

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Vail Town Council

From: George Ruther, Housing Director  
Suzanne Silverthorne, Communications Director

Date: May 5, 2020

Re: November 2020 Ballot Initiative Polling Discussion – Long-Term Funding for Housing and Similar Efforts in Support of Economic Recovery

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**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this agenda item is two-fold:

- 1) determine the level of support for continuing forward with a second community polling survey on the topic of establishing a dedicated, long-term source of funding for deed-restricted housing programs and developments in Vail,  
  
and,
- 2) discuss whether the community polling survey should also include questions about broader additional economic stimulus initiatives aimed at financially supporting Vail’s economic recovery.

**II. BACKGROUND**

The consultant team of Magellan Strategies and Summit Information Services has repeatedly stressed the importance of unanimous support and collaboration amongst the seven Vail Town Council Members and the five Vail Local Housing Authority members when a ballot initiative for a long-term source of funding for housing is pursued in the community. If the 12 community leaders elected and appointed to address the community’s housing challenges are in full support, and speaking with a shared voice, the likelihood of support from the registered voters in the community is greater. According to the consultants, ballot initiatives have failed in other communities simply because as few as one elected official or appointed member has lobbied against the initiative which served to divide the community and undermine the importance of the effort.

Prior to the onset of the Covid- 19 global pandemic the Vail Town Council and the Vail Local Housing Authority had been collaborating and discussing the pursuit of a long-term source of funding for housing in the Vail community. Identifying and securing a long-term source of funding is a high priority action prescribed within the Vail Housing 2027 Strategic Plan. To that end, the Vail Local Housing Authority was charged with completing a community polling survey in the spring of 2019.

A. Prior Efforts

In the spring of 2019, the Vail Town Council and the Vail Local Housing Authority partnered in a community polling survey targeting registered voters in Vail in an effort to gauge the level of support for a tax increase for housing. The consultant team of Magellan Strategies and Summit Information Services were retained to conduct the polling survey. Each has an extensive track record of successful election campaigns within the Vail valley and across the State of Colorado. More than 400 respondents participated in the polling survey conducted in late May - early June, 2019.

The 2019 community polling survey results revealed the following information:

- Community support for housing amongst registered Vail voters is strong and growing
- There is a community willingness, commitment, and desire to support housing solutions
- There are a wide range of opinions and thoughts about how best to address the housing need including amending short-term rental policies, greater private-sector participation, and exploring down valley solutions that include public transportation
- Additional work is needed in other areas of opportunities and solutions before the community may support a tax initiative in favor of housing
- There is an opportunity for greater community awareness of the work of the Vail Local Housing Authority
- Deed-restricted homes are viewed as an appropriate way to provide homes for Vail residents
- There is solid recognition of specific housing investments made by the Town in recent years (Chamonix Vail, Vail INDEED Deed Restriction Purchase Program, and 6 West Apartments)
- As verified by community survey input, addressing the housing need must be a priority of the Vail Town Council
- While a lot has been done in recent years around housing, there is more work to be done

In the end, the Vail Town Council and the Vail Local Housing Authority collectively determined to withhold placing a housing funding question on the November 2019 ballot, and instead, make progress on the recommendations for future action provided by the consultant team

based upon the polling results. It was determined a second community polling survey would occur in the spring/summer of 2020.

B. Efforts Underway

More recently, the Town of Vail conducted its 2020 Biennial Community Survey of Vail residents and community members. While not yet fully tabulated, our consultants at RRC, Associates, Inc. have begun to analyze and report out the survey responses focusing on housing-related questions. In doing, special attention was given to the responses of registered Vail voters. However, nonregistered voter responses have also been included as those individuals also influence and impact voter opinion. The high-level themes and preliminary results of the biennial community survey indicate the following:

Overall responses to questions that addressed “*willingness to support a tax*” and “*If yes*” the preferred type, either a property or sales tax have been analyzed. A key finding from the survey shows:

- There is a slightly larger proportion of respondents indicating they are willing to consider (39%) than those indicating they will not consider (34%). A notable 27% are “*uncertain.*”

In a follow-up question, of those that are willing to consider:

- Almost half (49%) favor a sales tax increase, compared to 31% identifying property tax as their preference. Again, a relatively large segment (20%) are undecided (“don’t know”). Clearly, the survey results show that there are divisions of opinions on these questions and that the “*undecided*” segment would likely be determinative in any election. These results suggest that information and communications around any ballot initiative(s) will be very important.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, renters are particularly likely to say they would consider a potential tax increase to support resident-occupied, deed-restricted housing.
- Examining responses by age shows younger voters are more likely to support an initiative. This is expected, renters are younger, in general, so these findings reinforce one another.
- Business owners/ operators are slightly more likely to consider supporting a tax.
- There are differences in responses by Vail neighborhood. Of the five neighborhoods that had the highest survey representation, East Vail and Vail Village are least likely to say they would consider supporting a tax increase.

When asked about the preferred type of tax, there were also differences in responses:

- While renters are relatively more likely to consider a tax, they are also likely to support the property tax approach. This is at odds with majority opinion (favoring sales taxes). Owners strongly favor sales taxes.
- Again, age brackets show difference in opinions. Younger respondents (heavily renters) are likely to favor property taxes.
- Business owners are especially likely to have opinions (few say “don’t know”) and they are somewhat divided between favoring sales taxes and property taxes.
- Neighborhoods with heavy single-family ownership including East Vail and Intermountain are especially likely to favor sales taxes. Responses from other neighborhoods show more variation.

In summary, there appears to be compelling information suggesting that a second community polling survey on housing is worth pursuing. Of significance is that the preliminary information suggests that many respondents (+/-27%) were “*undecided or uncertain*” in their position at this time. What this may suggest is that an organized and targeted strategy of messaging and communication aimed at better informing and further educating the nearly 30% of “*undecided*”, “*do not know*”, or “*uncertain*” respondents could have a significant affect on the outcome of a ballot initiative. In doing so, extra emphasis could be placed on identifying the demographics of the 30%, better understanding why they are “*undecided or uncertain*” at this time, and developing a strategy that effectively reaches out to those people.

A complete copy of the preliminary 2020 survey results and overview regarding selected housing-related questions prepared by RRC, Associates, Inc. has been attached for reference.

### III. FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION

There are a number of considerations that go into making a determination on whether to continue forward with current efforts regarding a second community polling survey on housing and broader economic recovery opportunities: Those considerations include:

#### Housing Fund Considerations -

- What do the preliminary results of the 2020 Biennial Community Survey suggest? Are there any early indications revealed regarding the sentiment of registered Vail voters about housing?
- How does November 2020 being a presidential election year potentially impact Vail voter turnout and ballot initiative results regarding housing?
- To what degree has registered voter sentiment changed about housing since completing the 2019 community polling survey?

- How effective have the steps taken in reaching out to inform Vail voters about housing been over the past 9-10 months?
- How does the Covid-19 global pandemic factor into the decision-making of the Vail Town Council? Is now an appropriate time?
- Covid-19 global pandemic will have serious impacts on the Town of Vail. If housing remains a priority of the community, how will housing initiatives be funded in the future, especially in light of no dedicated funding source?
- Would an adequate supply of housing benefit Vail in the economic recovery from conditions such as Covid-19, the Great Recession, etc.?
- How has the housing market changed in the previous 9- 10 months? Better? Worse? Same?
- How does the ongoing debates around the Booth Heights development impact Vail voter perception of housing?
- What additional community outreach is needed to shift Vail voter sentiment?
- What is the story to be told and how will it be messaged to the community?
- Is there likely to be unanimous support amongst the 12 community housing leaders in pursuit of a ballot initiative?
- To what degrees does a strategic action plan for implementing housing solutions affect Vail voters and impact the results of a ballot initiative?

#### Broader Economic Recovery Opportunity Considerations -

- Are there other more critical economic recovery/resiliency measures in greater need of funding at this time?
- What might the Vail Economic Recovery Team (as a part of VEAC) identify in the coming weeks and months as key community needs such as commercial rent relief, food security, community resilience efforts, etc?
- Sales or property tax increases to fund community recovery have been successful on a few occasions nationally, typically to support natural disaster recovery. At this time CAST and CML are not aware of such efforts being discussed yet in other municipalities.
- When is the appropriate time to poll our residents about such matters?

#### **IV. NEXT STEPS**

If either, or both, community polling subjects are supported by the Vail Town Council, the town staff will return to the Vail Town Council Meeting on May 19<sup>th</sup> with a draft community polling survey, schedule, and series of next steps for implementing a polling survey in June, 2020. The session on the 19<sup>th</sup> would likely include representation from the Vail Local Housing Authority, Vail Economic Recovery Team, and the consultant team. The results of the polling survey would be available in time for the group to determine next steps towards potentially placing a question on the election ballot in November, 2020.

