservoir closed](#) due to a 3-4 inch crack in one of its steel beams. The bridge on U.S. 50 was shut down Thursday evening at the urging of federal highway officials after an inspection crew identified "anomalies" in the bridge, the Colorado Department of Transportation said Friday morning. The crack was discovered last week during a mandatory inspection for high-strength steel bridges, required by the Federal Highway Administration, CDOT said. The inspection

was mandated because of “known issues” with similarly constructed bridges.

The unexpected closure of the bridge, which links Montrose and Gunnison, left people stranded on either side of the closure, including [a group of school kids](#) whose only options to join their classmates in Gunnison were to face the rolling caps of Colorado’s largest reservoir or take a seven-hour journey to school one-way over precarious mountain passes. Transportation officials [opened a detour around the bridge Monday](#), allowing residents of Gunnison, Montrose

and Hinsdale counties to drive across a rugged county road for “critical local travel” two times a day. Still, the two-hour commute behind a pilot car driving 25 mph would make it hard to get to school on time, said Kendal Rota, a mother of three who used to drive about a dozen students who live near Sapinero and Cimarron to school on a minibus before the crack was discovered.



These stories are from the Colorado Sun.

## STR Bill to Tax at Commercial Rate Fails in Committee



[The Colorado Sun reports](#) that SB24-33 was voted down 6-1 in the Senate Finance Committee. NWCCOG heard at the January Council meeting from VVP CEO Chris Romer how damaging passage of the bill could be to many communities whose bed base skews away from hotel type toward condominium and other rental models. With over 24,000 STRs in Colorado, and some resort communities having the majority of their visitor bed base in classic STRs, efforts to regulate and manage the impacts seem destined to remain a local government issue. NWCCOG and CAST worked together recently in updating the Workforce Housing Report and the [CAST STR Ordinances Matrix in 2023](#) which shows all of the current tools local governments are implementing. Changing the

tax base from residential to commercial at a state level will not again be on the table for some time in spite of exceptions made for units rented less than 90 days each year. The story notes that HB24-1299 which would only tax STRS at the higher rate if a person or business owns two other homes is still in question.

## If I Had A Million Dollars: (I couldn't buy a home)

A report from Zillow published April 2, 2024 finds [The U.S. has a record-high 550 'million dollar' cities](#) where “the typical home is worth \$1M or more.” Zillow has a robust [research page](#) worth exploring. Colorado now has 2 such communities, with Aspen, Avon, Basalt, Breckenridge, Carbondale, Edwards, Snowmass Village, Steamboat Springs and Vail in the NWCCOG region making the list according to [KDVR Denver](#). We’ve understood for years that real estate in marquee resort towns such as Aspen and Vail sport box office valuations, and that the red carpet extends miles “down valley” to places such as Avon, Basalt, Carbondale (30 miles) and Edwards (14 miles), pushing home affordability further and further from the workplace for many employees. The average annual wage in Eagle County is \$23.44/hr. (\$49,000/yr.). This gap isn’t news to those of us living it, though it is a benchmark worth pause.

Remember the whimsical 1988 song, “If I had a million dollars?” Even two years later when I graduated college, that benchmark represented a magical amount of wealth denoting some freedom from economic realities. It felt like a nearly unattainable wealth. Today, by simple cost-of-living inflation, the spending power of that \$1M would relate to \$2M to \$2.5M. Forbes reported last year that the nation had 22,000,000 millionaires of whom 735 rank as billionaires. That year there were 63,000 millionaires nationwide. From one perspective.



## COG Quirks



Meet Emily Hoskins, our Outreach Manager for the Energy Program at NWCCOG! Why is she holding a briefcase, you ask? "When I started at NWCCOG, I needed something to carry all of my outreach materials to events. There were a ton of these left over briefcases from probably back in the 80s so I took one. I've been using it ever since and it's a great talking point." -Emily

## Upcoming Board Meetings

**Thursday, June 6, 2024:** Full Council, EDD Board

**Location:** Zoom Conference Call, On-Site Location Silverthorne - Lunch provided

**Time:** Council 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., EDD Board 12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

**Primary Agenda Items:** approve March meeting minutes, approve List of Bills,

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