



Tidbits From the Director's Desk -

From Poppy Fields to Housing Fields: The Conundrum of Mountain Town Development and Environmental Impact

I'm having trouble finding an overarching theme in February despite having a veritable parade of provocative briefs such as:

How far would you travel to chase a desert poppy superbloom?

If inclined, this looks like one of those springs. Small towns across the intermountain southwest will suddenly be inundated for just because of an Instagram photo or websites such as "[Secretlosangeles.com](https://www.secretlosangeles.com)" goes viral. The latter reports that the West could be a "kaleidoscopic blanket of wildflowers" in upcoming months. At least one California town is bracing for another "nightmare" gridlock scenario like 2019 according to Lake Elsinore's Mayor who is reported in [The Guardian on February 8th](https://www.theguardian.com) concerned with an "eruption of blossoms" that has attracted as many as 100,000 drivers over a weekend in past years. Visitors far beyond the carrying capacity of road shoulders, local restaurants and lodging who then park in the middle of roads, so taken as they have been with the periodic phenomenon of poppies (which we know are a source of opiates).



The high Rockies are increasingly on the receiving end of the travel craze, though usually more predictable than a superbloom. To think we spent billions of dollars over the years trying to bring people here. Across the LEAST resort-influenced parts of NWCCOG, managers- by an 80% margin, are reporting their communities are shifting from *marketing* to *managing* visitors and increased tensions between "locals" and visitors are blossoming into policy.

That is one tidbit from this year's round of interviews between the NWCCOG Executive Director and local government managers across the region which is already yielding interesting data. Trends outlined in our Mountain Migration appear to endure. Much more on that coming soon. Those same calls reveal that for resort towns, the shift isn't a change in the overall economy, so much as a shift in attitudes and the requirement for more "active management of visitors" as many places grapple with traffic, overused infrastructure and simply more people here more of the time. We are hearing a lot of, "I never thought we would be Aspen, or at least not this soon."



A favorite Doonesbury cartoon I posted for 4 years on my Residence Hall door was of Lacy Davenport and her somewhat daft, bird-loving husband Dick who, when told by her that they cannot drop everything to travel to spot a rare bird (because she is running for Congress) replies, “...I don’t think you heard me... I said a Bachman’s Warbler.” That exchange encapsulates my split personality between lofty accomplishment and connoisseurship of nature’s beauty. Jobs used to tie us down from such impulses, but now not so much.

Is Housing now an issue for The State to Solve?

The State of Colorado, a bevy of new positions, authorities and bills, and the Governor say emphatically YES. On February 27th, Summit County hosted Housing the Missing Middle as part of the ongoing County 101 series. Moderated by Commissioner Tamara Pogue who was credited by a number of the panelists for being a bulldog for all of us advocating for the state of Colorado to get involved in housing, the event focused on those making 80 to 140% of AMI which translates, according to panelist Jerilynn Francis of CHFA to \$58,000/year income for a single occupant.

Colorado state government now has competition with the creation of MIHA, the Middle Income Housing Authority reports [CPR](#) which augments new financing tools enabled by HB1304 being distributed in the form of grants managed through DOLA’s Department of Housing. Then HB 1377 addressed homelessness assistance. Now SB 159 which the state is implementing currently to provide “innovative loan capital” according to DOLA’s Andrew Curtis. These compliment CHFA which has been in the housing finance field for years, but according to Francis has innovated to now “invest in the full continuum from exiting homelessness” to the upper reaches of the AMI spectrum. Yes, there are suddenly a whole lot of active players at state agencies scrambling to address the housing issue.



Representing the Governor’s office at the MM event, Eleni Angelides, the Deputy Legislative Director for Gov. Polis, noted that there are a variety of ways the state is leaning into the issue including “offering state owned land, with a 99 year ground lease or through a community trust” which she noted, “is one way the state can have an impact on the high country.” She cited collaborations going on in Summit and Eagle counties between local authorities to re-develop CDOT lands, and said “we still have policy issues that need addressing.” Asked if the state had any plans that might make local governments “uncomfortable,” she said “I like uncomfortable. We need to be uncomfortable. It is a time for urgency.” The sentiment seemed to be shared. What that translates to in coming years is yet to be seen.

On Friday, Feb. 24, the House passed HB23-1115, Repeal Prohibition Local Residential Rent Control (Reps. Mabrey and Velasco and Sen. Rodriguez) on second reading. The bill was amended to clarify that cities must always allow rents to increase by at least 3 percentage points more than the rate of inflation; to exclude new developments fewer than 15 years old from rent control ordinances; to clarify that rent control policies must be applied uniformly to renters who are similarly situated. The amendment also ensures that inclusionary zoning is still not considered rent control.

No one argues that the cost and supply of affordable housing isn’t an issue. The question is whose purview is it? The answer at the missing middle which highlighted sophisticated multi-agency collaborations which have occurred recently appears to be, housing is everyone’s issue. For years though, housing has been assumed to be a matter for each community to figure out. In a state where “local control” is as sacred a cow as a sacred cow gets for local government, it sure *feels* like something is about to shift as it has in many other states. It doesn’t yet look like the state will “reach down” through changing land use at a state level on such things as ADUs as a use by right or abolishing single family zoning as some western states have done. Now it appears the state is focused on expanding the toolbox with permissive policy rather than passing policy that overrides local land use. That said...

A shot has been fired across the bow to local governments, DOLA has been directed through Proposition 123 to request all towns and counties to provide data for a “baseline” of affordable units available. With annual **compliance** of a 3% increase in affordable housing stock, those jurisdictions staying in line will

then be eligible later for funding. The carrot part leaves the question of when the state might pull out as a stick when it comes to compliance on the housing issue.

Like it or not, the state IS involved now in housing. Remember, we asked for it. The 2021 Mountain Migration Report published by NWCCOG with Colorado Association of Ski Towns had a raft of policy recommendations for action at all levels of government, many of which advanced in 2022. Now in 2023, the state government which is controlled in both the executive and legislative branch by Democrats appears to think it is their turn for a crack at the issue. This is not without some heartburn from local officials. “We do need help from the state, but not through changes to land use regulations,” says Breckenridge Mayor Eric Mamula in a letter to the governor as reported by Elliot Wenzler at [the Colorado Sun](#). The Sun article notes there are “hints of bringing bills” right now “that could reshape housing policy across the state,” not the least because Governor Polis used the word “housing” more than three dozen times in his State of the State address. It is an article worth reading to prepare for specific bills that look to be on the horizon this session upending current practices with regards to rent control, Accessory Dwelling Units as a use by right, and Transit Oriented Development. It is a good time to check in with your local legislators.

It is worth a side note that one of the purposes of Councils of Governments when formed in the mid-1970s was for COGs to act as arms of the state for “regional land use planning” which the Sun reports was the last time the state seriously looked at statewide land-use rules. That was back when the public reacted against bringing the Olympics to Colorado because the state was already growing too fast. With the exception of Denver Regional Council of Governments which utilizes that enabling power today to negotiate rail and major transportation initiatives that cross many jurisdictions, no other COGS in the state are involved in land use in any significant manner.

Gas Stoves – Another Distraction to the Climate Change Discussion



There has been a lot of hot air recently.

If you were not keeping track, natural gas bills climbed this winter to some of the highest rates many have ever seen, providing an opportunity to turn the rhetorical heat up. [Bloomberg news](#) reported the US Consumer Product Safety Commission considered regulating—er, “a ban” on— gas stoves because of indoor air quality issues being linked to childhood asthma. The Washington Post headlined, [“There’s a Secret Pollution Source in 40 million homes. The U.S. may try to ban it.”](#) noting

both the childhood asthma issue, respiratory problems and... the gas stove which.... “emits planet-warming gasses.” Though the chair of the commission stated clearly, they are not looking to ban stoves, the story took off in certain corners of the news cycle like a dumpster fire. Indeed.

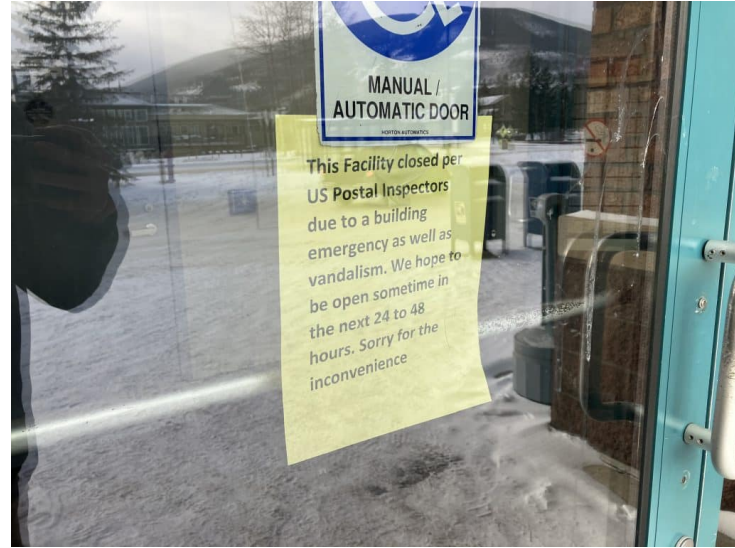
Known impacts of indoor combustion are hardly new, resulting in ventilation requirements that have been in building codes for decades. That is why boilers have venting requirements, as do kitchen stoves. Meanwhile, [Wyoming Republicans take a stand, want to ban electric cars](#)” reports ARS technical, stating a goal of 2035 to do so, which happens to be the year by which California plans to phase out sales of new internal combustion (read gas powered) vehicles and the year that President Biden has stated that 50 % of new vehicles sold in the U.S. should be EVs. As gas prices have reduced this winter, and the uproar doesn’t seem to have... caught fire... predictably, [FOX news is reporting that the Biden administration was serious about banning gas stoves prior to the uproar](#), and also that [“Democrat led cities](#) are already trying to take away your gas stoves.” It may be forgotten that most of Eagle County as with other neighboring counties about the time I arrived in the mid 1990s banned fireplaces and wood stoves because of how bad outdoor air was during the winter, especially with inversions. Our air is considerably better now, though I dearly miss chopping wood, the smell and pop of burning pitch, it is a real improvement that happened relatively quietly. This is really just another step in that direction. To say gas stoves are a hot topic or a “touchy” subject doesn’t do this fear-mongering campaign the justice it deserves.

We at NWCCOG do have a dog in the fight. NWCCOG’s energy program is involved with the Colorado Energy Office and Eagle County in converting mobile homes on liquid petroleum to all electric heat pumps and appliances. For these poorly insulated, aging structures, often with extended families living in close proximity, the gas systems are often cause for immediate danger as well as long term health hazards—just as using your camp stove in a tent would be a hazard. In the NWCCOG Energy program, the heat pumps use far less energy than the systems they replace, allowing air to be conditioned to a comfortable indoor temperature year-round. It is an important program making a small dent in a big

problem, making marginal living conditions more like the average home, and as a matter of scope and ambition, a far cry from outlawing gas. If our programs, including beneficial electrification are the cause of some of the hot air we have not heard it directly. Yet. The case against the case against reducing gas appliances reminds me that there was a rhetorical conspiracy against “Christmas” a few years ago as some of you might remember. The current conspiracy/distraction from a real policy conversation is evidently a war against “gas” itself. It is a convenient distraction from talking about real climate and energy policy. Stoves have become the new flash point in the culture wars.

Post Office Woes— Will Mailing It In Get there On Time?

Next to housing but registering as more of back ground annoyance for most of us has been the understaffing and other challenges encountered when going to the post office. The issue has been elevated now to both Colorado Senators, Bennet and Hickenlooper according to [The Vail Daily](#) inviting leaders of the USPS to Colorado to come and see for themselves. Unfortunately, the Daily reports that the message was sent as a “letter,” to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, presumably mailed from (choose your local post office), so who knows if or when that one will be delivered. Not to be outdone, Congressman Neguse has also sent a letter “[urging USPS to Find Immediate Solutions to Mail Delays in Colorado’s Mountain Communities](#)” according to a press release.



*“Notwithstanding the herculean efforts of the front line postal workers at the locations above, these rural mountain communities are simply not receiving a level of service even close to what the district management of USPS is required to provide. Our offices receive regular reports of sporadic or nonexistent mail delivery, backlogs of mail and packages piling up behind service desks, unreasonably restricted regular operating hours, unscheduled closures of service desks during posted operating hours, unpredictable hours of operation, lack of access to P.O. boxes, disheveled and unclean public areas, unaddressed maintenance issues, mail and packages inexplicably returned to senders, crippling staff shortages, and customer lines of 60 minutes or longer. [...] In order to meet the universal service mandate of the USPS, these locations are in urgent need of your focused and immediate attention,” wrote **Congressman Neguse**.*

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Northwest Loan Fund Helps Marshall Forestry Boost Efficiency with New Processor



Jake Marshall, owner of Marshall Forestry, was introduced to the Northwest Loan Fund (NLF) by the Colorado State Forest Service Loan Fund. Marshall had the opportunity to take on a contract that could be completed in less time with a forestry processor, but the cost of purchasing the equipment was a challenge.

"The loan process was simple," Marshall said. "We supplied the Northwest Loan Fund with required financial info and worked out a budget for the processor. From there we found the machine we wanted and worked with the Northwest Loan Fund to send funds to complete the purchase. The process was easy and efficient."

Thanks to the support of both the NLF and the State Forest Service Loan Fund, Marshall was able to acquire the forestry processor and immediately put it to work. The machine could de-limb, measure, and stack up to 700 trees in a day, allowing the company to take on much larger jobs than before. "The processor is a necessary tool for us," said Marshall. "We would not be able to complete or even bid on jobs of significant size if we did not have the machine. It has allowed us to take on jobs that range from 75-400 acres in size. Before the processor was acquired, our average job size was 10-30 acres."

Marshall is thrilled with the results and plans to continue expanding his business with the help of the Northwest Loan Fund. Thanks to the fund's support, Marshall Forestry is able to take on bigger and more profitable jobs, which will benefit the company and the rural community it serves.

Next Board Meeting

Next Council Meeting - Thursday, March 23, 2023

Full Council Meeting, EDD Board Meeting

Location: NWCCOG Silverthorne Conf. Room and ZOOM

Time: **Council** 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM - **EDD** 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

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