



## From the Director's Desk -

### *Where have all the workers gone?*

The past 18 months of COVID pandemic has triggered structural changes to our workforce. The topic may have overtaken housing, which is saying something. It seems everyone I talk with has an anecdote.

Here is my take on the workforce shortage: People adapt. One adaptation is that some are learning they don't need to work as much, or work where or how they were working before.

Economists refer to this as the "participation rate" which has "fallen broadly across demographic groups and career fields" according to The Wall Street Journal. The WSJ reports 4.3 Million Workers Are Missing. Where did they Go? It is a worthwhile read, echoing a trend reported by just about every major news organization in recent months from [The Colorado Sun](#) to [The Colorado Springs Business Journal](#) to [Fox News 31 Denver](#) which notes that the workers shortage could make Colorado roads less safe this winter. The WSJ article's subtitle is "Many economists expect the shortage to last years, and some think it could be permanent." The article was published Oct 14<sup>th</sup> noting that "evidence suggests labor shortages might be deepening. Labor supply declined in September and workers quit at record rates in August."

The article notes among other factors that retirements have accelerated. Which got me thinking that the very idea of "retirement" may be morphing.



The WSJ was referring to Baby Boomers, which also got me thinking about another explanation in the form of a standing joke about my hometown best illustrated by the show Portlandia. Watch [The Dream of the 90s is alive in Portland](#) on YouTube for a bit of fun spoof. The trend was enough of a "thing" in 2012 that Bloomberg reported ["Is Portland Where Young People Go to Retire?"](#) noting that "the number of 25-39 college educated people running their own business is about 50% higher (there) than the average for large metros," adding that "this high degree of entrepreneurship is a positive for the regional economy. It also shows a strong DIY culture: if



the economy doesn't provide you a job, make your own."

That kind of DIY resourcefulness was what John Hickenlooper as Governor often invoked —Coloradoans are creative problem-solvers. That may describe a lot of what is going on right now in the labor market in the Colorado high country which also has historically relied upon a labor force of talent that is (famously) severely underemployed, and until recently willingly, happily underemployed because living in Vail or Breck or Aspen or Steamboat for a season had a kind of a cool factor you could take back to law school with you. Today's "hippy" has less conventional ideas under her baseball cap than gaining a post-secondary degree and working for corporate America. The calculus of

those who didn't mind "working on the mountain" or driving a bus for a ski pass in those traditional jobs seems to have changed. It could be seen as a good thing unless you are an employer dependent upon workers who think they need the job you are offering at the pay you are offering it. Chris Lubbers with Summit Stage notes that they are 20 drivers short of the 65 they need for this winter and are offering bus drivers a \$1,000 signing bonus. He notes, "we are unfortunately experiencing the same workforce shortages...that we know many businesses in our community are grappling with."

The NYT also reported on the early "retirement" trend in [Will Portland Always Be a Retirement Community of the Young](#) in 2014 noting that Portland "has become a city of the overeducated and underemployed – a place where young people are, in many cases, forced into their semiretirement." I don't know about being "forced" into early retirement. It notes "in the wake of the financial crisis, many young college graduates have delayed their lives." I don't think moving back in with your parents qualifies as early retirement. And then there is this. The state demographer, Elizabeth Garner often notes when she visits the high country on the high percentage of unearned income that many residents quietly enjoy. Some of this is from rental income, but she also notes that a good bit of that slice can be attributed to "Trustafarians," those neighbors of yours who don't seem to work but seem to have the money to purchase \$100,000 camper vans when they feel the urge. Driving a campervan around or driving a bus – that question may be a 'duh' for some who evidently have a choice.

Lest you think this column about the workforce is entirely frivolous, here are some significant trends and factors noted in some of the articles cited above that are long-observed and predicted. These trends are coming home to roost right now in the labor shortage, trends such as:

1. Baby Boomers are, in fact, ageing out of the workforce
2. Globalization is undercutting the competitiveness of many American industries
3. Foreign worker VISA programs are poorly managed in an economy that is highly dependent upon foreign workers
4. America's love-hate relationship with immigrants and immigration prevents adoption of a coherent path to citizenship
5. Many American workers' refuse to relocate to chase jobs
6. Many jobs don't pay a living wage
7. The cost of childcare absorbs so much of a young workers wage that it often doesn't make sense to work if you have kids
8. The social contract between employers and employees has all but disappeared, and currently, that is a win for employees

With some other factors that probably couldn't have been predicted before our shared COVID experience include:

1. that many "front line workers" would quit, refusing to expose themselves for such low pay
2. that some businesses quickly adapted to business models that reduced the need for labor and never looked back
3. that people learned creative personal financing during the pandemic such as refinancing, "side hustles", semi-retirement, or adapting to live on less income
4. that so many Americans would re-assess their work-life balance and choose to work less, work unconventionally, or not at all

For those who blame unemployment payments during COVID causing the worker shortage, that's over now and the workforce shortages aren't. The truth is that America doesn't have much of a social safety net, and we have been unravelling what we do have for years. The mysterious disconnect about the workforce shortage is the most of us simply must work. I've often joked to friends that in spite of contributing to various retirement funds for most of my adult life, these savings don't appear to be able to

support more than a few years of a traditional, modest retirement; so I may be paying for my own itinerant under-employment through my 20's, and the cost of parenthood, and living in such a wonderful-expensive place with the acceptance that I will - in one way or another - work until the day I die. The punchline of my "joke" is: "I just hope that's a long way off."

There is a lot more going on with this trend than the obvious. People adapt. For me, I choose to retire just a little bit every week, while gainfully employed.

**Jon Stavney**

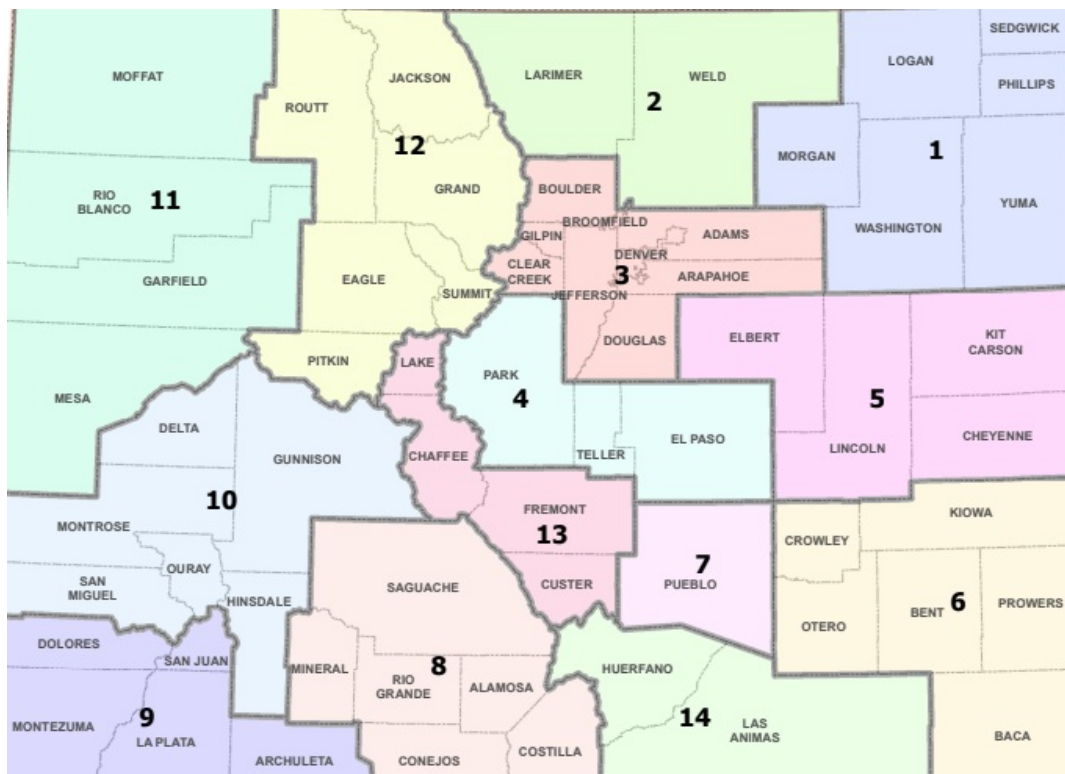
Executive Director

JStavney@NWCCOG.org

## NWCCOG officially welcomes Routt County back to Region 12

### Governor Polis Takes Action to Support County Priorities -

October 18, 2021 - The Governor signed an [Executive Order](#) allowing Routt County to change Regional Planning Districts so that they may join the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG). The Routt County Board of Commissioners cited that their county shares NWCCOG's priorities of housing, childcare, transportation, and local air service.



**NWCCOG is proud to announce supplemental allocations today that will assist counties in projects each have designed to address economic recovery from the pandemic**

For Immediate Release  
October 25, 2021

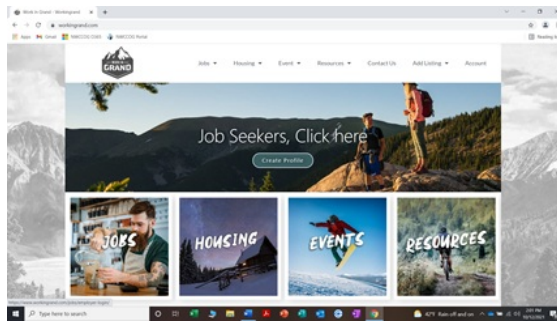
*NWCCOG allocates an additional \$79,000 in EDA CARES Act grant funds to member counties for projects to aid in COVID Recovery.*



As part of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's CARES Act Recovery Assistance, EDA awarded NWCCOG Economic Development District a supplemental award of \$400,000 to help our region respond to the unusual and compelling urgency of the coronavirus pandemic. A portion of these funds



(\$150,000) was granted directly to each of our five member counties to be used towards county-specific projects. NWCCOG has just allocated an additional \$79,000 to further these projects. Our counties have been able to do many great things with these funds to help our region recover from the negative economic impacts caused by the pandemic, including:



### Grand County – Work in Grand Economic and Workforce Resiliency Effort

Grand County was granted \$50,000 towards the Work in Grand effort which focuses on the county's biggest challenge with respect to economic resiliency: access to a reliable workforce to fill jobs. Grand County created the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Lead Partnership, a group of CEOs, human resource directors, and other key leaders from businesses in the county's tourism industry to convene and converse about shared

critical challenges. This partnership has been especially important during the coronavirus pandemic as many businesses in the hard-hit tourism industry were facing similar challenges. Out of this grew the WorkinGrand.com platform, a web portal to recruit and retain talent that is either from Grand County, seasonal employees that have previously visited Grand County are now looking for additional opportunities, as well as students looking for paid work and internships. The goal is to encourage longevity in employment in the local workforce by assisting them with not only finding jobs, but in connecting them with resources to other needs such as housing, health and human resources, community-based services, and community events. This platform will allow Grand County businesses to better understand the needs of job seekers. The platform seeks to encourage local high school graduates, local seasonal employees, local part time residents, and others to develop their profile on the platform, so that they can stay connected with local job opportunities. The team has also developed an aggressive marketing and outreach plan that will be executed in partnership with public and private sector partners. The Work in Grand effort will build and strengthen capacity in our region's key industries by developing pathways that help retain a qualified workforce.

#### Grand County Quote:

*"The EDA Cares Act grant has helped us strengthen the pathway to career opportunities as we recover from the disruption of COVID and the workforce challenges that our businesses are facing. The Work In Grand website provides us a one stop platform for connecting employers with potential employees. Although we are faced with continual workforce shortages, we are at least able to work collectively to sustainable solutions."* – **DiAnn Butler, Economic Development Director, Grand County**

Learn more about Grand County's Work in Grand project here: <https://www.workingrand.com/>

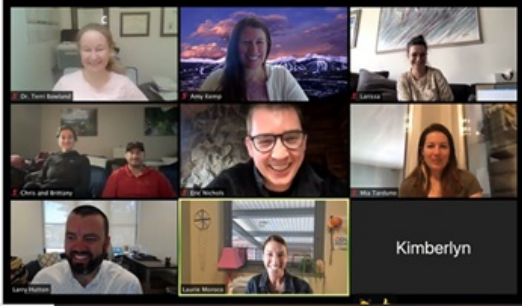
### Pitkin County – Messaging Campaign for a Safe Community

Pitkin County was awarded \$50,000 to develop a community campaign providing key messaging for a safe community to help businesses stay open during the pandemic. This has been a collaborative effort between Pitkin County, GoSnowmass, Aspen Chamber Resort Association, Basalt Chamber, Aspen Skiing Company, City of Aspen, Town of Snowmass Village and Town of Basalt to ensure social, economic and public health. The collective community's path for an economic recovery and resiliency relies on ensuring that Pitkin County and Aspen/Snowmass are safe to visit and that businesses are able to remain open all year long. Pitkin County's success locally hinges on the behaviors of residents, workforce and on guests and visitors. The campaign consists of a collective, comprehensive visitor and guest communication plan to ensure a successful, safe and open winter, from the time of booking a reservation at a lodge, to arriving at the airport or via car, eating at restaurants, or sitting on the chairlift. The goal is that all of our businesses, large and small, can stay open and together, Pitkin County remains open.



### Summit County – Economic Resiliency Capacity Building

Summit County was awarded \$49,000 for a variety of capacity building projects to move economic recovery efforts forward. Cooperation between Summit County, the Summit Chamber,



Summit Prosperity Initiative, and the business and non-profit communities, has been instrumental as we navigated the changes to the COVID dial and the related restrictions and head into recovery and resiliency planning. Specific activities include tools and analysis for economic recovery including the development of a quarterly economic dashboard for the County; COVID Economic Impact Study, the SummitBiz Rebuild program which is a multi-week program which has graduated 18 businesses; and support for the northwest Colorado SBDC. With the assistance of this funding, a new level of cooperation was achieved in Summit County that did not exist pre-pandemic, and the result is the formation of a long-term economic development organization called the Summit Economic Partnership.

### Jackson County – Development of Public Health Department

Jackson County was granted \$50,000 for the development of a public health department, which did not exist pre-pandemic. Funding is going towards operational costs including salaries for three new employees, including a public health director/nurse, a regional EPR coordinator, and an administrative assistant; clinic rent, supplies, and towards the purchase of an electronic health records system. The emergence of COVID greatly emphasized the importance of a local public health department. For one, the county had a major shortfall in the ability to provide data and evidence to present to the State with respect to variances in business closures and capacity restrictions. With the formation of the public health department, the county can support its claims to the State and prepare the community for similar situations. The overall intended outcome is to improve the health and quality of life of the community. The median age in Jackson County is far above the national average and over 50% of the population is age 55+. The older population is going to benefit greatly from new public health services. The new public health department will take the lead on providing immunizations, establish a WIC program, offer tobacco education, represent Jackson County in the opioid discussion, and meet the State's requirements for COVID testing. Economic development hinges on the ability of a community to provide a higher quality of life for its residents. This department will surely move Jackson County in the right direction to do just that, well beyond the pandemic.



### Public Health

**Public Health Director**- Dr. Lynnette Telck

**Public Health Nurse**- Marcie Clendenen

**Regional EPR Coordinator**- Jim Johnsen

970-723-4002

PO Box 872, Walden, CO 80480

### Jackson County Quote:

*"The overall intended outcome is to improve the overall health of our community. On a more refined scale, we are looking to have this department take the lead on providing immunizations, establish a WIC program, offer tobacco education, represent Jackson County in the opioid discussion, and alleviate the pressure put on our local clinic to meet the State's requirements for COVID testing. Essentially, this department is going to be the hub of government provided health services for our community. Economic development hinges on the ability of a community to provide a higher quality of life for its residents. This department will surely push us in the right direction to do just that."* **Coby Corkle, Jackson County Commissioner**

### Eagle County – Vista Project

Eagle County was granted \$30,000 for Vista, a planning effort that seeks to boldly reimagine how community members and decision makers can work together to produce realistic, effective





outcomes for a more resilient economy. The goal of Vista is to rebuild the economy in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic through facilitating a regional feedback-driven process by inviting residents and leaders to come together to create solutions. One outcome of the Vista project is to develop the county's Comprehensive Plan, which will address ways the county can plan for a future that includes a resilient, balanced, sustainable, inclusive,

equitable economy. 2020-21 has been an extremely challenging time in Eagle County as well as the region as a whole. The Vista project seeks to develop strategies for the community to come together to rebuild after COVID to create a more resilient economy that works better for all. Furthermore, in the efforts to include community voices of disenfranchised communities, the Vista project commits to meet people where they are to understand their community needs better and implement their voices in the development of the new economic strategies. The development of the county's Comprehensive Plan is a key component of this. The Comp Plan will consist of land use regulation, strategic priorities, and other factors that create a blueprint that defines how the Eagle County community grows.

Learn more about Eagle County's Vista project here: <https://sites.google.com/eaglecounty.us/vista-site/home>

## REMINDER: Vintage Offers No Cost Assistance for Medicare Open Enrollment

Medicare Open Enrollment starts October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and will continue through December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Each year during the annual Open Enrollment Period, you have a chance to make changes to your Medicare prescription drug coverage (Part D) or Medicare Advantage Plan. These changes are effective January 1, 2022. During Open Enrollment, Colorado's State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) offers free, unbiased, and personal counseling to all Medicare-qualified individuals. Vintage, the Area Agency on Aging within the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, coordinates certified SHIP counselors to help Medicare beneficiaries review options and help make the best coverage decisions. Vintage serves individuals who are 60 and older and their caregivers in Eagle, Grand, Jackson, Pitkin, and Summit counties. The mission of SHIP is to empower, educate, and assist Medicare-eligible individuals, their families, and caregivers to make informed health insurance decisions that optimize access to care and benefits. SHIP counseling is free, and counselors do not sell or endorse any insurance company or product, so they provide an objective view of the options. SHIP Counselors are trained and certified by Medicare and the state and have many years of experience.



**SHIP counselors are available by appointment only from October 15th through December 7th for in-person and phone counseling.** Walk-in service is not available.

Appointments can be scheduled at [Yourvintage.org/Medicare](http://Yourvintage.org/Medicare) Or (970) 970-315-1328

## Transportation Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment Released

**November 2021** - The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) and the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) have completed a

transportation gap analysis of the Northwest Colorado Region with the help of LSC Transportation Consultants, INC. This study aims to:

- Create an inventory of current transportation services in the NWCCOG Region
- Provide an assessment of current and future transportation needs for the general population and particular market segments, including persons with disabilities and the older adult population
- Make recommendations for needed transportation in the region



The comprehensive report details the methodology used in the study, along with important findings. A summary of key findings, by transportation entity include:

#### **RFTA**

- Lack of ADA and Paratransit connecting Aspen and Snowmass
- Lack of public transportation south of Carbondale (i.e., Redstone) or east of Basalt (i.e., Meredith and the Frying Pan corridor)
- RFTA receives requests for service outside their two-mile service parameter from Highway 82 in Carbondale to Glenwood Springs, and along I-70 from Glenwood Springs to Parachute (excluding the Town of Parachute which is not in RFTA's service area)

#### **ECO Transit**

- ECO Transit indicated they receive requests for regular daily service to both Minturn and Red Cliff, as well as Dotsero.

#### **The Lift**

- Increase transit-service frequency between Winter Park and Granby to access Grand County buildings

#### **Other key findings include:**

- Lack of county-to-county transportation options
- Inability to match transportation with rapidly expanding number of individuals moving to resort areas
- Need for additional funding to meet the unmet Non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT) demands

The NWCCOG, as well as the State of Colorado as a whole, are preparing for a tremendous increase in adults aged 65 and older in the coming years. Currently, the transportation infrastructure is not equipped to handle the rise in population from current residents and the potential mobility needs of older adults and people with disabilities. This older adult population wants to age in place and needs creative and sustainable transportation solutions that are affordable, accessible, and convenient, particularly in rural areas like the NWCCOG study area.

As more people migrate to Northwest Colorado, evolution of transportation must follow. This report will help inform the local leadership on the gaps in transportation services, needs for older adults and people with disabilities, as well as encouraging leadership to address the evolving transportation needs.

The complete report will be available on the NWCCOG website in early November. For additional Information contact Charles McCarthy, Mobility Manager, 970-468-0295x110, [cmccarthy@nwccog.org](mailto:cmccarthy@nwccog.org)

### **Next Council Meeting - Thursday, December 2, 2021**

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

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-site location TBD

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Primary Agenda Items: 2021 budget revisions; approve 2022 budget; annual NWCCOG Foundation Board meeting.