

RESORT DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY PLANNING — CREATING NEW HABITS OF WORKING TOGETHER

Collaborative planning between developers and communities in resort towns can balance growth with local values, ensuring sustainable development that benefits both new residents and long-term locals.

By Darla Callaway

The urban flight to live in mountain towns and pursue recreational-oriented lifestyles — combined with increased tourism-oriented economic opportunities — has impacted locals who struggle to find affordable housing. It has also put increased pressure on these towns' natural resources, civic infrastructure and social services. Communities that didn't historically identify as resort towns have increasingly become home to new residents and investors. It is not a new revelation that the impacts of growth can be divisive, and solutions are complex.

New locals and investors may not fully understand the impact their new presence imparts on a community. The community's default reaction is typically to say, "not in my back yard" (NIMBY) or "close the door behind me."

It's essential that real estate professionals, designers, urban planners, community leaders and elected officials work together to develop a comprehensive plan for resort communities with a holistic approach to housing, infrastructure,

healthcare, social services, environmental, climate and other important topics.

The idea of placemaking, as well as planning and design practices that create equitable access to recreation, affordable housing, economic sustainability and natural resource protection, all come into play. When done right, they can assist these communities in creating a solution long-term residents, investors and visitors alike will benefit from.



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The Power of Habits to Create Tangible Outcomes

Community comprehensive and vision plans already exist, identifying civic values, strategies and priorities. Resort development is based on values, too. If resort development and communities can be proactive to identify common values, they could create strategies and habits of working together.

Here are three ideas that encourage collaborative strategies and habits:

1. Developers should seek to understand community values before there is a project.

As part of market research and due diligence efforts, resort developers can strengthen their competitive position and anticipate risks by being knowledgeable about the community's values.

Reading a community's visioning and planning documents, such as comprehensive plans, general plans, Parks Recreation Open Space and Trail (PROST) plans and others, is a great place to start. Meeting with elected officials to discuss the goals and strategies of the community plans with the intent of understanding the context by which the plans were developed can also go a long way.



The 144,214-square-foot Pedestrian Mall in Aspen runs along three sides of a city block, prioritizing pedestrians over vehicular traffic.

Developers should further consider future partnerships and tenants by engaging with local businesses, entrepreneurs, school districts, healthcare providers, non-profits, arts communities and environmentalists. Needs may be identified that are complimentary to future development ideas and further community goals.

2. Integrate developer input into community plans.

Few community plans engage local developers in crafting vision statements, strategies and priorities. However, it's a missed opportunity to educate developers on community values while inviting new ideas and solutions. Developers should be encouraged to participate in a broad range of focus group topics, and resort town officials should ensure developer representation is considered when crafting community engagement plans.

3. Seek resort developers with shared values.

By actively seeking resort development partners who share similar values, communities can be in the driver's seat of change that aligns with their community. This can be done when elected officials attend and engage with developer organizations like the Urban Land Institute (ULI). Such officials should also be proactive in getting to know developers who share their values. This can happen by attending real estate conferences or joining like-minded associations. It's easier for each party to get their needs met when they have a relationship with one another.

Communities must seek proactive approaches to understand common values, leverage each other's strengths and work together to create resilient growth. When it comes to resort and community planning — they should go hand in hand. Planning for tourism to strengthen a local economy is exciting.

By integrating these strategies early in the lifecycle phase of planning, both parties can create a collaborative approach that not only benefits all, but preserves the local community fabric.

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The Aspen Mountain Ski Resort Sundeck in Aspen, Colo., features 30-foot ceilings and a huge rock fireplace.



The Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway is a shared-use trail network in Lake Tahoe's South Shore. The 3.9-mile trail links south shore neighborhoods to each other and to Lake Tahoe Community College.



The 23,000-square-foot space sits atop Aspen Mountain and is accessible by gondola.