



A Housing Theory of Everything



The Manager Insights Series: As Executive Director, I interviewed each NWCCOG municipal and county manager during the first quarter of 2023 and asked each a series of questions on housing, sustainability, marketing, policing among other topics.

While SB23-213 was not directly discussed in my interviews, the the topic is pertinent and timely. I decided on a slight detour from my original plan.

Jon Stavney
Executive Director - NWCCOG
JStavney@nwccog.org

Twelve hours of hearings on Colorado Senate Bill 23-213 on April 6th included testimony from more than 25 leaders from across NWCCOG territory. For our constituents', recommended edits are being coordinated by Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) with regards to land use and QQ with regards to water. The housing conversation has absorbed many thousands of hours of public input in town halls across--what the bill labels as Rural Resort Job Centers (RRJC) over recent decades. On the 6th, that conversation moved to a Senate Committee under the Golden Dome. There, a much broader conversation is happening at a state level across the country.



As in Colorado, elevating housing from a local to the Governor's office issue, is not entirely welcomed judging from the 12 hours of testimony. I listened from about 11 a.m. on and off until 8:30 pm, missing Gypsum Town Manager Jeremy Reitman who was the last to testify at 11:30 that night.

We in the RRJC view housing primarily through the prism of workers and preservation of owner occupancy as a marker for a vibrant community. Other testimony last week reflected a state level conversation that is

considerably widened from that scope. There it includes issues such as: racist history of U.S. housing policy as addressed in Richard Rothstein's [The Color of Law](#). That legacy extends to exclusionary zoning, and local control, the very protective framework through which our local governments provide due process to constituents, the most vocal of which are sometimes called NIMBYs. At a national level housing is about rampant [homelessness and crime](#) which has disproportionately impacted Western cities as discussed in reference to Reno and Denver in this [Axios piece](#). John Frank of Axios notes that in D.C. homelessness is often framed as a crime issue because, "it is a much easier talking point." The conversation can have a utopian edge also, as it merges with the revolution in urban planning centered around Walkability as outlined in Jeff Speck's [The Walkable City](#) and hundreds of planning concepts that have erupted since the Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Co. led a revolution of [New Urbanist design](#) in the 1990s as an [anecdote to sprawl](#). These are gaining new advocates as urban planning converges with energy efficient building codes and climate change policy.

As Norman Maclean ends his famous book, "eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it..." What testimony on SB 23-213 as well as all public policy conversations with my peers in local government merge into is this matter of affordable shelter. We should probably get away from calling it "housing" since that evokes imagery that is becoming less and less relevant to any solution. From economic development (workforce) to delivery of services (employment/wages) to water availability, to social justice or climate change: at a community level, the rock beneath the streambed of national politics, is this word: **shelter**.



High-density housing, currently under construction, lines Silverthorne's main thoroughfare — Blue River Parkway, on Dec. 14, 2022. A new bill proposed by Gov. Jared Polis and state Democrats would incentivize this type of development across Colorado in a bid to increase housing supply.

Tripp Fay/Summit Daily News

I'd like to have been the one to have coined the phrase, which Annie Lowrey, author of [Everything Is About the Housing Market](#) in the March issue of The Atlantic rebroadcasts. Her article claims that "Housing costs are perverting just about every facet of American Life, everywhere." It certainly feels that way toggling from local to state to national politics. Her home city, San Francisco has produced just 1 home for every 8 jobs in the last decade. She re-introduces readers to a phrase now, coined in September of 2021 Journal Works in Progress by John Myers, Ben Southwood and Sam Bowman [The Housing Theory of Everything](#). Subtitled, *Western Housing shortages do not just prevent many from ever affording their own home. They also drive inequality, climate change, low productivity growth, obesity and even falling fertility rates.* It may appear a brash statement. The obesity part has to do with a nation of drivers who were once walkers, and could be with [The 15 Minute City](#), which AP news covers as being misconstrued in some [Conspiracy theories](#). The Housing Theory of Everything, Lowrey points out, straddles public policy and economic theory. It derives from Thomas Piketty, author of [Capital in the 21st Century](#), a book that claims **housing inequality is a greater driver of overall inequality in the Western World than income inequality**.

A house, a housing unit, a shelter—there is a reawakening right now that challenges the 19th Century American "dream;" that white picket fence of Tom Sawyers, and that single-family home first mass-produced in Levittown, PA as being a useful template looking forward. It is still the predominant housing unit in the U.S.

Talking with 31 managers this past quarter, confirms that the Rubik's Cube of housing is the alpha and the omega of public policy among NWCCOG members. Recent legislation introduced with the backing of Colorado [Governor Jared Polis](#) suggests that it is time to break the current rules and pull the puzzle

apart, best outlined by this [CPR article](#). He has followed through on a promise from the recent State of the State address by shepherding SB23-213 through the legislature.

The bill is not an isolated idea. Similar efforts being considered in at least 7 other states including [Vermont](#) which estimates the need for 40,000 new units by 2030, a state that also considers local control “a sacred cow.” As well as [Washington](#) State which Axios reports has a bill that would require cities with at least 6,000 residents to “allow quadruplex housing on all residential blocks as well as six-plexes near transit to meet a goal of 1 million homes needed by 2044. There, Governor Inslee supports dismantling local zoning rules that prohibit density in many neighborhoods. In a good summary article, NPR reports, “[Oregon, California and Maine and a handful of cities](#) have already “opened up” their zoning. (which) Housing experts say is the key to ending the housing shortage.”

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies “air, water, food, **shelter**, sleep, clothing and reproduction” as basic human Psychological Needs, also known as Deficiency Needs, without which, a human is merely surviving. In our reverence for free-market economics and boot-strap romance, we fail most miserably at addressing Shelter as a right. In spite of recently heroic policy efforts by entities across the CAST and NWCCOG region, it appears that Colorado, like some other states is deep into reassessing more than 50 years of housing policy, something that hasn't happened since Colorado in the 1970s led by Governor Lamm last considered state and regional land use control (creating Councils of Government partially for that purpose), fought off a bid for the U.S. Winter Olympics and opposed major freeway expansions.

Due to the explosion in population since the 1970s it would appear to the conservationists that unrestricted growth has won the decades in between, it did, though not without eons of public testimony against just about every project proposed since, and not by creating enough housing, but by gentrifying housing nearly everywhere that growth has succeeded, perhaps even where it was most resisted. It appears that Governor Polis may be willing to trade a bit of due process for public testimony on site specific land use development to pull our collective heads out of the hole we've been in ever since the 1970s. Up in the rarified air of the RRJC region it is starting to appear that we will no longer be able to have it both ways.

NOTE ABOUT ISSUE 3 - Law Enforcement as a percent of GF:*Manager Insights #3 got the attention of Grand County which had reported the Sheriff's budget as 39% percentage of the General Fund. After seeing how this was out of proportion to other counties, their team revised, excluding emergency management, building inspection and coroner as well as some capital items. Also erroneously included in the first number was the Jail. These revise their number to 18%. Issue 3 has revised this in the posted [revision here](#).*

Note about the Manager Insights series: The data collected for this series demonstrates the depth of knowledge among area managers and I felt honored to be entrusted with their candid reflections. Raw data will be shared directly back to managers and packaged data and quotes will be published only after review and with permission from each manager. I take responsibility for any inaccuracies or cumulative insights not directly attributed to one of my fine colleagues.

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments | P.O. Box 2308, 249 Warren Ave., Silverthorne,
CO 80498

[Unsubscribe office@nwccog.org](mailto:office@nwccog.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data](#)
[Notice](#)

Sent by jlpoint@nwccog.org powered by



Try email marketing for free today!