

MOUNTAIN TOWN NEWS

News in brief & deep in resort valleys of the West
July 6, 2010

Roaring Fork Valley has high hopes for bus rapid transit

RFTA assembles \$40 million plan for Aspen-to-Glenwood corridor

by Allen Best

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colo. – In a down economy, things are looking up for Dan Blankenship. As executive director of the Roaring Fork Transit Authority, Mr. Blankenship has day-to-day responsibility for guiding the second largest fleet of buses in Colorado while mapping out a transportation system that may provide a model for other resort valleys of the North American West.

This new system, which is being called bus rapid transit, or BRT, will run between Aspen and Glenwood Springs, the major part of the 70-mile-long service territory for the agency. Mr. Blankenship and other directors of RFTA (pronounced Rafta) think this innovative bus system will significantly unclot the Roaring Fork Valley's notorious highway congestion and give buses the same élan more commonly reserved for trains.

These are high expectations. At

one time, valley communities looked hard at putting commuter trains on the corridor once used by the Rio Grande & Western Railroad. The trains would have connected to light rail at the edge of Aspen. That was in the 1990s and, had that project gone forward, the inflation-adjusted cost now would be at \$500 million.

BRT, says Mr. Blankenship, will come in just under \$40 million. Of that, he says, the Obama administration has asked the U.S. Congress to allocate \$25 million in the 2011 budget.

Rail still has supporters in the Roaring Fork Valley, but Mr. Blankenship believes the magnitude of the costs make it infeasible.

Is it still *swintering* out there?

The colder, wetter weather of May and early June brought to mind long-standing mountain-town jokes:

- "I missed summer this year because I was out of town for the Fourth of July," and
- "Mountain towns have nine months of winter and three months of bad skiing."

To this long-suffering mix comes a new word, at least to Myles Rademan, whose years in Crested Butte should have caused him acquaintance with all jokes about long winters. In Park City since the mid-1980s, he reports a new word: "swinter." (The phrase may come from an animated TV show called Phineas and Ferb).

For the record, it snowed in Park City on June 17. Of course, it has snowed in Breckenridge, Vail and other mountain towns on July 4th.

Whistlerites have recently seen marginally chillier, wetter, and darker conditions that together suggest a different season altogether: June-uary.

Rail requires density, and people in the Roaring Fork Valley don't like density. Further, the Aspen area would have to compete with the nation's major cities for funding, and it just doesn't have the same density, traffic congestion and air quality problems that they do—not to mention the political clout. And buses would have been necessary, anyway, for feeder routes.

Instead, RFTA in 2001 set out to upgrade its express bus service, going to voters in November 2008 for a 4/10ths of one percent sales-tax increase. Although the recessionary sky was falling, voters authorized the tax increase and also \$44 million in bonding authority.

RFTA has now issued \$27.5 million in bonds at good interest rates and hopes to begin construction next year, perhaps able to take advantage of lower construction costs.

Jacque Whitsett, the town of Basalt's representative on the RFTA board, sees a benefit to letting out bids in what she expects will still be a recessionary period, as it will help stimulate the local economy.

George Krawzoff, the director of transportation in Steamboat Springs from 1996 to 2008 and now a consultant, says he believes bus rapid transit has use in other

valleys. The name also can also help produce funding. "If you can construe your project as a BRT project, that gives you access to funds that might not be there otherwise," he says.

Mr. Krawzoff, who is now a Colorado Transportation Commission member, also believes BRT has potential application in Steamboat Springs. (See page 4).

Aspen since the 1970s has struggled with transportation. It's located at the end of what is, for about six months of the year, the end of the highway. For many years, state transportation officials wanted to widen that highway to the outside world to four lanes. Just as stoutly, a core of Aspen's residents resisted. They feared what easier access would do to their community. But there was an unyielding reality: the highway got more and more crowded, but also unsafe. For at time, it was called Killer 82, because of the high number of fatal car crashes.

At length, there was public acceptance of the need to four-lane Highway 82. About the same time, several local governments agreed on the need for a valley-wide bus agency. None of this came particularly easily. There were turf issues, egos, and resentments—and it would appear there still are. The 70-mile corridor crosses parts of three counties and services eight towns.

Ridership grew steadily at 4 to 5 percent, corresponding with the expanding economy of the region, peaking at 4.85 million riders in 2008.

That winter had epic snowstorms in the Roaring Fork Valley, while warm weather was accompanied by gas prices of \$4 to \$5 per gallon. If the nation's housing market was slowing, you couldn't tell that in Aspen's construction zone. Town officials even adopted rules to make the noise and work tolerable to neighbors. The buses were full—and uncomfortable. It was standing-room only, putting a sour taste in everybody's mouth.

"If we were to stop now, we might not be where we need to be when the economy picks up."

Dan Blankenship
Executive director
RFTA

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Bus ridership has declined 24 percent since that high mark.

Incongruously, RFTA adopted higher fares during this time, the most severe amounting to a 22 percent increase. According to a widely used formula, every 10 percent increase in fares produces a 4 percent decline in ridership. As well, some service was cut.

Farebox recovery has declined \$1 million. General fund sales tax receipts have declined another \$2.6 million. RFTA had to tap the general fund reserve fund last year for about \$1.5 million to shore up its existing services. However, revenue from the additional 0.4% sales tax increase approved by RFTA voters in 2008 is being deposited in a separate fund designated specifically for BRT implementation.

The silver lining in all this has been that RFTA—and every other bus agency in ski-based resort valleys—has had an easy time of finding qualified bus drivers. Also a blessing has been the likelihood of getting work done on the BRT at much lower costs.

“It’s kind of the best of times and worst of times at RFTA,” says Mr. Blankenship.

He doesn’t expect the lull to last. In April, bus ridership increased slightly. He expects gas prices to spike again. “It’s not a question of if, but rather of when.” But nobody really knows how soon the economy will regain vigor. If it remains stalled for three or four years, RFTA risks having a new and improved bus system and higher operating costs, but with fewer riders than expected

“But if we were to stop now, we might not be where we need to be when the economy picks up,” says Mr. Blankenship. He expects the 18 new low-floored diesel-powered Gillig buses to be rolling by autumn 2013.

Bus rapid transit is a rubber-band of a word. Some BRT configurations give buses their own, dedicated lanes. But, as the [wikipedia](#) site notes, BRT designates a variety of bus systems, and not all have dedicated lanes. That will be the case in the Roaring Fork Valley. To augment existing

bus-only and bus/HOV lanes, less than \$2 million will be spent to extend right turn lanes at several intersections, creating queue bypass lanes for buses. No new bus-only lanes of any significant distance will be added, says Mr. Blankenship. Instead, the “rapid” will come in accumulations of shaved seconds here and there, and a few minutes here and there.

The buses will have fewer stops, but those stops will be better appointed: shelters from rain and snow, parking lots with accumulated 300 parking spaces, and the sort of electronic real-time “next bus” information found in light-rail stations in Denver and Salt Lake City. Stations also will have platforms, eliminating the need to climb up steps or get out clunky accessories for wheelchairs. Sale of fares will become more streamlined, so drivers need to spend less time collecting money.

The biggest time savings will be at the outskirts of Aspen, where drivers commonly fume their way for 20 to 30 painful minutes into and out of Aspen during peak times. Aspen in recent years has done several things to give buses priority, and more yet will be done. Two examples: Aspen removed parking to provide RFTA with an exclusive bus lane to bypass traffic on Main Street during afternoon peak hours. Also, upper valley governments built exclusive bus-only lanes for RFTA buses. Entering Aspen, buses should be able to save 10, 15 or even 20 minutes as compared to cars when

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congestion is greatest. Buses will also have the ability to use somewhat widened shoulders at key mid-valley choke points.

And finally, up and down Highway 82, stop lights at six intersections will be rejiggered to give priority to the BRT buses; saving a few more seconds.

“All these things work hand in hand,” says Mr. Blankenship. The net savings resulting from fewer stops and shaved seconds will cut 30 to 35 minutes off the existing 100-minute trip between Glenwood Springs and Aspen – with the goal of making travel as fast or faster than a car during the morning and evening congestion.

During morning and evening peak periods, the BRT buses—the name adopted for branding purposes is *VelociRFTA*—will run every 10 minutes, slacking back to 15 minutes at midday and 30 minutes during evenings and nights for approximately 14 hours per day.

The emphasis will be on a “faster, more convenient, more comfortable, and happier” commuting experience, all of which RFTA believes will draw a new group of riders, those who can well afford to drive but who, for a variety of reasons, prefer mass transit.

Riders may even have WiFi while traveling on buses. The only thing missing seems to be the club car.

Would BRT answer Steamboat’s needs?

Lincoln Avenue getting upgraded

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. –

Lincoln Avenue, the main street in Steamboat Springs, growls with traffic as if it were a highway. In fact, it is: U.S. Highway 40, the first connecting link between Denver and Salt Lake City. But could bus rapid transit take off some of the load?

The streets in Steamboat Springs were torn up this summer as part of a \$5.6 million project. The highway was due for a 30-year paving update, and Steamboat Springs contributed \$1.6 million to utility work, better storm-sewer drainage, and other such



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to-do items. But pedestrians and transit users should also benefit. Somewhat similar to what the town of Eagle has done, Steamboat will end up with bulbouts at its intersections, to help calm traffic and also close the gap for pedestrians. Also, there will be colored concrete crosswalks that can't be worn away by scraping snow in winter. To accommodate buses that stop to pick up passengers, full 10-foot pullovers will be created, so that traffic behind does not have to stop.

Philo Shelton, the public works director, said that traffic signals will be reprogrammed so that traffic can pulse through the downtown area more easily,

But nobody expects these improvements to turn Steamboat's downtown in a silk purse. It carries a great deal of traffic, and short of Fort Knox, there are no easy bypass solutions.

George Krawzoff, a transportation consultant from Steamboat who also is on the Colorado Transportation Commission, believes bus rapid transit could help. He points out that despite the recent defeat of a major housing project called Steamboat 700 on the west side of town, major growth pressures will persist to the west. To the east is the main winter employment center, the ski area.

Mr. Krawzoff conceives of a narrow lane of dedicated pavement along the Yampa River, at the base of the Howelson ski area, several blocks south of the highway/main street. A narrow ribbon of pavement about three miles long could flux with buses going upvalley in morning, and downvalley at night.

Traffic on the main street and highway (Lincoln Avenue) would be significantly dented, he believes, without a major additional intrusion.

Resort valley buses

Ridership in 2008, the peak year for nearly all resort-area transit agencies.

RFTA 4.68 million

Aspen to Rifle, 70-mile service territory; does not include Aspen or other intra-town buses.

Vail 3.2 million

Free intra-town bus service in Vail.

Summit Stage 2.2 million

Colorado's Summit County, but does not include Breckenridge, or other town-operated systems. Now includes buses to Leadville.

Steamboat Sprgs Transit 1.3 million

Nearly all within Steamboat, but with one route to Craig, 42 miles west.

ECO Transit 1.2 million

Vail to Dotsero & Leadville, 70-mile service territory; does not include Vail, Avon or Beaver Creek bus systems.

Avon 1+ million

Free intra-town bus service in Avon.

Aspen 1 million

Free intra-town bus service in Aspen.

START 881,000

Jackson, Wyo., plus legs to Teton Village, Alpine, Wyo., and Driggs/Victor, Idaho

Breckenridge 688,000

Free intra-town bus service.

Crested Butte Mtn. Express 637,000

Crested Butte and Mt. Crested Butte, free

Gunnison Valley RTA 87,000

Crested Butte to Gunnison

NOTE: This is not strictly an apples-to-apples comparison. RFTA and ECO Transit are entirely fare based and have longer distances, whereas others are exclusive or mostly free to riders and cover shorter distances, sometimes just a matter of blocks.

ECO Transit pulls back for now from I-70 expansions

Had studied link to Glenwood

GYPSUM, Colo. – ECO Transit, the bus service established by Eagle County in the mid-1990s, had been in an expansion mode. The agency knits together the Eagle Valley from Vail 45 miles downvalley – leaving just a 20 mile gap to Glenwood Springs, which is served by Roaring Fork Transportation Authority.

The two agencies have studied the potential of linking. But, for now, they have delayed action.

“I think we all agreed that this connection can be made, and will be made in the future. But this is just not the right

time,” said Harry Taylor, who directs ECO Transit. The idea, he added, has been put on the back burner until 2012.

Linking the Eagle Valley with Summit County has also been talked about, he said, but with less urgency. There appear to be fewer employees commuting across Vail Pass. The pass itself poses a severe winter-time challenge for buses, Mr. Taylor notes. Last winter it was closed 56 times.

As with other bus services in resort valleys, the last few years have been a roller coaster ride for ECO Transit. Ridership grew rapidly in pace with population and a rip-roaring construction economy. Then, in 2009, sales taxes declined 21 percent. In response, service was cut by about a third and fares raised. Ridership eventually dropped.

This year, sales tax revenues have increased, and are now 3 to 4 percent above what was projected, if still down altogether from last year.

Eagle County has been considering whether to revamp the administration of ECO Transit. It currently is overseen by the county commissioners, with assistance of an appointed board. There has been, said Mr. Taylor, talk of giving that appointed board more direct responsibility for overseeing operations. A second option would be to create a rural transportation authority, similar to that which operates the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority.

I-70 zipper lane useful just 17 Sundays/year *Will emergency access be Achilles heel of plan in Clear Creek County*

I-70 CORRIDOR, Colo. – Zippering of Interstate 70 between Denver and Summit County looks to have potential usefulness on just 17 Sundays each year, between the hours of 1 p.m. and 9 p.m. But whether the zipper on these select Sundays would merely borrow from Peter to pay Paul has yet to be determined.



GOING HOME: A proposal now under study would re-zipper I-70 through Idaho Springs, creating three lanes of traffic going eastward. Photo taken in March 2009.

“We know that we can reduce travel in the east-bound direction on Sundays during winter by about 50 percent. But we are still trying to get a handle on how much we are going to increase travel time in the west-bound direction,” said Stacey Stegman, spokeswoman for the Colorado Department of Transportation.

Zippering highways has been done in at least four states: Arizona, California, New York and Utah, but in shorter segments.

C-DOT began a study late last winter after being approached by a vendor, who proposed to re-zipper the four-lanes of the highway to three lanes to accommodate the traffic pulses. The would be done on the 15 miles between Floyd Hill and Georgetown, the area of greatest constriction.

Potential use has been narrowed to just 17 Sunday afternoons per year, all in winter, and here’s why:

- Westbound traffic from Denver on weekends gets staggered on Fridays and Saturdays.
- During Saturday afternoons, traffic returning to Denver really never gets bad enough to warrant zippering.
- In July and August, when traffic counts rival those of ski season, there’s more west-

bound traffic. Although more study will be likely, it now appears that narrowing that traffic to one lane would create too much pain to tolerate.

That leaves just 17 Sundays per year in which the zipper lanes could be employed. Currently, it can take 5.5 hours to drive between Breckenridge and Denver. With zippers, it's possible the trip could be reduced to perhaps 2.5 or 3 hours.

But even if it could succeed, are there fatal flaws to the idea? That will be the subject of the next phase of the study. C-DOT now is wrapping up the first \$50,000 phase, tapping the expertise of teams from the University of Arizona and University of Colorado-Denver.

The next phase, costing more than \$200,000, will dig into the more devilish details, including the questions about whether the zippering would prevent police, firefighters and emergency medical personnel from traveling up and down the valley.

"If they say they absolutely cannot get to somebody to save their life, that would probably kill the problem altogether," said Ms. Stegman. Also to be studied will be socio-economic impacts, what might be called environmental justice.

Clear Creek County Commissioner Harry Dale said he believes the writing is already writ large on the wall. At a recent public meeting, he said, a fire official in his county said that the shoulder of the highway reduced to one lane would be insufficient to admit a fire vehicle. "That alone should kill this thing," said Mr. Dale.

Also relevant will be set-up and take-down times: about 90 minutes for each, during which time traffic would be disrupted.

If the idea does fly, however, C-DOT would be working with a private vendor in a \$25 million public-private venture. The company would be responsible for operating the zipper lane.

C-DOT had begun studying the idea late last winter. Colorado legislators, in what appears to be a case of political grandstanding legislation, ordered that the idea be studied. The conclusions are to be

submitted to legislators before the next session.

New law limits passing of trucks on I-70 inclines

Relevant to 2-lane sections

GEORGETOWN, Colo. – A new law that went into effect in Colorado on July 1 bans slow-moving vehicles from moving into the left lane on I-70 west of Denver. The law is a reaction to the situation presented primarily by trucks, where one traveling 40 mph, for example, will slowly pass another truck going 35 mph—forcing all other traffic going 65 mph behind to wait while this is completed. This happens most commonly on the steep, two-lane grades of Georgetown Hill and on Vail Pass. Other areas having 6 percent grades, as defined by the law, have three lanes. Travel in the left lane must be at the minimum posted speed.

Yellowstone group putting together linked system

Harnessing the Internet

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho – Bus and all other transportation plans can be terribly frustrating if you don't use the system frequently. A case in point: Recently I have had eye surgery. It was not terribly serious, but serious enough that the surgeon specified that in no way would I be allowed to drive myself home.

Looking at the bus maps for metropolitan Denver, I would have been frustrated beyond words. But RTD, the bus agency, has a website, somewhat similar to MapQuest. In this you can put in the originating location, the destination, and the website instantly spits out how to get from here to there, including bus numbers, times, and stops -- specifying even the time it takes to walk to the nearest bus stop.

The [Yellowstone Business Partnership](#), working through a cooperative called Linx, continues work on a similar trip-planner program that will link the disparate ground-based transportation options in the greater

region around Yellowstone National Park. Participating bus agencies and companies in the new cooperative formed through the YBP include Jackson Hole's START, Salt Lake Express, TRPTA (the transportation authority for Idaho Falls), plus others based in Billings and Bozeman, Mont., Lava Hot Springs, Idaho, and Lander, Wyo.

Through Linx, a rider needing to get from Bozeman, Mont., to Salt Lake City could get on the Linx trip-planning and reservations website and figure out how to connect between the various buses and vans to Salt Lake or Jackson. The same website and technology now being developed will allow one-stop ticketing.

"It would be a seamless experience," explained Kim Billimoria, communications specialist with the partnership.

The cooperative also intends to install hardware on all participating vehicles that will link to the Linx website. The LinxComm units, as they are called, are currently being piloted on the START buses. LinxComm allows [monitoring](#) of buses that travel morning and evening between Driggs, Idaho, and Jackson, Wyo. "When the buses are in operation, you can watch the bus icon cross Teton Pass within five seconds of real time," Ms. Billimoria explained. An added bonus for commuters is free on-board Wi-Fi.

Jackson Hole Airport is \$31 million bigger & better *Tripled passenger capacity*

JACKSON, Wyo. – The Jackson Hole Airport has completed the first phase of a \$31 million expansion. The expansion has yielded 52,000 of additional square feet in the terminal and a \$12.2 million baggage handling system said to be among the most advanced in the country, able to scan large items such as ski bags and kayaks. The former terminal could handle 331 passengers per hour; now it's 1,100 passengers. More upgrades will be completed by December, reports the Jackson Hole News&Guide.

Some indications of a quickening economy

But not so in sales tax

JACKSON, Wyo. – Economic indicators suggest a quickening pulse in Jackson Hole this summer and many other resort towns of the West.

The story far and wide seems to be cautious optimism, despite continued foreclosures and sales tax revenues that are on par with those of five years ago.

In Jackson Hole, airline bookings have increased 10 percent compared to last summer, likely producing an additional 18,000 people who will be making dining reservations at the cloth-napkin restaurants and buying the usual trinkets. Auto traffic more broadly in the Rocky Mountains has been projected to increase also.

Real estate will be a mixed bag. Sales volume will likely increase anywhere from 20 to 50 percent, one long-experienced industry insider told the Jackson Hole News&Guide. Sales have improved in both Jackson Hole and the adjacent Teton Valley of Idaho.

But the newspaper also tells of foreclosure proceedings filed against a multimillion dollar parcel at the base of the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. Two years ago, local authorities had granted approval to build an 182,000-square-foot hotel using the name The Little Nell, making it an offshoot of the hotel bearing the same name in Aspen. The developer, Rob DesLauriers, told the newspapers that the project was put on hold 18 months ago when construction financing was not available. With that, he said, the name Little Nell expired. Mr. DesLauriers said he hopes to find a lender willing to rewrite the loan or a buyer for the property.

Development, however, will continue to lag. There's not much in the pipeline, and one local architect points an accusatory finger at local planning bodies that review building plans.

Taking stock of local economic indicators, analyst Jonathan Schechter

concludes that the economy in Jackson Hole during the last three months has more or less found its bottom. However, after declining to 2005 levels, sales tax revenues continue to decline.

He also reports that newspaper classified ads suggest a slight hiring trend. Rental housing is being absorbed.

Steamboat Springs

In Steamboat Springs, finance director Deb Hinsvark reports another 5 percent drop in sales tax collections after a 14 percent drop last year. But she believes that the bottom of the pool has been found. She has been cautiously forecasting a flat sales sector through this year and next, with no uptick in retail sales until 2012.

“I agree that things have bottomed out. How long they will stay at the bottom, that is the question,” she says.

Real estate sales have been expanding. “We went from \$1 billion to \$250 million—almost immediately,” says David Baldinger, owner of Steamboat Village Brokers, remembering the cliff face of 2008 and early 2009. But the market has now expanded volume for five consecutive quarters, he notes. Prices remain stagnant, but volume has increased, and that’s a big change, he says.

“Last year at this time we were really nervous, because we didn’t know what would happen. Prices didn’t matter. They just wouldn’t sell. The floor was closed. That hadn’t even happened in the slowdown of the 1970s and ‘80s.”

Now, activity has picked up. “You wouldn’t call this a robust market by any stretch, but we are consistently closing sales.”

Summit County

The real estate market in Summit County showed a 4 percent increase in monetary volume and a 20 percent increase in the number of transactions for January through May.

Telluride

Bookings for summer lodging in Telluride were reported by Mountain Travel Research Program to have a 22 percent year-over-year increase in occupancy rates for June through November, at the top of the class. The next three strongest increases among resort in the MTRiP report were between 13 and 18 percent.

Telluride is at 20 to 30 percent of capacity. But Telluride is commanding an average daily room rate of \$204 per night, second only to an unnamed resort that is getting \$295 per night. But that’s a 6 percent increase from the same six months last year.” This year, we’re seeing not only one of the highest ADRs we have in recent years, but we’re also seeing occupancy come back,” said Scott McQuade, chief executive of the Telluride Tourism Board/Marketing Telluride Inc. “I feel we’ve turned a corner,” he added.

Real estate sales in the Telluride market have also been coming back. George Harvey, a Telluride agent who is also president of the Colorado Association of Realtors, reports that Telluride has exceeded most other resorts.

“Steamboat and Telluride are recovering faster than any other markets in Colorado,” he said. Why? “We’re a pretty small economy, and we went down faster than (Aspen and Vail) did, and we’re coming back faster.”

Park City

Optimism about increased tourism this summer prevails in Park City. Hoteliers tell the Park Record that they expect 20 to 25 percent gains this summer in occupancy compared to last summer. But as has been the case during ski season, flat or lower rates will be necessary to achieve this.

Ralf Garrison, of the Mountain Travel Research Program, predicts an even more robust summer, with gains of 40 percent in July and August as compared to 2009. Increased occupancy, he says, may also allow rates to rise again.

Mr. Garrison reported that occupancy in March this year at Park City and other ski resorts he monitors in the West was up 9.6 percent. But, of course, room rates had dropped.

Vail

Vail ended up the last ski season of 2009-2010 with a 1.4 percent decline in tax collections compared to 2008-2009. That's still more than \$12 million in taxes.

Steamboat likes softball players, but not so many

Renewing Triple Crown deal

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. – City officials in Steamboat Springs have extended their contract with Triple Crown Sports to 2020, but to a lesser extent. City officials estimate a 25 percent decline that will result in softball and baseball tournaments being exclusively held in Steamboat Springs instead of being farmed out to outlying communities in the Yampa Valley.

Steamboat has worked with Triple Crown since 1982, with a peak participation in 1907. That year, more than 300 teams participated.

At least 10 or 15 years ago, there was a love-hate relationship. It was an economic boost, but at what many perceived to be a high cost in terms of congestion and noise. Complaints have diminished in recent years.

Now, partly as a result of the recession and partly because of more extensive market research, Triple Crown will be relocating its tournaments closer to population centers, explained Chris Wilson, the city's open space and recreational services director. Lake Tahoe will get more tournaments, but Park City will get fewer. More tournaments will also be held in Texas and Florida. Steamboat will be somewhat more of a special occasion.

The agreement obligates Steamboat to pay Triple Crown \$65,000 to \$80,000 per year. In addition, the city promises investment of \$75,000 per year in maintenance and upgrade of the softball fields. Quality of the fields has been an issue, and Steamboat has been reluctant to invest in

a multi-field sports complex that would be used no more than half the year.

In an editorial, The Steamboat Pilot saw the Triple Crown story as a “clear reminders that diversification is the future of our year-round economy. Earlier this spring, we reported on a collaboration between Steamboat Ski and Resort Corp. and local mountain bike enthusiasts to develop more trails on the mountain. We also know that plans are afoot to develop Howelsen Hill and Emerald Mountain into a world-class Nordic ski facility and year-round outdoor recreation center. We urge the Chamber and elected officials to put more investment into what can be next and not think that sitting pretty with what we have in hand today is good enough.”

Ketchum/Sun Valley shake up marketing organization

Town mayors vow new approach

KETCHUM, Idaho – External marketing, special events, and local chamber activities are being broken up in Ketchum and Sun Valley. Despite a strong ski season last winter, the longer-term story has been of a faltering economic pace, particularly when it comes to tourism and retail spending. Ketchum sales tax receipts have declined 35 percent and those in Sun Valley 24 percent during the last decade.

The mayors of Sun Valley and Ketchum, which have the power of considerable purse strings, indicated that they wanted to reduce responsibility of the Sun Valley/Ketchum Visitors Bureau. They had provided \$600,000, half of the bureau's \$1.2 million budget. “You guys have worked very hard, but it isn't working,” said Randy Hall, mayor of Ketchum, at a public meeting attended by the Idaho Mountain Express.

The mayors call for a new marketing board, to be overseen by a representative of the Sun Valley Co., plus one representative from each municipality and two people at large.

The bureau in recent appearances has conceded the change. “We think change is

healthy. We're not being territorial," said Carol Waller, executive director.

The mayors propose that the visitors' bureau drop its function as a chamber, and become merely a visitors' bureau. But Ms. Waller and board members want to keep on the duties of organizing local events.

The Idaho Mountain Express, in an editorial, said the change was longer overdue, but expressed worry that the mayors needed to "buckle down and create a sensible transition plan. ... After all, marketing requires lead time."

The newspaper also inquired of other communities about marketing. The closest analogy was in Telluride, where external marketing was split off five years ago. While the story most often told locally in Telluride is that the tourism economy has gone to hell in a handbasket, from the perspective of Sun Valley/Ketchum, Telluride has succeeded grandly. "I wish I could say it was all of us," said Scott McQuade, chief executive of the Telluride Tourism Board. "But when things are going well, at least people can't put you down."

In Aspen, the advice offered by Debbie Braun of the Aspen Chamber Resort Association was "Look at the people in place, not the organization."

And in Jackson Hole, a sharp distinction was noted: Jackson Hole has several four- and five-star hotels, and they have a lot of muscle in their marketing. At present, while Ketchum has authorized several silver-heeled hotels, these authorizations came only after the recessionary walls began tumbling down.

Vail to host big kuhuna of world cup skiing yet again

Championships in '89, '99 & '15

VAIL, Colo. – Vail and Beaver Creek have won the right to host the 2015 World Alpine Skiing Championships. This will be the third go-around for the resort complex, which also hosted the championships in 1989 and 1999—the first time since Aspen hosted the ski-racing champions in the 1940s that a U.S. resort had had that distinction.

What does it mean in terms of hosting the Olympics? There was no conjecture in the newspapers whether hosting this plum event will either aid or hinder a bid by Vail or others in Colorado to secure the Olympics in 2022. Privately, some confidants said it would have no effect.

But will this usher in a new round of prosperity in the Vail area? Hosting the 1989 races helped position Vail more firmly on the global stage. Real estate developers said the races weren't a consideration, but one developer said he clearly sees a home run. By 2015, he said, the economic cycle will have returned to what it was earlier in the last decade. Time, of course, will tell whether he is merely excitable or prescient.

Whistler retains expert in place-based cultural tourism

What's distinctive in a destination?

WHISTLER, B.C. – The resort municipality of Whistler has hired a consultant described as an expert in the realm of place-based cultural tourism. Ontario-based Steven Thorne was retained to spend 10 days in Whistler and hold a public meeting. His precise role is to guide creation of a plan that develops Whistler's cultural tourism.

"Place-based cultural tourism is about encountering a destination's history and heritage, its stories, its people, its landscape, its townscape, its people," explained Thorne in a press release. "It is about discovering what makes a destination distinctive, authentic, and memorable. It is about the experience of 'place.'"

Mr. Thorne added that cultural tourism isn't just about tourism. Rather, it's a "strategic opportunity through which the arts, culture and heritage sector can leverage its own development, and serve the local community."

The local chamber of commerce, however, described cultural tourism as having "the potential to attract a new segment of the tourism market to Whistler."

Developer says New West enclave dying on the vine

Proposal for 400 housing units

EDWARDS, Colo. – Gosh, was it only three years ago that Edwards, located about 10 miles down-valley from Vail, was a poster child of New West extravagances? Officially designated by the U.S. Census Bureau as a micropolitan, it had become the new locals' address of prestige. There's a lot of new-car smell about the place.

Now comes a proposal from the Atria Group for 400 more housing units along with 260,000 square feet of commercial space on the former site of a gravel pit.

Reporting from a recent meeting with neighbors, the Vail Daily says that many perceive the project as a detriment to what they perceive as a lingering semi-rural lifestyle. "This is more like being in Denver's suburbs than being in the mountains," said Elizabeth Holland.

Rick Mueller, a developer, argues for economic development. "You're either growing or you're dying, and we're dying," he said. "People are moving out of the valley."

The commercial component of the development would cater to health and wellness, and Mr. Mueller said that would help diversify the local economy.

Steamboat auction seen as no great shakes in long run

Bank takes over base-area parcel

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. – Clock Tower Square and the adjacent Xanadu condominiums at the base of the Steamboat Ski Area will be auctioned in early August. Mile High Banks had reclaimed the properties in foreclosure. The property has been appraised at more than \$10 million, an auctioneer told The Steamboat Pilot this week, and the bidding will begin at \$3.8 million.

Jamie Temple, of Steamboat Springs, and his investing partner, Colgate Holmes, founding partner of Ritz-Carlton Hotel, in



The bank that took over the Clock Tower and an adjacent property will attempt to sell it by auction in early August.

2009 had listed the land and buildings for sale at \$15 million.

"Hindsight is 20-20," Mr. Temple, the primary investor, told the Pilot. He said the situation in Steamboat was clouded by the fact that, while the national real estate downturn had begun in 2005, the market in Steamboat remained robust through 2006 and 2007 and was in only moderate decline through the first half of 2008. During that time, he and others in Steamboat were intent on tracking Steamboat's upward trend in prices to those in Vail and Aspen. Mr. Temple expected that whole-ownership condos in Steamboat might go higher than \$1,500 per square foot.

In Vail during that period, a benchmark of \$3,000 per square foot was set. But the Residences at Little Nell, in Aspen, timeshare sales were working out to almost \$6,000 per square foot.

"We were starting to see Steamboat coming into its own, but it was always a bubble," Mr. Temple said. "We thought it wouldn't stop, but it did stop."

He noted to the Pilot that a separate business, the nearby St. Cloud Mountain Club, is unclouded and is well financed.

But the projects being contemplated by Mr. Temple and his partner always were expected to be several years out in the redevelopment of the base area. Now, the timetable seems to be 8 to 10 years.

Redevelopment of the base area does go on. Three major high-end condominium

projects have been completed since last fall: One Steamboat Place, Edgemont, and Trailhead Lodge (an 80-unit project at Wildhorse, now accessed to the base via gondola). Sales at those projects, if not particularly robust, have been at least respectable, says Dave Baldinger, of Steamboat Village Brokers.

Mr. Baldinger also points to \$4.5 million in base infrastructure work being done this summer, and another \$3.5 million next year when Burgess Creek is returned to an above-ground flow.

“You get impatient because we have been working on this for five years, but after another 24 months this will look really cool.”

Big box defenders say working folks need ‘em *Who sells steel-toed boots?*

CANMORE, Alberta – Canmore continues to debate whether it wants to accept additional big-box corporate retailers in its midst. Those opposing argue that such retailers represent homogenization and will defile Canmore’s relative individuality, what some might call its small-town quaintness. They point to such mass-market offerings in metropolitan Calgary, less than an hour away.

Balderdash, say supporters. They argue that Canmore’s existing stores lack items needed for everyday living. And what items the stores do have carry inflated prices.

“Maybe we should just toddle up town and buy a \$300 jacket or a pair of shoes for \$200,” one letter in the Rocky Mountain Outlook sarcastically said. Said another more straight-forwardly: “Our so-called designer shops don’t carry anything practical.”

Taking stock of Canmore more broadly, letter-writer Grant Robinson pooh-poohed Canmore’s supposed distinctiveness. “We aren’t more unique than any other busy mountain resort town in North America,” he writes.

“If we do carry a uniqueness, we may have more people that (good or bad) want to save the world, thinking their NIMBY

attitudes are a good start. Don’t get me wrong. I don’t mind helping you save the world. Just let me go buy a pair of steel-toed work boots before we get started.”

Bigger, better emerges from dust of ‘70s mall

Innovation gets EPA award

VAIL, Colo. – In ski towns, as across America, buildings from the 1970s now seem quaintly dated. Such was the case in Vail, where a retail and housing complex called Crossroads Mall was razed two years ago.

In its place has come Solaris. It’s bigger, and at more than 100 feet, the tallest building in Vail. It’s also expensive. Two years ago, during the height of the real estate boom, the project set what appeared to be a benchmark for resort real estate prices at more than \$3,000 per square foot, surpassing anything in Aspen, Park City or Jackson Hole by a considerable margin.

Solaris will be coming on line during the next few months, revealing both old and new. The movie theater will simply replace what was there before, but the new complex will also have a bowling alley, a first for Vail.

Adopting a now familiar theme in winter resorts, the new complex will also have an outdoor skating rink that will double, with modifications, for other purposes, particularly concerts. Parking will all be underground.

Aspen museum takes a look at the mid-‘70s

Freewheeling party town

ASPEN, Colo. – You just know that this exhibit has some jungle-like shag carpet as well as macramé plant holders – and a bong. The Wheeler/Stallard House Museum in Aspen now has an exhibit devoted to Aspen in the mid-1970s.

“Think crimes of fashion, public nudity, and a freewheeling party town where anything went and everyone played on a softball team,” instructs The Aspen Times.

One part of the exhibit documents what the Times described as the “not-exactly-accredited Aspen State Teachers College,” which offered classes in Advanced Hustling 401, Sub-Letting 104, and Drinking 205.

“It was irreverent. That was a big part of what we wanted to talk about. There was such a sense of fun,” said curator Lisa Hancock.

No tears shed over loss of cheap housing in Ketchum

1970s project now a memory

KETCHUM, Idaho – Easy come, easy go. Bavarian Village in Ketchum was constructed in the early 1970s, and the units served their purpose, says landowner Dennis Hanggi. They always provided inexpensive housing. But only 4 of the units 17 owned by Mr. Hanggi were occupied, and there was a reason why. Sometimes when he’d drive prospective renters for a look-see, they wouldn’t even get out of the car, Mr. Hanggi told the Idaho Mountain Express.

Do gates deliver security or snobbery at Catamount?

Lyman Orton: wrong message

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. –

Lyman Orton charges that calls for a security gate at the entrance to a high-end housing enclave near Steamboat Springs called Catamount smack of snobbism.

“I don’t know who these folks are that keep agitating for a gate, but I hope that they calm down and learn to enjoy what is one of the safest places in the world to live—Routt County,” said Mr. Orton in a letter published in the Steamboat Pilot. He accuses the agitators of using “security” as a code word for “letting the rest of us know just how exclusive they are.”

For several decades, Catamount was envisioned as a ski area. Trails were to have descended off the Gore Range and into the lush Yampa River Valley. The flattened ski market of the 1990s finally quelled that idea.

Instead, developers created a lake-centered project in the base area.

As an owner, Mr. Orton—the owner of Vermont Country Stores and a one-time bidder on the Crested Butte ski area—says he and others specifically directed that Catamount would remain an ungated community, because of the negative signal that gates send.

“The heritage and culture of our valley is neighborliness, friendliness and a welcoming attitude,” he writes. “Gated communities send exactly the opposite signal.”

Frisco launches building of 70 deed-restricted housing

800 to 2,000 square feet in size

FRISCO, Colo. – Despite the slowdown in the economy, several mountain towns have continued their investment in affordable housing, Frisco among them. Developer David O’Neil, who has built New Urbanist-style higher-end affordable housing in Breckenridge (Wellington) and Denver (old Elitch’s site), is building the first 12 units of what will ultimately be 70 townhomes and single-family houses. Families of four with incomes ranging from \$68,000 to \$136,000 will be eligible for housing. Units will range from 800 square feet to 2,000 square feet.

Even with bankruptcies, Aspen remains pricey

Spec home goes for \$24.5 million

ASPEN, Colo. – Another bankruptcy has made the news in Aspen. The owner of a trio of parcels in downtown has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. At the height of the real estate boom, the parcels had been advertised for \$41.5 million. The price now is \$28 million.

It was the third bankruptcy filing since March in downtown Aspen, notes The Aspen Times, although in one case the judge rejected the petition.

But from elsewhere comes news that a spec home near Aspen completed last year

has sold for \$24.5 million. The house sits on about 9 acres and has 13,000 square feet.

And then there are the 19 units of affordable housing that the local school district expects to complete by Sept. 1—after the school year has already started. The school officials have budgeted \$19,000 to put up teachers and in some cases their families at a local hotel for a month.

Real estate sales edge upward in Aspen area

June was particularly strong

ASPEN, Colo. – Real estate volume through June in Aspen and Pitkin County was 22 percent ahead of last year, with June being particularly strong, reports the Aspen Times.

The greatest amount of activity was in properties ranging in value from \$4 million to \$8 million. One real estate broker associate, Tim Estin, reported he was “day to day hopeful.” Between 60 and 70 percent of annual sales occur between the Fourth of July and the end of September.

Unless conditions worsen, Aspen can expect to surpass \$1 billion in sales, although this will lag far behind the benchmark years of 2006 and 2007, when roughly \$2.6 billion was sold each year. “I am of the opinion we’re never going to see 2007, at least not in my lifetime,” said long-time agent Bob Starodoj, owner and chief executive of Mason Morse Real Estate. He sees future prices more in line with those of 2004 to 2006.

Meanwhile, hoteliers in Aspen have been expecting improved economic conditions this summer. Bill Tomcich, director of a reservation agency, expected lodges over the July 4th weekend to surpass last year’s figure of 84 percent of capacity.

Part of the draw during late June was the annual Ideas Festival. The festival in years past had a regular string of front-page names passing through: the Clintons, John McCain, and many more. This year has been no exception. Tickets were \$1,225 for students and \$7,500 for regular patrons.

Google directions blamed for accident in Park City

Internet changing our brains?

PARK CITY, Utah -- If somebody gives you bum directions, can you blame that person if you get hurt?

The somebody in this case is Google, which provides mapping directions, and a Los Angeles woman has sued the company, asking for \$100,000 in damages after she was hit by a car. She was in Park City, and it was just before dawn in January 2009. The instructions sent her down a busy road without streetlights or a sidewalk.

Writing in The Washington Post, author Nicholas Carr says the story illustrates a remarkable shift in the way people get around these days: “We may not all be wandering around highways in the dark, but most of us have become dependent on computer-generated maps of one sort or another.”

Mr. Carr, the author of a new book called “The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains,” says there is evidence that our growing reliance on automated GPS directions could end up altering the circuitry in our brain.

He cites a study of London cab drivers that showed them with enlarged portions of their brains that are believed to have to do with navigational skills. He also cites ruminates of a researcher from Canada’s McGill University that speculates that giving into the easy directions of GPS may actually result in more cases of dementia.

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Portable solar collector juices events in Aspen

Innovation gets EPA award

ASPEN, Colo. – Quietly, Aspen last year introduced a portable solar collector called Sunny the Solar Roller. The device will be used almost every weekend this summer for special events, such as concerts but also farmer markets and even a wedding — basically anything that requires temporary use of electricity.

The collector can generate 500 watts of electricity for up to eight hours or 2,500 watts for two hours.

This is enough electricity for even larger events. City staffer Ashley Cantrell explains that it's enough electricity to meet the needs of a band for two to four hours performing before an audience of around 1,000 people.

And what if a cloud passes in front of the sun? The system includes batteries for power storage and also a cord to connect to the grid.

Ms. Cantrell came up with the idea of the solar collector, which was custom built by a local firm. As part of its ZGreen (the ZG is a play on the local license plates) program, Aspen had begun requiring event organizers using public facilities hew to environment-friendly practices. For example, all items given away by event hosts must be made of materials that can be recycled or consumed. No Styrofoam take-out containers are allowed. There are several other thou-shalts and an even more extensive list of options. Organizers must meet two of the six options that govern food and beverage. Those options include offering and promoting locally (within 500 miles) grown or organic food,

providing vegetarian meal options, and composting food waste.

“As far as we know, Aspen is the only town in Colorado and one of very few in the nation to require that events meet green standards,” says Ms. Cantrell.

In coming up with the solar collector, Ms. Cantrell's team wanted to make it easier for event planners to meet one of the criterion, namely to use renewable energy. There are few such solar trailers in existence, and it is probably unique in that it is lent without cost to event planners.

Success and acclaim were immediate.



The portable solar generator has proved a hit with the public and event organizers, although it's a pain to store in winter.

“Event planners love using renewable energy to power their events and it comes in really useful in places where grid power is either not available or is hard to access. The key has been making the

trailer easy to use, lightweight and very attractive to all ages,” she explains.

“The trailer serves two roles, one as a power source, but the other as a great educational tool. Many people approach the trailer with curiosity and walk away having learned a lot more about renewable energy and the options that are available to them.”

Problems have been few. The trailer weighs 500 pounds, and some event planners don't have the means to tow it. Also, it was stored inside last winter, taking up space. And event organizers have to watch the batteries to make sure they don't get too low.

The device cost \$10,000, which was underwritten by the Community Office of Resource Efficiency. The group is responsible for administering the Renewable

Energy Mitigation Program in Aspen and Pitkin County, which collects fees from builders of large homes and those that employ outdoor energy use, such as swimming pools, without mitigating that energy use by creating renewable energy sources. The group collected \$8 million in such fees since the program was launched in 2000 and as of 2007.

The Environmental Protection Agency in May gave Aspen its Clean Air Excellence Award for the innovation. It was among 14 such awards chosen from among 124 applications submitted.

Barbecues in Frisco must now compost & recycle

Steamboat also eases into net-zero

FRISCO, Colo. – The Colorado Barbecue Challenge has been held in Frisco since 1993, but this year it had something new. The town required all vendors to do without plastic utensils, plastic bowls and plates, Styrofoam, and plastic beer cups.

Those items and others can't be recycled in Summit County. Instead, vendors had to offer knives, forks, plates and cups that can either be recycled or composted.

The Summit Daily News explains that the current requirements have been five years in the making. The municipal government in 2005 began tackling waste at smaller events sponsored by the town. Then, the town began offering reduced registration fees for events which voluntarily adopted waste-reduction strategies. This year, going green has become mandatory.

Getting it all right has not been easy. Last year, for example, participants mistook the composting bin for a trash container. Steps have been taken to prevent such recurrences, and Frisco organizers told the Daily that the effort this year succeeded in diverting 70 percent of garbage from the landfill. The goal had been 60 percent.

And in Steamboat

Now in its second year, the Zero Waste Initiative in Steamboat Springs has more than

tripled in size. Last year volunteers in the effort, sponsored by the Yampa Valley Sustainability Council, organized zero-waste efforts at five events, diverting an average of 70 percent of waste from the landfill. This year, the effort will expand to all the free concerts at Howelson Hill. Liz Wahl, food and beverage director for the ski area, said the initiative has an almost desperate need for volunteers to help concert goers figure out what can be recycled and composted and what cannot. As for working with concert organizers, she said it's easy. "They're all like, 'Yeah, I want to do the right thing,'" Ms. Wahl told the Steamboat Pilot.

Telluride council firm about new energy code

Time to stop making excuses

TELLURIDE, Colo. – Telluride in the last decade has twice taken very ambitious vows, pledging to reduce its carbon footprint as a community. Now, it's groping through the hard work of concrete action that will be necessary if the community has any hope, however faint, of achieving those great ambitions.

The first vow came circa 2005, with a sign-on to the Mayors' Agreement on Climate Change. That agreement specifies that communities will work to reduce their carbon emissions 7 percent below 1990 levels—by 2012. With the possible exception of Seattle and perhaps several others, it now appears that few of the more than 1,000 towns and cities that signed on will achieve that target.

Then, in 2009, Telluride Mayor Stu Fraser announced a goal of becoming carbon neutral in its electrical supply by 2020. He said improving energy efficiency was an important first step.

But the devil is in the details. After a half-dozen public meetings in the last year, the council reviewed a proposal to substantially tighten the community energy code. Following a model first created in Aspen a decade and then copied with revisions in the Eagle/Vail, Crested Butte,

and other areas, it creates a penalty for what is considered profligate energy use, such as for big houses, snowmelt systems, and outdoor tubs.

The Telluride Watch reports angry denunciations at a recent meeting. “You’re driving your building costs up very substantially,” said a builder. “Let’s just make it so your average millionaire can’t even build a house here,” he said.

A hot tub vendor advocated instead the banning of heated sidewalks, which he said would achieve the same level of reductions.

A minority of council members wanted to delay action, to allow additional time for discussion with builders.

But the majority of council members voted to proceed immediately in adopting the energy/green building code. They also scrapped some exemptions that had been recommended.

“If Telluride really wants to reduce its carbon footprint like it says it does, it’s time to stop making excuses and to begin reining in its energy use—even if it means higher costs or less convenience,” said the Watch in summarizing the majority opinion.

Telluride getting pushback to tax on plastic grocery bags

Grocer wants ramped-up recycling

TELLURIDE, Colo. – Telluride and the adjoining town of Mountain Village appeared ready to assess a tax on use of plastic shopping bags. The Telluride Watch reports unanimous support in a recent working session of the town council.

Helping steel the determination was the showing of a movie called “Bag It” at the recent Telluride Mountainfilm Festival. The documentary presents a compelling argument for the need to rein in the rampant use of plastic.

But now comes protest, from the owner of the lone grocery store in the central part of Telluride. The owner wants to see the idea of expanded recycling.

The easiest target about such concerns has been the plastic bags liberally used in

grocery and other stores. The nation of Ireland famously imposed a 15-cent tax on plastic bags in 2002, cutting use by 90 percent. Various U.S. cities—Seattle, San Francisco and Washington D.C.—have also taken action, with varying success.

Because of its tourist trade, Telluride believes that an outright ban on plastic bags would prove unworkable. Instead, activists and town leaders think a tax on single-use plastic bags handed out at grocery stores will be most effective.

Activist David Allen, who began lobbying for a disincentive three years ago, warns that Telluride may be lobbied by national trade groups. In Seattle, he said, opponents spent \$1 million in helping persuade voters to overturn the 20 cent fee on paper and plastic bags that city had enacted.



Jackson by summer’s end to have a major array of solar

Nearly \$1 million in last year

JACKSON, Wyo. – Largely as the result of federal stimulus money, the town of Jackson will have a major array of solar by summer’s end. The town by last year had 34 kilowatts of solar capacity by last year, but this year has or will soon add another 190 kwh, for a net total of 224 kwh. Most will be at the sewage treatment plant, with another chunk at a water well, and token amounts in more public places.

The federal government (funneled through state government) has provided

\$708,000 for the solar installations, and the town provided \$280,000.

Solar garden idea taking root in the resort valleys

Aspen, Vail area installations

BASALT, Colo. – Work has begun on a community solar installation in the Roaring Fork in what business sponsors claim is the first of its kind in the nation. This first installation, for 85 kilowatt hours, is small, but a much larger 900 kw system has been approved adjacent to the airport at Rifle, while yet a third installation, which would be the largest in Colorado, has been proposed for the Eagle County Landfill about 20 miles west of Vail.

Enabling the installations are new legislation adopted in Colorado authorizing such “solar gardens.” In this case, power can be sold to the local electrical co-op, Holy Cross Energy. Individual homeowners, instead of having solar panels on their rooftops, can buy electrical production in the cooperative. A Carbondale-based company, Clean Energy Collective, has created the legal, tax, and billing models.

The models well may be worth studying. Local communities have already been struggling to balance aesthetics of solar panels and other renewable energy devices against the broader desire to reduce carbon footprints. This collective model creates numerous efficiencies—installation, bulk-buying of panels, and then the very-important maintenance. But, it does depend upon having cheap land—which is why it may make sense for landfills. The first site, about 20 miles down-valley from Aspen, is on a half-acre located within a water district yard.

Sun Valley light-trespass ban extended to rural precincts

Activist wants retrofitted fixtures

KETCHUM, Idaho – Some years after the towns of Ketchum, Sun Valley and Hailey adopted a law restricting light pollution and trespass, the Blaine County

commissioners have done the same for their more rural precincts. The new law prohibits new outdoor lighting fixtures from sending light directly onto adjacent property or public right-of-ways.

For long-time activist Steve Pauley, a resident of Sun Valley, that’s still not enough. He wants the law applied retroactively to existing lighting fixtures on houses and businesses. He cites it as both a quality-of-life and a health issue. He referred to new evidence that has linked night-time lighting to harmful effects on human health.

Even if Pauley considers the regulation too tame, others in the Sun Valley area resent it.

“We are getting pretty tired of others telling us what to do,” groused one blogger on the Idaho Mountain Express website.

But another blogger said that the accretion of many small lights has already sullied the quality of life.

“I am neither an astronomy geek nor a liberal, but I do like to be able to look up and see the stars,” he wrote. “When I moved here, one could see all seven stars in Pleiades glittering in their glory. Now one can see a grouping of an indeterminate amount of stars. We are losing something of value.”

Jackson/Teton County create environmental review board

Will take broad look at impacts

JACKSON, Wyo. – The town of Jackson and Teton County continue to create the framework for a nine-member advisory board that will review the broad impacts of policies, but not any specific development projects. A report in the Jackson Hole News&Guide indicates some minor heartburn in formation of the agenda. “When this started, it was so broad and open-ended it could have been a financial disaster,” said Hank Phibbs, chairman of the county commissioners. “We had to get it focused and aimed at practical matters that will come before boards.”

New speculation about possible Whistler buyer

Russian billionaire's name floated

WHISTLER, B.C. – After selling Copper Mountain and a handful of other resorts, Intrawest managed to refinance its debt earlier this year, paying off Lehman Brothers and other creditors and getting a new loan that will be due in 2014.

Despite the new breathing room, Intrawest may still be shopping its flagship operation, the Whistler and Blackcomb ski areas. Citing unnamed sources, The Wall Street Journal reports that Intrawest had approached a Russian billionaire who is involved in hosting the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

The billionaire, Vladimir Potanin, has made his money in mining of nickel, palladium and other minerals.

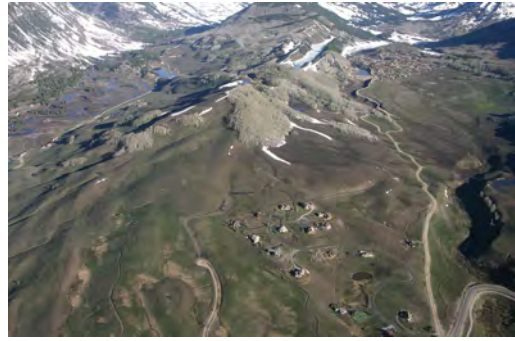
One source told the Journal that buying Whistler-Blackcomb would give him all the expertise he needed to get everything done in time for the 2014 Olympics. But another source said it's unlikely Potanin will buy Whistler.

Whistler's Pique Newsmagazine, in relaying the Journal report, also noted that Nippon Cable, a Japanese firm that owns 23 percent of Whistler-Blackcomb, may increase its stake in the operation, giving Intrawest even more breathing room.

Vail Resorts gets ready to spend some money

\$75-\$85 million at its 5 resorts

BROOMFIELD, Colo. – Vail Resorts intends to plow between \$75 million and \$85 million into its various resorts this summer. Heavenly, on the California-Nevada border, will get an on-mountain restaurant. Vail Mountain gets a quad lift to replace the ancient three-seater that has served the Back Bowls for decades.



Big land-preservation deal struck at Crested Butte

313 acres adjacent to the town

CRESTED BUTTE, Colo. –A major deal has been done at Crested Butte to preserve open lands described as potentially developable resort property.

The Trust for Public Land last week acquired 313 acres of high-profile real estate near Crested Butte with the intention of preserving it as open space. It also sets the stage for preservation of 70 additional acres.

The town of Crested Butte immediately gets 166 acres. The acquisition was funded by a \$2 million grant from Great Outdoors Colorado and \$1 million from the Town of Crested Butte.

The Trust for Public Lands will retain ownership of the remaining 147 acres until Crested Butte and the local land trust raise sufficient funds to purchase it. Those additional conveyances are expected again in 2011 and 2012.

“This property serves as the ultimate conservation puzzle piece — connecting four existing open space parcels, buffering National Forest, and providing recreational access to the backcountry,” said Justin Spring, TPL project manager.

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