



## Happy Birthday, NWCCOG!



In 2024, NWCCOG quietly turned 50 years old. Congratulations to QQ and Energy (Weatherization) which have been stalwarts from Day 1. I want to thank hundreds of past and present employees for making this a mission-based organization with a formidable reputation. We have strong shoulders upon which we stand.

### Political Curiosity Will Save Us

One thing I've learned is that you just don't know. I have also learned that we must actively manage ourselves to avoid being overwhelmed which renders us ineffective.

Eight years ago, when I started this role, the incoming Executive Branch team proposed a budget that would have eliminated many of our federal funding partner agencies to NWCCOG and slashed our budgets and staff. Worst case, half of our programs would have been eliminated. There were tears in the hallway, and anxieties ran amok. I knew grant funding was less stable than property or sales tax which. Turned out, the Legislative Branch of government (as designed) put the brakes on that train. Medicare, adult aging services, weatherization, the Economic Development Administration, preservation of the clean water act and other environmental protections, flawed as they are in practice, would die another day.



This time the sideboards are less apparent. It really looks like some agencies could be strangled in the bathtub as Grover Norquist famously wished. Radical changes are likely to occur at the federal level. Some advocated for this upheaval for half a century. They appear poised to have their giddy wishes granted. It's going to be wild.

I often thought, what if citizens got to see the actual impacts of rhetoric--campaign slogans solidified into

policy? How would it play out, if Americans could suddenly experience and debate policies that recently appeared untouchable?

The volume of proposed change is by design, too much to process, so choose one area to focus, one agency, one arena and become extremely curious about it, interact with others about it. Stay focused on it. Ask what are the changes intended to do, who do the changes serve? If it has the chance of positive outcomes, stay open and curious. If not, speak to it with specificity.

*"By inundating the public with the sheer volume and crudeness of his actions, (the authoritarian leader) aims to exhaust the part of our minds that distinguishes truth from falsehood, morality from immorality, and virtue from vice. This (leader) is not concerned that such tactics might lead to a societal mental breakdown; rather, he relies on it. His strategy is to ensnare ordinary citizens in such a web of moral confusion and cognitive paralysis that they become incapable of understanding."* -Tom Nichols, The Atlantic (with modifications by me).

In a political climate marked by rapid change and complex challenges, cultivating a sense of curiosity can empower us to engage more thoughtfully with the issues at hand.

Scott Shigeoka, author of *Seek: How curiosity can transform your life and change the world*, learned from his research that curiosity offers us different ways to:

- Challenge our assumptions and biases
- Provide an antidote to fear and anxiety
- Embrace uncertainty with more courage
- Deepen connections in an era of social isolation and exclusion

...among other benefits. It is a "bridge to connection." The book offers useful models and suggestions for applying "Deep Curiosity" to your life. If you don't have time to read, listen to one of his plethora of podcasts or videos. I discovered him on [Templeton Ideas podcast](#).

Underneath Shigeoka's belief in the power of curiosity is the idea that we make choices about our outlook which then shape us, which in turn powerfully shape the nature of our interactions with others, and... our reality. These choices are feedback looping multipliers. We are participating in history right now, a turning point. Fear and loathing are corrosive. Schadenfreude is overrated. I-told-you-so is unfulfilling. Glibly striving for happiness in spite of external realities is so 1990's. Gratitude can be its own kind of escape.

Curiosity is incompatible with fear and nihilism. I suggest trying curiosity; we just don't know how it will all turn out.

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## Alyssa Shenk Takes the Helm as New Mayor of Snowmass



Alyssa Shenk, a dedicated public servant with a decade of experience on the Snowmass Town Council, has been sworn in as [the new mayor of Snowmass](#). This milestone comes alongside her role as Chair of the NWCCOG Council, showcasing her commitment to regional leadership and collaboration.

As mayor, Shenk aims to build on her previous achievements with a focus on expanding workforce housing, developing child care facilities, and fostering community involvement in local projects.

"I just feel incredibly fortunate to have been elected to sit in this seat," Shenk remarked after taking the oath of office

In her role as Chair of the NWCCOG Council, Shenk is poised to bring her collaborative spirit and community-focused approach to regional issues. This position allows her to address challenges and opportunities that span beyond Snowmass, fostering cooperation among Northwest Colorado communities.

Shenk's dual roles as Snowmass Mayor and NWCCOG Chair position her as a key figure in shaping the future of both her local community and the wider region. Her experience, dedication, and approachable leadership style promise to bring positive changes to Snowmass and Northwest Colorado in the coming years.

# Celebrating Excellence: NWCCOG Energy Program Welcomes New BPI Certified Energy Auditors

Congratulations to the newly certified Energy Auditors on the NWCCOG Energy Program Team! Clay VanThullenar, Nick Miller, Ashley Oberg, and Nick Fiorella have recently achieved the Building Performance Institute (BPI) Energy Auditor Professional Certification, marking a significant milestone in their careers.

The NWCCOG Energy Program is committed to investing in the growth and development of its team members, fostering opportunities for advancement in the vital field of weatherization and home energy performance. This certification highlights not only the skill and dedication of these individuals but also the program's broader philosophy of promoting career progression. Notably, all current Energy Program field leaders began their journeys in front-line roles, progressing through positions such as Energy Efficiency Technician, Crew Leader, and ultimately into Program Management.

Earning a professional certification in home performance is no small feat. It involves passing a challenging written exam and a demanding field test, underscoring the technical expertise required for success in this industry. To prepare staff for this rigorous process, NWCCOG partnered with Morgan Currie from the highly regarded Community Housing Partners Training and Research Center, who conducted an intensive two-week training and testing program in Gypsum.

This achievement reflects the Energy Program's dedication to building a team of highly skilled professionals and empowering them to make a meaningful impact in the communities they serve. Congratulations again to Clay, Nick, Ashley, and Nick on this well-earned accomplishment!



## COG Quirks: Monkeying Around the Atlas Mountains



Erin Fisher, NWCCOG's Vintage Director and Dana Wood, NWCCOG's Mobility Director just returned from an unforgettable vacation in Morocco. One of the unexpected highlights? The overly friendly Barbary Maque monkeys at one of their quick stops in the Atlas Mountains. "These monkeys knew no boundaries and were obsessed with grapes!", said Erin.

If you ever find yourself in Morocco, here are some tips based on their adventure:

- Always carry grapes: You never know when a monkey might decide you're their new best friend.
- Expect the unexpected: From monkeys to stunning landscapes, Morocco is full of surprises.
- Pack your sense of humor: When dodging monkeys or navigating through bustling markets, laughter is your best travel companion.

In the end, Erin and Dana's trip was not just about exploring new places but also about embracing the chaos—and perhaps learning that sometimes, it's the monkeys that steal the show!

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