



## From Ghost Town to Home Rule: Keystone's Remarkable Reinvention

Keystone has always been a place that refuses to stay still. Homesteads and mines gave way to logging and rail in the 1800s. By the 1930s, it was a ghost town. Then in 1970, a ski resort brought it back to life. And in 2024, Keystone completed its latest transformation — becoming Colorado's newest municipality. If you've been around the Colorado high country long enough, you know that kind of arc doesn't happen by accident.

Rewind to the mid-1990s. The resort had expanded to three mountains, two base areas, a lakeside village, two golf courses, and trail access into the National Forest — a genuine year-round community. About 700 full-time residents called Keystone home, and some of them were already asking a question that would take decades to answer: should this place incorporate? The resort was changing hands — Vail Resorts was the buyer — and as Bill Bergman, one of the resort's founders, put it, the timing just wasn't right.

Fast forward to 2020. Keystone had grown into one of Summit County's major resort communities. Over 3,500 residences. Two thousand short-term rentals. Twelve hundred full-time residents, another 4,000



part-timers, and winter peak weekends pulling in 25,000 visitors. Traffic and pedestrian safety along US 6 were becoming serious concerns, resort-built infrastructure was aging with no clear entity responsible for maintenance, and Summit County — effective as it is as a regional government — was not built to address the hyper-local needs of a place like Keystone. Anyone who has worked in or around resort communities in our region knows this dynamic well.

So, the question came back around: Could Keystone make it as a town without raising taxes? A core group of residents started digging in, consulting with Summit County, NWCCOG, and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The feasibility study delivered a compelling answer: yes. Due to the county's existing tax structure, incorporation would redirect more than \$7.5 million annually from Summit County to the new town — enough to cover the current level of local services. That's a significant number, and it gave the effort real legs.

Here's where Keystone's story gets especially interesting for anyone who follows municipal governance in Colorado. Rather than take the conventional route — become a statutory town first, figure out home rule later — residents decided to go straight to home rule. That meant combining the state's incorporation and home rule processes, adding roughly six months to the timeline, but giving the new town far more autonomy and flexibility from day one. "I was encouraged by the positive attitudes and participation of the entire community to erect a town from the ground up," said Keystone Town Council member, Dan Sullivan.

More than 50 volunteers drove the effort forward — a petition drive, the formation of a Charter Commission, the drafting of a Town Charter, and the creation of an Election Commission. Three separate elections were required: one to approve incorporation and elect the Charter Commission, one to approve the Charter, and one to elect the Town Council. With guidance from the Colorado Municipal League and an experienced attorney, the whole thing took two years from committee formation to home-rule incorporation. That's a sprint, not a marathon.

And then came one of the smartest moves in the whole process. Three months before the town council was even elected, residents formed a transition committee — made up of all the council candidates, supported by a former county and town manager, a legal advisor, and community volunteers — to prepare for day-one operations. That early coordination proved critical. On day one, the town had an interim manager, a clerk, and a community development director in place. Interim financing was secured. The administrative and regulatory framework was already taking shape.

Two years in, Keystone has been fully operational and staffed. Ordinances, resolutions, and intergovernmental agreements are in place. A Comprehensive Plan is complete. The first US 6 safety infrastructure project is done, with more underway. Roads and trails are being maintained. A joint police department has been formed with the neighboring Town of Dillon — a great example of the kind of regional collaboration we champion at NWCCOG. Community committees are actively working on the town's shared future, and the town is building a collaborative relationship with Keystone Resort, recognizing that their futures are intertwined.

Looking ahead, Keystone is entering its next phase. This year, with extensive public engagement, the town will develop its first Strategic Plan and a Trails and Open Space Master Plan to shape the next 10 to 20 years. The community — full-time residents, part-timers, second homeowners, workforce, and businesses — will determine what kind of town Keystone becomes and the services it provides for generations to come.

From where I sit, having watched this process from the beginning, Keystone's story is one of the more impressive examples of community self-determination I've seen in nearly a decade at NWCCOG. It's a case study in what happens when residents do their homework, plan meticulously, and refuse to wait for someone else to solve their problems. The future is bright up there — and it belongs to the people who built it.

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## A Changing of the Interstate Crossing Guard Corps.

[Photo Credit: Aspen Times. Pitkin County Public Works Director Brian Pettet speaks to a small crowd at the Brush Creek Park & Ride ribbon cutting in 2023.](#)

The role is about being present for the region. Eighty percent of the time, you are just there and there isn't much going on, but its 20 percent that really matters," Brian Pettet, outgoing IMTPR Chair.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> was a snowy day on the road to Eagle County BOCC chambers from Aspen, but Brian was there as he has been for 26 years either attending or leading the meeting attended by a couple dozen of his County or Town Engineer or Public Works Director peers, the group salted with a dash of elected officials. In typical fashion, after telling a compelling story to explain "the question everyone always asks;



what will you do in retirement?" in typical fashion, Pettet thanked Dana Wood for her support of the group "doing what he used to do" when Mick Ireland was IMTPR Chair and would talk to Brian all the way there and back. Those of us who've been around long enough to know Mick smiled at that.

Ever the statesman and tight meeting manager, Brian let loose a little on his opinion, "we ought to be funding ROADS, not all the peripheral stuff if you ask me." We didn't, but Pettet had more than earned an opinion or two about how things were done in transportation

funding in Colorado. Thanking Brian, Bentley Henderson (Vice Chair of the IMTPR) noted that he did some research and Brian was the longest serving member of the regional group charged with hashing it out locally so CDOT didn't have to be in the middle of local politics, "Back then there was a lot of money and many projects that the group was forced to prioritize; "things got a little \_\_\_\_ sometimes."

NWCCOG joins all the IMTPR member jurisdictions in thanking Brian. In a tight, secret ballot vote among the members on tiny papers ripped from a legal pad, edging out Travis Elliot, Town Manager of Parachute, Tom Gosiorowski, Town of Eagle Public Works Director was elected the next IMTPR Chair. Pettet congratulated him noting that the next STAC committee meeting was in a week and there was an opening there for vice chair. "We should talk," said Pettet to Gosiorowski.

Thank you to Brian Pettet on his dedication to the IMTPR for so many years. We are truly grateful for his service and we wish him a very relaxing retirement!

*Jon Stavney*

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## NWCCOG Upgrades Silverthorne Headquarters with Cold-Climate Heat Pumps

NWCCOG recently completed an important energy-efficiency upgrade at its Silverthorne headquarters through a partnership with Energy Outreach Colorado (EOC).

Through EOC's Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Program, NWCCOG replaced its aging heating system with modern cold-climate heat pumps designed to perform reliably in Northwest Colorado's harsh winter conditions. These advanced systems provide efficient heating even in low temperatures, improving both comfort and operational efficiency at the facility.



The installation of cold-climate heat pumps represents a significant step toward improving energy performance at the Silverthorne headquarters. By transitioning to more efficient heating technology, NWCCOG is reducing energy use while supporting broader regional sustainability goals.

Cold-climate heat pumps are specifically engineered to perform in mountain environments, making them an ideal solution for high-elevation communities like those served by NWCCOG. In addition to increasing reliability, the upgraded system is expected to help lower long-term operational costs and reduce environmental impact.

This project highlights the value of collaboration between regional organizations and statewide partners. Through its Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Program, Energy Outreach Colorado works with organizations like NWCCOG to identify cost-effective upgrades that improve building performance and reduce operating expenses.

By investing in efficient infrastructure, nonprofit and public-serving organizations can redirect savings toward the programs and services that directly benefit their communities.

This project is just one example of how partnerships are helping organizations across Colorado modernize facilities and improve energy performance.

Read the full story and learn more about this project:

<https://energyoutreach.org/nwccog/>

## Upcoming Board Meetings

**Thursday, June 4, 2026** – NWCCOG Energy Warehouse in Gypsum

Full Council & EDD Board Meeting Primary Agenda Items: Approve March meeting minutes, approve Q1 Financials; EDD Board meeting

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