



## From the Director's Desk

### Hope in Science - A Beacon for 2024

I prefer cheery reflection as 2023 ends, though the portents of 2024 weigh heavily during this darkest part of the year. In these newsletters, I attempt to mix equal parts salt of realism and pepper of encouragement. We need both in the face of despair.

Our 2023 Workforce Housing Report shared tremendous progress by our member communities on the housing shortage. I'm fortunate to cover a region that excels at innovating and solving problems in a state that is pretty good at those things. That's an honor when most of us harbor scant hope about the future of our nation today. The further away from our communities that I seek news, the worse it all appears. Wars, disasters, climate, massive inequalities, and the Denver Broncos, I am not alone in feeling more impacted by my newsfeeds than by the gift of seasons changing across Colorado. Our local pain is acute. There has been so much attention on mental health and addiction because it is an epidemic, one that hinders our ability to see clearly. The [Colorado Sun wrote about "The Paradise Paradox,"](#) a film about mental health disproportionately impacting us. We are hardly immune to these unsettled times.



In this space in 2023, I wrote on issues "close to home" with [Manager Insights](#), highlighting the seeping of incivility into our communities, workforce poaching, and the high cost of policing. Last winter, local managers were cautious in wanting not to be quoted about local incidents of political violence. Most had recent stories. These were uncomfortable topics. I understand the concern about inviting bad behavior by highlighting it. We must call it out for what it is. CNN this month referred to a "[deluge of violent messages](#)" threatening public officials that can be understood as precursors to political violence. It spiked in 2021 and is surging again. As we prepare for a looming presidential election year in 2024, Colorado seems to have put a [target on itself](#) (CBS) this past month or set the table perfectly for the [Supreme Court \(Salon\)](#). The Washington Post urged us to [avoid "fatalism"](#) about a [self-proclaimed "dictator"](#) (USA Today) because that perspective invites inevitability. The same goes for thinking the worst about our neighbors with differing politics or expecting violence in the streets.

It doesn't take much watching of Fox News to get the sense that half of the country believes we are ALREADY a dictatorship with violence in the streets, immigrant mobs pouring into the country, looting, and society generally falling to pieces. MT2030 again showed that learned helplessness and self-loathing about our role in the climate distracts and delays large-scale actions (Michael Mann, *Our Fragile Moment*). Instead of focusing on Climate Change at NWCCOG, we posted on workplaces innovating by Growing their Own, and we just completed a series on the torturous lessons learned in developing a single public housing project in Gunnison County. I may have been the only person fascinated by two local governments and multiple state agencies having to go through each other's review processes. It wasn't exactly *Survivor* or a Taylor Swift concert, but our Executive Committee thought this was a better way to stay in our lane. There is so much encouraging policy emerging from the hinterlands today. [High Country News](#) just reshared insights from our Workforce Housing Report, impressed by efforts across our Membership to address housing. When we stay close to home, it feels like so many challenges are

turning a corner towards progress.



Now feels like a time we should each reach higher in our focus toward the more imminent crises of the rule of law and a choice to reinforce inclusionary democracy or slip away toward an autocracy based on exclusion, grievance, and retribution. One realtor was apoplectic about our coverage of how transaction fees contributed to housing costs until a [Missouri Court](#) concurred with our point the following week. We take caution from some of our local governments that thought they should take a stand on international issues, only to retreat from the white heat that comes from

sticking their necks out – [Avon flying the Israeli flag](#) and [Aspen backing away from addressing antisemitism](#) deciding it also couldn't hang a [Ukrainian flag](#). Whether our local leaders continue to address national and international issues or “stay in their lane” out of wisdom or fear, there is little doubt that this coming year will be very trying for all of us, in no small part because of the state of our union as we embark upon a Presidential election. The last election cycle was never entirely resolved despite a bloody coup attempt to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power barely averted and a continued denial of basic facts. Yes, it all seems so privileged to actively throw away a perfectly sufficient democracy.

So, I was encouraged and want to share a recent experience as we close out 2023 and begin 2024. On December 20<sup>th</sup>, NWCCOG's entire Energy Program staff visited the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) Denver West Campus (South Table Mountain Site), where we were treated as royalty for our program's daily implementation of that entity's mission. Though I think our most significant impediments to progress today involve a lack of moral and political courage and that expecting “science” will solve all problems is a marginalized 19th Century perspective, it can be tempting to forget that every day, thousands of highly educated people are focusing their attention on solving fundamental problems. For instance, how to use solar and wind energy to store in sand or ice for use in off hours, how to create fresh water from moisture in the air, optimize hydrogen as a power source, and work with industry partners to simulate building performance, grid optimization and understanding how to utilize unrecyclable plastics. Despite our current cultural malaise, we have tremendous potential to dig our way out of the holes we put ourselves in.

As we step into 2024, let's remember the brilliant minds and tireless efforts focused on solving our world's most pressing issues. Despite the challenges we face, the dedication to harnessing science and innovation offers a beacon of hope for a brighter, more sustainable future.

Photo Credit: National Renewable Energy Lab website

*Jon Stavney*

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**Announcing:** The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) partnered with the Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) to produce a Workforce Housing Report in an effort to provide our member communities, as well communities outside of the NWCCOG/CAST region which face similar challenges, with tools, strategies, best practices, and innovative ideas to increase the supply of affordable workforce housing. [Read the Workforce Housing Report here.](#)

NWCCOG Welcomes  
Dana Wood  
Mobility Manager



Dana Wood is a Kalamazoo, Michigan, native who has lived, played and worked in the Colorado River Valley area since 2011. She moved to Colorado, site unseen, and fell in love with the state. Dana is the Mobility Manager for NWCCOG and manages the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) and the Intermountain Mountain Transportation Planning Region (IMTPR). She is excited to support these groups by co-creating solutions to local and regional transportation gaps and advocating for funding to improve the quality of life for community members in rural Colorado. In her new position, she remarked, "I'm looking forward to getting to know all the partners and their work, connecting folks with resources, and developing concrete goals on how to collaborate and fill transportation gaps."

Her previous work history included working in local public health and the food access field, managing grant funding, developing community coalitions, and working with communities across Colorado to co-create solutions to address hunger in their areas through funding, technical assistance, leadership development, and capacity building. She's looking forward to bringing her partnership development skills to her new role at NWCCOG to make impactful changes throughout the region.

She is an ultra-runner, yoga teacher, nature lover, and world traveler. Her professional passions and background include food justice, creating community-based solutions, and building trusted relationships to spark positive change. She is a board member for Highwater Farm, a nonprofit regenerative farm in Silt, and a Planning and Zoning Commissioner for the Town of Silt, where she lives, works, and plays along with her dog, Luna.

## Vintage: Ombudsman Annual Review

# Long Term Care Ombudsman

Ombudsmen are advocates for residents of long term care facilities

"Someone suggested I contact the Long Term Care Ombudsman for help. The ombudsman immediately put me at ease and helped me work out the appropriate plan. The ombudsman also explained my rights/my mother's and helped work with the facility to better handle my mother's care. When it came time for me to move her, the ombudsman helped with suggestions and resources in choosing the best solution. It is truly hard for me to imagine doing everything I needed to do to get the best care for my mother without the support of an ombudsman."

Quote from a Family Member, 2023

## FFY'23 HIGHLIGHTS

-  Provided information to **34** residents & family members
-  Conducted **94** visits at long term care facilities
-  Attended **32** community meetings
-  Worked to resolve **22** Complaints
-  Provided information to **21** LTC facility managers & staff
-  Resolved **100%** of complaints.



### Empower & Advocate

Ombudsmen work with residents to empower residents and advocate for change



### Resolve Problems

Ombudsmen work to resolve problems individual residents face & improve quality of life & care



### Educate

Ombudsmen educate residents, families, staff, and the community on resident's rights



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## Regional Grants Navigator Reminder

Johnathan Godes, Regional Grants Navigator

Another reminder with [Governor Polis' December 28, 2023 press release](#) is to take advantage of IJJA and IRA Grant Writing and Technical Assistance Program. Johnathan Godes can provide information and assistance on the process. Contact Johnathan at [jGodes@nwccog.org](mailto:jGodes@nwccog.org).

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