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Vol. XLIII, Issue 204	

A county-wide collaboration

Could a multijurisdictional authority bring solutions to Eagle County's housing problems?

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As housing prices in Eagle County continue to rise, and local governments strive to provide affordable housing for their workers, county leaders are looking at a new type of collaboration: a multijurisdictional housing authority.

THE NEED FOR HOUSING

The need for more affordable housing in Eagle County is not a new concept. In 2016, responding to a housing shortage of 4,500 units, Eagle County Commissioners put a 0.3% sales tax on the November ballot, which would have designated approximately \$5 million per year for housing. The measure failed.

Now, as housing once again becomes a top priority for municipalities across Eagle County, the prospect of a county-wide collaborative effort to create housing has



CHRIS DILLMANN/VAIL DAILY ARCHIVE

A new opportunity is arising in Eagle County for regional collaboration to provide faster, better funded housing projects through a multijurisdictional housing authority. The collaborative funding for the Habitat for Humanity development on Third Street in Eagle is an example of how combined effort leads to success.

resurfaced, albeit in a slightly different form.

Real estate prices continue to rise in Eagle County — the price for a single-family home went up by 9% from November 2022 to November 2023, according to the Land Title Market Analysis for the county.

According to the 2018 Housing Demand Analysis done by consulting groups for local policymakers, by 2025, the estimated housing demand in the Eagle River Valley will be 5,900 units. Most municipalities within Eagle County are actively working toward creating more housing, including through housing authorities, which Vail and Eagle County have, and by hiring housing directors to town staff.

A MULTIJURISDICTIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY?

Recent years have seen significantly more valley-wide collaboration between governments than in the past. "We're all struggling with the same things," said Jeff Shroll, Eagle County manager.

Housing, climate change, transportation and early child care facilities are all top of mind for most Eagle County governments.

"Now is the time to have these regional conversations about housing," Shroll said.

If local governments are primed to work together,

HOUSING, A9



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The Colorado Mountain College Vail Valley apartment buildings that opened in September were built in collaboration between the school and Eagle County, an example of a regional collaboration to promote housing.

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COLORADO STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS/COURTESY IMAGE

An artist's rendering of part of the proposed State Land Board development, which would provide 700 units of housing for Eagle County workers.

HOUSING

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it may be time for a multijurisdictional housing authority in Eagle County. The regional collaboration could provide opportunities for several municipalities to throw their support behind housing projects, leading to faster and better-funded efforts. Proving cross-jurisdictional collaboration would lead to stronger grant applications, and funding could potentially also come from some sort of tax.

"A multijurisdictional housing authority in Eagle County really looks like a lot of the work that we're doing already, where we all have a high priority and high focus on providing housing solutions, but we're doing it collectively and together," said Kim Bell Williams, Eagle County's housing director.

"I think it can help us all prioritize what projects we can all work on together, and find success," Shroll said. "It could open up some significant financing opportunities, not even necessarily a new tax dependent," he said.

Williams, who worked as the managing broker at The Valley Home Store when the ballot measure failed in 2016, said she has seen a shift in attitude across Eagle County in recent years. People are more willing to travel longer distances throughout the county between work and home than before.

Additionally, while housing was expensive in Eagle County in 2016, Williams said, "people could make it work," finding homes they could afford to rent or buy. In 2024, the housing affordability gap, or the difference between the cost of a median-priced home in the county and what a working family can afford, is "significant," Williams said.

As the Vail Daily reported in August, while the median income in Eagle County for a four-person household is \$118,300, the gap between what that household could afford and what a median-priced house costs on the free market is over \$767,000. Thus, there is an overwhelming need for deed-restricted community housing.

THE MAKINGS OF A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

"I think having the flexibility to respond to the market is key, and then also staying in the community and hearing the needs," Williams said.

Shroll envisions the makeup of the multijurisdictional housing authority to

include full-time staff members and a board of directors. The board would have representation from every municipality that joins the authority, similar to the Eagle Valley Transportation Authority board. "Except this time we'd want some really strong housing background, financing background," he said.

To start the process, "I think we all need to get rowing in the right direction, and we need to get some traction in having those conversations," Shroll said. "It's also trying to help understand what the (multijurisdictional housing authority) isn't ... It's not going to take the autonomy, we don't want it to take the autonomy away from each town and each jurisdiction," he said.

"Building housing is not just finding a bare piece of property somewhere and trying to figure out how to get housing. We have to look at: Where does the water go? How do we handle the wastewater? Is it walkable? Is it on a bus route?" Shroll said.

Each town would weigh in on the best location and conditions for housing, "just like they do now," Shroll said.

Pitkin County, Summit County and the Yampa Valley all have cross-jurisdictional housing authorities that Eagle County can use as a guide. "We don't necessarily need to reinvent the wheel, we just need to find the right ones to steal from, and add our own little twist to it, and really identify the needs in our valley that could be very similar," Shroll said.

The Valley Home Store is one example of how regional collaboration on housing is already successful in Eagle County, helping people find and afford housing throughout the county.

The nearly 100-acre State Land Board property that Avon is looking to annex in the coming months is an example of productive regional collaboration to build more housing. "We've had lots of great people at the table — Minturn, Vail, Avon," Shroll said. "I think there's an opportunity to showcase what that regional collaboration looks like," he said.

BABY STEPS

The concept of a multijurisdictional housing authority in Eagle County is still in the very early stages. Shroll said the feedback he has heard thus far from town managers has been "cautiously optimistic."

Taking "baby steps" is the way toward enhancing regional collaboration, and drafting the makings of the multijurisdictional housing authority, Shroll said.

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