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Editorial on Community Housing – Published March 18, 2005

A Case for Community Housing

There are many reasons to support community workforce housing. Let me put forward two: 1) community housing will be vital for the success of local businesses, and 2) community housing will make life more appealing for those residents and visitors who enjoy and expect the amenities this area offers.

Years ago City of Sun Valley leaders identified the need to solve the housing problem and addressed it in the 1994 Comprehensive Plan by calling for an affordable housing linkage program. Such a program is designed to generate housing for jobs created by new development. Sun Valley is now moving forward with two simple and straightforward ordinances that will require new development to either provide affordable housing directly or to contribute a one-time fee to help with a portion of the costs of providing that housing.

Deep down in our hearts we know that some reasonable amount of workforce housing is necessary in our community if we are to sustain the future of this very expensive area, especially as land costs and residential values skyrocket. It is the strong second home market in Sun Valley that has principally caused these values to rise, which is generally a good gain for the region's overall prosperity, but has the unintended side result of pricing workers out of the area even when earning reasonable wages. People who need to live here, like medical personnel, and emergency service providers, are finding they can't afford to anymore.

Our residents and resort guests, upon whom our economy is largely based, share high expectations for quality service. Whether in restaurants, or in the shops, they rightfully expect to encounter cordial, well-trained employees capable of providing skilled, excellent service. Many businesses have a difficult time meeting that expectation as they spend more time and money dealing with turnover issues caused in large part by housing that has become more expensive and difficult to find. Employers need to have adequate hiring choices and a full staff of qualified workers to keep their businesses

running, so distractions like these don't drive down quality and service and affect the employer's bottom line.

We also want these folks to deposit their paychecks in our community, not outside the valley. If they live here, they stand a greater chance of spending their money at the local grocery, the local theater, the service station, coffee shop, restaurant, gift shop, bookstore, ski area, doctor or vet. This money will then continue to work within our community.

For all of these reasons, providing for workforce housing is a pro-business, pro-community proposition.

To try to solve part of this problem, the Sun Valley Planning and Zoning Commission has proposed two sound ordinances that begin to deal with the issue.

The first ordinance, recommended unanimously by the Commission, focuses on the need to have essential service workers, the doctors, nurses, teachers, firemen, policemen and other professionals such as managers, living in our midst. For these folks, the ordinance is designed to provide housing that will include them in our community in homes they will purchase in new residential subdivisions. We are fortunate that there is still land available for this type of housing in the city. The exterior of their homes will look similar to others built in the subdivision, as we in Sun Valley value our design standards and insist that they apply to workforce housing as well.

The second ordinance, recommended by a super majority of the Commission, is focused on developing rental and some for sale housing in areas relatively close by for future ski patrollers, bartenders, housekeepers, snowplow drivers, clerks, guides, and others who are integral to our community. The primary intent of this ordinance is to require new residential and commercial development to provide housing on-site, but if not possible, then contribute a one-time fee to help fund additional housing for this workforce. These fees, as currently proposed, would amount to approximately \$3,000 for a 3,500 square foot new home and \$9,000 for a 7,000 square foot new home. Fees will be pooled with other resources so they can be leveraged, for instance with state and federal funds. Some developers may wish to build their own dormitory style housing on-site under this ordinance. Others may wish to take credit for building caretaker units if they desire. Again, all housing built under the ordinances will have to meet the strict Sun Valley design guidelines.

Those of us who have lived here for some time have built the infrastructure of roads, water and sewer systems, schools and the like through the taxes and fees we have paid

over the years. Now that housing is a priority, it seems fair that future development, which will create new jobs, might reasonably contribute a relatively small one-time fee to workforce housing for those jobs they create.

As the City of Sun Valley shows leadership by establishing a reasonable level of community workforce housing for new residential and commercial development with fair ordinances, then it follows suit that the rest of the valley should be encouraged to consider similar actions over time. Solving community workforce housing starts at the local level, but by working together we will be able to create housing to meet the true needs of our community and resort.

Nils Ribi, Chairman, Sun Valley Planning and Zoning Commission