

# Northwest Colorado Council of Governments



A County and a Town walk into a Housing  
Project...

#2 - Incorporating Strategic Objectives

## Continuation

Using Whetstone in Gunnison County as a case study of workforce housing development, this issue builds on our [series from last week](#). The story is complex and serves to illustrate the almost insurmountable details that must be considered, hammered out, negotiated, renegotiated, and ultimately approved for a project to result in livable units. Gunnison County has provided detailed edits and signed off. Stay tuned to this space as each installment builds on the preceding, to clearly illustrate the complicated story of affordable housing.

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## Whetstone Incorporates many Strategic Objectives for the County

The Whetstone project checks many boxes for a county regularly [recognized for Excellence in Performance Management](#) by ICMA for a unique integrated approach to strategic planning. As a result, Whetstone has been vetted through the lenses of sustainability, fiscal leverage, walkability, maintenance, and access to public transportation. Cattles' full title is "Assistant Manager overseeing Sustainability and Operations" which is evident as he describes these varied



aspects of the project. It also meets some of the county's objectives in addressing the [Gunnison Valley Climate Action Plan](#) which "provides a pathway to 50% emissions reductions by 2030 from the 2015 baseline according to the County's [website](#). "We are committed to no gas on this site," says Cattles. The housing will be entirely electric with no natural gas. "We've been electrifying buildings for a while. Most county facilities are already off gas appliances and heating."

The Whetstone project has modern city planning elements that have already been thoroughly vetted by the County Public Works department which intends to maintain the Traditional Neighborhood Design of narrow streets, walkable sidewalks, side street parking that plow drivers in the snow country tend to abhor. "We went through the site methodically and came up with a snow removal plan," says Cattles "and we continue to receive critical feedback and evolve the plan, we want to make sure what we ultimately land on is the best design we can come up with." The internal negotiations by the County with their own Public Works underscores that even a project led by one department has regulatory and timing hurdles to clear within its own organization. If the Town of Crested Butte decides to annex, Cattles had feared these negotiations about street design would start again from scratch, but because the town was "in the room" for snow country design process makes it less likely the town would re-review and write such details into an annexation agreement if it chose to annex instead of serving the project extraterritorially with utilities as the county desires.

Situated at the intersection of State Highway 135 and Brush Creek Road at the upper end of the valley, the project is adjacent to "an intersection that has been on our list for a number of years to upgrade" according to Cattles; "the location gives us some land and tools to do better" meaning a better transit stop for the area, a round-a-bout for better traffic circulation, and an underpass for safe pedestrian passage, especially during Gunnison's famously cold, snowy winters. The intersection solution enables the right of way for a round-a-bout to make the project "transit oriented" while improving traffic circulation on the only way in and out from town. The ghost of a past project on a neighboring property has already taught the

county some lessons. Cattles says that Whetstone emerged “from another failed project called ‘Brush Creek’ on a similar, neighboring parcel. Part of (that project) was that we had this co-ownership structure with several other owners two of which were other governments, and we couldn’t agree on some issues. It escalated to where the project failed.” That project had a partner developer that bailed after “incredibly detailed discussions about storage, architecture, and committing to so much detail” and additional costs that the private developer walked away after the first step of entitlement. It taught Gunnison County a lesson that has brought them to where they are now: be the developer; be disciplined about adding costs and be honest with the community about what the project can and cannot sustain, own and manage the project which can be an asset to be leveraged for other projects.

Look for Part #3 in the series next week.

Photo Credit: Paradise Park, Town of Crested Butte. Whetstone Planning. Both from CFGV Community Housing in the Gunnison Valley.

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