

# Snowmass–Capitol Creek Caucus Master Plan

Draft ~~422~~ June 2017



## VISION STATEMENT

The Snowmass and Capitol Creek valleys are two of the most beautiful in Colorado, if not all of the Rocky Mountains. Even though they are near the resort towns of Aspen and Snowmass Village, the character of these valleys is still predominantly rural/agricultural and remains substantially unchanged. Homes here have been built subordinate to the magnificence of our natural surroundings. Although there may be half as many ranches as there were 35 years ago, open meadows along with abundant wildlife still abound.

The valued qualities include the natural watersheds, water quality and quantity in Snowmass and Capitol Creeks and their tributaries, undisturbed expanses of natural vegetation and riparian corridors, and wildlife habitat. We experience our valleys through views of open meadow foregrounds, framing dramatic peaks, colorful hillsides and distant ridgelines. Agriculture is recognized as a resource and means to preserve the open space character of our valleys and we support using a range of techniques to ensure its continued presence and viability. In order to protect and preserve the character and scale that exists today, this Master Plan is offered as a guide for present and future residents to the values we attribute to the quality of life in our Caucus area. It will only be through commitment to such ideas that we will be able to protect and maintain our valleys and our extraordinary landscape into the future.

*Listed below are recommendations from the Caucus to current and future landowners, and to the County that are intended to help further the goals of this Plan. We look forward to working with you.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Until 1960, Pitkin County was sparsely populated, with just over 2,300 people and over 104,000 acres of agricultural land in private ownership. Since that time, the population has grown by nearly six times, while agricultural land decreased to one quarter of its 1960 acreage.*

The Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus Master Plan is a comprehensive long-range plan to guide development in the Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus area. It is written to apply to any development proposal – whether a remodel or expansion of an existing home, the

proposed receiver site for a TDR, the planning and construction of a new home, or commercial, institutional, and recreational development. The Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus is a legally constituted 501c3 neighborhood coalition established for the purposes of advising residents and the Board of County Commissioners and County planning staff on land use and other issues in our Caucus area, ensuring that homes, structures and commercial activities reflect the jointly held vision of residents. The Caucus is not a regulatory agency; rather it advises the County, which retains all state-enabled regulatory authority.

The Caucus area is approximately 17,061 acres. Current zoning<sup>1</sup> in the Caucus area continues to support the predominantly large-lot rural agricultural land use patterns and character of our two respective valleys.

We encourage new residents, homebuilders and homeowners to visit our website. We strive to keep it updated. If you are looking for something that is not there, please don't hesitate to contact one of the Board members directly. Contact information is on the website: [www.snowcapcaucus.org](http://www.snowcapcaucus.org).

This Master Plan is based on the consensus of our residents as derived through many caucus meetings over many years. While we cannot make every neighbor happy, we have honored all opinions and suggestions expressed by the residents of both valleys.

## **RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

All residential development in the Snowmass and Capitol Creek valleys should be consistent with and complimentary to the rural character of the area. The natural environment should dominate a person's experience of the valleys. To this end, we strongly recommend low density, single-family residential housing of moderate size and bulk.

We recommend that development of a new home and/or significant remodels be subject to the following standards:

- In accordance with County code, there should be no multi-family homes, condominiums, apartments, or townhouses.
- Structures should be sited for preservation of open space, irrigated agricultural lands, and pasture.
- The Caucus supports the maximum house size limitation of 5,750 square feet.
- ~~The Caucus respects the County's policies relating to the use of Transferable Development Rights (TDR's) and GMQS protocols in our area to build a home larger than 5,750 square feet.~~
- Existing homes of any size and vacant land with established development approvals that have not lapsed are considered approved until those approvals have lapsed.
- Outbuildings should be reflective of our western rural character. We recommend that the County work with the Caucus to develop design parameters to ensure that

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<sup>1</sup> Current zoning includes R-30, AR-2, AR-10,AH, RS-30, RS-60, RR and small pockets of B2, PUB & P-1.

scale and materials for outbuildings are consistent with surrounding rural character.

- We expect neighbors building or remodeling homes to approach their Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) and comply with the HOA's set of rules and regulations, as well as Caucus guidelines, which are the basis for Caucus recommendations to the County.

## **SCALE OF HOME**

- The Caucus encourages homes that do not dominate the landscape, but instead are sited and designed in harmony with the topography of the site to have the least visual impact possible. Ways to accomplish this include ranch style homes, homes properly located to fit local topography, homes with broken roof lines, and use of native landscaping to reduce the visual impact.
- We discourage the use of grand entrance gates.
- The Caucus may request the use of story poles showing height and corners of all new structures to enable the Caucus Land Use Committee to visualize proposed buildings or structures.

## **MATERIALS**

The Caucus encourages homeowners to:

- Use dark or earth tone-colored roofs with low reflectivity.
- Use fire resistant roof materials as required by County code.
- Use earth tone siding, exterior paint, and stains that fit in with the natural environment.
- Use landscaping with plants and trees indigenous to the Snowmass and Capitol Creek Valleys.
- Use fencing that is consistent with rural, western character, preferably wood rail, split rail, barbed wire, or smooth wire. All fencing, including fencing on lands assessed as agricultural properties, should be built to meet wildlife-friendly standards. Pitkin County should work with the Caucus to develop standards that ensure that fencing is functional, but designed to meet the rural character of the area and wildlife needs. Abandoned fencing, both wood and wire, that is no longer serving a functional purpose should be removed.
- Avoid development of large, open-surface, impermeable parking areas.

## **VISUAL IMPACTS**

- We endorse existing Pitkin County codes that prohibit ridgeline development.
- We encourage barn architecture be of rural western character.

- We recommend screening or enclosure of outside storage of materials and trash.
- The Caucus supports current Pitkin County Scenic Overlay Review Standards.

**LIGHT POLLUTION**

To preserve the sanctity of the night sky, the Caucus

- Supports the County Land Use Code prohibiting exterior upward facing spot or flood lights, limiting light trespass, including roadside gate lighting.
- May request a lighting plan for review.
- Encourages the County to consider future amendments to the County’s lighting regulations to further minimize the impacts of outdoor lighting as new information and technology is made available.
- Discourages holiday outdoor lighting, except between November 15 and January 30.

**COMMERCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Existing retail commercial development in the vicinity of the Snowmass Conoco and Post Office is sufficient to meet the needs of local residents. The Caucus is concerned about the traffic, parking, roadside trash and similar impacts associated with commercial and institutional development and how these impact our rural character and natural environment. Any proposal for new commercial or institutional business, excluding home occupations, should be submitted to the Caucus board for review prior to application for County land use review.

To preserve the rural character of our valleys, zoning within the Caucus area should be revised by the County as necessary to ensure that the following uses are allowed by special review, or prohibited respectively, as specified below:

**SPECIAL REVIEW**

- Commercial Nordic Skiing
- Small Lodge or B & B or Guest Ranch
- Commercial Equestrian Activities
- Arts and Crafts
- Camps & Schools
- Commercial Marijuana Cultivation

- [Polo Fields](#)
- [Wind Turbines](#)

**PROHIBITED**

- Commercial Snowmobiling
- Commercial Motorcycling & ATVs
- Golf Courses
- Private Clubs
- Marijuana Retail Outlets & Processing Facilities

The Caucus discourages gated communities.

The Caucus supports the concept of local food production and would like to work with the County on the definition and standards for sustainable local food systems.

In addition to these uses, both commercial and institutional uses that exist when this plan is approved should be considered grandfathered uses, provided they continue to be

operated in a manner consistent with the performance standards and the goals and objectives of this plan and the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

The Caucus opposes any mining, mineral exploration, oil and gas drilling and exploration, sand and gravel pits, rock crushers, concrete batch plants, and any other heavy extractive operations.

## **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

In keeping with our vision statement, the natural environment is our highest priority.

The Caucus encourages the preservation in perpetuity of agricultural lands, of open space and wildlife habitat through private or public land conservation. Recognizing that each property owner's circumstances are unique the Caucus notes several alternatives for preserving land: Conservation easements through Aspen Valley Land Trust, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails and other conservation organizations; TDR sterilization; and deed restrictions and title transfers.

The Snowmass and Capitol Creek valleys are intact ecosystems providing critical habitat to hundreds of species of both flora and fauna. The valleys serve as migratory routes for elk, foraging ground for bear, nesting areas for grouse, redds for trout, and dens for badgers. The plant communities range from mountain shrub land at the lower elevations to subalpine and alpine plant communities higher up the valleys. Along with the obvious and iconic species, there are dozens of less known species that nevertheless play a crucial role in the biotic web.

An important role for the Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus is to study, understand, monitor, and support the rich flora and fauna. Studies have shown that certain species in the Snowmass and Capitol Creek valleys are imperiled. As human residents, we endeavor to protect the valley and its habitat for those who don't have a voice --- the wildlife and plant communities. This desire to keep the biology and ecology healthy informs our entire master plan and our decisions of where to build, and what to leave alone.

- We support the County's existing policies and programs related to weed management, and encourage more aggressive enforcement of noxious weed control.
- In the interest of protecting the natural quiet environment, we discourage fireworks, drone aircraft, night beacon lights and loud, amplified music. The Caucus is opposed to the development of new landing strips and vertical takeoff and landing areas in the Caucus area. Special events are subject to the noise limits of the County code. Special event permit applications should always be referred to the Caucus, as applicable under County Code.
- We recommend that where practical, all utility extensions associated with new development or redevelopment within the Caucus area be put underground.
- We recommend preservation of historic structures within the Caucus area.
- All signs, including security, political and real estate signs, should be of minimal size and located on private property. The Caucus discourages display of any political signage longer than 45 days before an election or 7 days after an election. Special

event notices should be of minimum size and allowed on public rights of way for no more than 10 days, unless longer as allowed under County Code.

## **WILDLIFE**

It is of great importance to the residents of the Caucus area to preserve and protect wildlife habitat in the Snowmass and Capitol Creek valleys for both indigenous and migratory species.

Pitkin County and the Caucus land use committee perform site visits of development proposals and will continue to require certain plant species, cover and corridors for the protection, reproduction, movement and migration of all native species, including restoration and/or enhancement concurrent with development activities.

The Caucus firmly encourages all pet owners to have their pets under control at all times by some means to protect wildlife and livestock. Colorado Parks & Wildlife retains the authority to kill domestic animals harassing wildlife.

## **WILDFIRE**

The Caucus cooperates with the County Sheriff's office, the Basalt Rural Fire Protection District and the Snowmass Wildcat Fire Protection District and other appropriate government agencies to establish and administer wildfire policies and programs to minimize the danger and destruction associated with wildfires within the Caucus Area.

- To the extent feasible, driveways for new homes should be designed to allow passing areas for fire truck access, though the wider dimension should not necessarily be used for most of the driveway.
- Individuals should become very familiar with their local HOA emergency plans and County rules with regard to evacuation planning for people and livestock.
- The Caucus will collaborate with Homeowners Associations, the County and other appropriate agencies to develop a coordinated Evacuation Plan for all areas of the Caucus, including properties within a Homeowners Association and those that are not. The Plan should incorporate an emphasis on self-reliance in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.
- Landowners should actively maintain the vegetation on their property to the wildfire-mitigation standards of the Pitkin County Land Use Code and local fire protection agencies.
- Refer to [pitkinwildfire.com](http://pitkinwildfire.com) to obtain information on wildfire evacuation and mitigation.

## **FLOOD**

Where local rivers and streams abut or flow through private property, landowners and HOA's should develop plans to address flood hazard and response to flood events. (See Water Use section below for guidance on siting and development near water resources.)

## **ROADS AND TRANSPORTATION**

County roads in the Caucus area should be maintained as rural roads. Safety improvements should be made as necessary. Our roads serve local residents, guests, and emergency vehicles as well as public bicycle and running events. Safety for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians on our roads is a paramount concern for the Caucus.

- The County is responsible for regular maintenance of the roads to eliminate washboards and other safety hazards, but our roads should not be further widened or straightened.
- We support the current mass transit system in the Roaring Fork Valley and the Park-n-Ride facility at the intersection of Snowmass Creek Road and Highway 82. We support innovations that expedite mobility in the valley when they are consistent with the environmental standards of this plan.
- We encourage all institutional uses and special events within the Caucus area to use shuttle services.
- The speed limits on Snowmass and Capitol Creek Roads are between 25 and 35 mph. The Caucus strongly encourages property owners, guests, and service workers to obey posted speed limits. Our roads are narrow and windy; cyclists, pedestrians, livestock, and wildlife are often present.
- The Caucus believes that timely snow plowing on all county roads where there are residents is a necessary priority.
- The Caucus encourages the County to explore additional methods to indicate to drivers on our roads that caution is advised.
- The Caucus strongly urges the County to consider alternatives to the use of Magnesium Chloride/MgCl<sub>2</sub> on our roads.
- The Caucus would like to work with the County on proposed/future senior and disabled transportation options.

## **RECREATION AND TOURISM**

The Caucus believes in preserving existing recreational opportunities within our area.

- Due to the absence of wide shoulders and usable space to expand local roads, the Caucus does not support the expansion of our roads to accommodate bike paths. We do support working with Open Space and Trails in an attempt to find possibilities for bike paths away from the roads.
- We support the protection and management of adjacent land to preserve the current wilderness areas and we embrace the designation of future wilderness areas.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- The County should ensure the highest quality high-speed internet services (advanced services), telecommunication services, and/or cable television services

and reception in the Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus area, while minimizing scenic and other impacts associated with these facilities. The Caucus would like to work with the County on this.

## **WASTE MANAGEMENT**

The Caucus understands that at current use levels, the Pitkin County landfill will have to close about the year 2030, which will have many consequences to our level of service as well as increased expense. We support existing programs that divert materials from our waste stream to extend the landfill's life. The Caucus also encourages our residents to participate in the new residential waste management plans that include food composting. Visit [landfillrules.com](http://landfillrules.com) for the latest information.

## **WATER USE**

Our high elevation valley is an arid environment. The Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus strongly encourages homeowners and landowners to protect our fragile rivers and streams. In siting, designing and constructing a home, landowners are advised that the Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus:

- Supports federal, state and county restrictions that protect streams and riparian areas through setbacks, buffers and erosion control.
- Encourages landowners to minimize development and avoid destruction of native vegetation adjacent to streams and wetlands and riparian areas to preserve native habitat and vegetation for wildlife.
- Encourages homeowners to install state-of-the-art low-flow plumbing fixtures in the home, including low-flow toilets with full and ½ flush options.

Landscape irrigation is the largest component of water demand in a home. The Caucus encourages water conservation in home irrigation through:

- The choice of efficient irrigation systems (e.g. soaker hoses, micro sprinklers).
- Active irrigation scheduling to limit operation of large landscape irrigation systems to early morning or evening in order to reduce evaporation.
- Use of rain sensors where automatic sprinkler systems exist that will override the programmed watering schedule and shut off the system during or after significant rainfall.
- Avoiding sprinkler use during windy times.
- Use of low-water landscaping featuring native plants instead of sod to minimize the need for supplemental watering.
- Minimizing lawn size, and use of Pitkin County Native Grass mix.

Homeowners should consult with their HOA for further guidance on home and garden water conservation.

The Caucus recommends that the County provide incentives for the re-use of gray water for domestic irrigation and establish effective and workable regulations governing gray water re-use.

To prevent damage to riparian habitat and to prevent siltation of streams, livestock access to streams and riparian areas should be prevented. The Caucus encourages landowners to:

- Provide tanks for livestock watering as an alternative to local streams and ditches.
- Fence livestock off waterways to avoid erosion and degradation of water quality.

## **WATER RESOURCES**

The Caucus encourages water users to practice wise use of our water resources – both the surface waters of Snowmass and Capitol Creeks, and ground water. The Caucus offers information on local water resource issues in our publications: *The Future of Instream Flows in Snowmass Creek* (AMEC 2012) and the booklet *Water User's Guide for Protecting Flows in Snowmass Creek* (2015). The *Water User's Guide*, available on our website, describes voluntary programs to conserve water and protect instream flows offered by the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the non-profit Colorado Water Trust.

The Caucus recommends that residents consult a water attorney or the State of Colorado Division of Water Resources to learn about water rights. Water rights are important and valuable property interests and they are transferable. In brief, water users can secure a water right to divert and use a specified amount of water for a claimed beneficial use at a specific location so long as there is surface or tributary groundwater available in the system that is not needed by senior (i.e. earlier) water rights. Landowners do not have the automatic right to use the water from any rivers or streams next to their property. If water rights are being conveyed with your property, review these rights with a water attorney. Similarly, the presence of a stream or ditch conveying water through a property does not convey any right to use the water to the property owner.

The Caucus reminds residents that ground water supplies and surface water supplies are limited and precious.

- The Caucus supports a county-wide water conservation plan to protect the Caucus area from unreasonable depletions of groundwater.
- The Caucus encourages the County to protect the quality and quantity of ground aquifers generally, and through the development of Source Water Protection Plans with assistance from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, implement applicable best management strategies
- The Caucus strongly discourages the transfer of water rights out of the Snowmass and Capitol Creek Basins (e.g., to the Brush Creek basin) and encourages the preservation of water rights and resources in our local creek basins.
- The Caucus encourages the efficient use of best management practices in agricultural and domestic irrigation to protect healthy flows in our creeks.

- The Caucus strongly recommends that landowners research Pitkin County requirements for fire mitigation, including provisions for water tanks or ponds to protect against wildfire emergencies. Residents who elect to install ponds will have to obtain a water right from the State of Colorado for the pond. The exceptions to this requirement occur when the pond is expressly used for operational storage for irrigation and therefore only full for up to 72 hours at a time, or if the water user is willing to empty the pond when senior water rights “call” for their water rights. Otherwise, a water right is required to confirm the priority, right and use of the pond. Even with a water right, pond owners may be required to obtain an augmentation plan.

The Caucus is similarly committed to protecting water quality in our streams.

- The Caucus strongly encourages irrigators to minimize the use of pesticides and fertilizers, which if used improperly, can be transported to local waterways.
- The Caucus urges livestock owners to use fencing and other best management practices to minimize land disturbance near streams, wetlands and other riparian areas.
- The Caucus requests that landowners who stable and graze livestock to use fencing to ensure barnyard waste does not seep into the Creek.
- The Caucus urges horse outfitters and private horse owners staging in the Hay Park Trail parking lot to clean up their animals’ waste and litter to avoid waste finding its way into the Creek.

## **ENERGY AND CLIMATE STEWARDSHIP**

The local governments in Pitkin County continue to demonstrate commitment to energy and climate stewardship through improvements to building codes, incentive programs, demonstration projects and the like. The Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus encourages homeowners and builders to look for every opportunity to demonstrate conservation. The following are offered as guidelines.

- Advanced energy efficient building designs, passive solar designs, and energy conservation retrofits are the first priorities for reducing the use of purchased energy, cutting energy costs and pollution, and minimizing the size and cost of solar systems.
- The Caucus encourages home designs that demonstrate use of solar, ground source heat pumps and other renewable energy resources that minimize fossil fuel energy consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Special attention should be paid to minimizing energy use for second homes while unoccupied.
- The glare produced by light reflecting from solar panels should not create unreasonable impacts of intensity and duration for the applicant’s neighbors. If glare creates unreasonable off-site impacts, then vegetative screening, panel repositioning, or other effective means of mitigating glare may be required.

- View-plane obstructions and issues related to height, width, and bulk should be minimized when installing solar panels, in consideration of neighbors.
- Off-site renewable electricity options are available from Holy Cross Energy and Clean Energy Collective. Holy Cross and Community Office for Resource Efficiency have energy efficiency programs, rebates, and financing.

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