

Minturn trying to keep locals in town

With housing prices rising, town aims for 20% of homes being deed-restricted by 2030

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Minturn has adopted a housing plan that aims to achieve 20% of the town's housing stock as deed-restricted units by 2030.

Daily file photo

MINTURN — Just 20% of homes in Vail are occupied by people who actually live there year-round.

In Avon, that number is 64%.

Minturn, by comparison, has 80% of homes occupied by full-time residents.

Town leaders say that's one of the biggest reasons that Minturn maintains its genuine community feel and small-town character. And they want to make sure it retains those qualities.

Or, as their official strategies put it, “keep Minturn Minturn.”

But the rising cost of housing, as well as a creeping infusion of second-home owners, perhaps threaten Minturn's sense of community, working-class roots and authentic character.

“Minturn has been discovered, and an increasing number of second-home owners have begun to shift the historic social and economic diversity,” according to the town's recently adopted Housing Action Plan. “There is now a severe shortage of housing for local residents to rent or purchase.”

Facing the specter of a transformed town, Minturn leaders have approved a plan with the goal of creating more housing choices for year-round residents.

“We want to make sure this stays a primary homeownership town,” said Minturn Mayor John Widerman at the Aug. 23 Town Council meeting. “This is what I've heard time and time again. This is really one of those guiding documents that's going to solidify that for us.”

Last year, the median sale price in Minturn was \$775,000. An affordable home price for a two-person household making the Eagle County median income is \$294,900.

Just one of the 20 homes sold last year in Minturn was considered affordable. It was a 672-square-foot two-bedroom, one-bathroom unit, built in 1971, that sold for \$280,000.

According to the study, as of May 2019, there were five long-term rentals available in Minturn; 14 homes and condos were available as short-term rentals.

Concrete goals

The plan sets a course for the town's housing efforts for the next three to five years. Its main goals include:

- Achieving 20% of the town's housing stock as deed-restricted affordable housing by 2030.
- Creating and preserving homes that are attainable for households making 80% to 140% of area median income. For a two-person household, that would be between \$60,160 and \$105,280.
- Ensuring that at least 25% of new homes are affordable for households making 140% of area median income, which would be \$105,280 for a two-person household.
- Increasing affordable housing opportunities in existing neighborhoods. That would include duplexes, townhouses and accessory dwelling units.

"One of things that defines this town is that so many of us care and enjoy seeing our neighbors and interacting with one other," said Council Member Brian Eggleton. "We have a really great ratio right now of full-time residents in this town. I hope that we can use this Housing Action Plan as a policy-guiding document to allow us ... to retain that. If the goals are a little aggressive, that's probably a good place to start."

Minturn now has about 520 housing units. That means, at its current size, it would need about 104 deed-restricted units to meet the 20% goal.

About 300 to 400 new homes will potentially be built in the town over the next 10 years. That means, under the plan's goal, about 164-184 new deed-restricted units would have to be created.

In Vail, the town in 2016 adopted a plan that aims to add 1,000 more deed restrictions by 2027. That would create homes for 3,736 Vail residents.

The tools to get there

The highest-priority tools identified in Minturn's housing action plan are incentivizing accessory dwellings and adding inclusionary zoning regulations.

Inclusionary housing requires new developments to include deed-restricted homes, usually as a percentage of total units or a percentage of total residential square footage.

Vail, Eagle, Eagle County and Avon have inclusionary zoning rules on the books, with Avon just adopting the regulations this spring.

Accessory dwelling units can be an apartment over a garage, a tiny house in a backyard, or an apartment in a basement of a home. They are often studios or one-bedroom units.

There are ways to encourage these units to be built. For instance, Crested Butte incentivizes accessory dwelling units by giving owners reduced tap fees and more allowable density.

The study also identified various tools as secondary methods to reach its housing goals. They include:

- Public land-private developer partnership. This means identifying town-owned land that is unused or underused, and partnering with a developer to create housing.
- Density bonuses. Additional density would be provided in exchange for workforce housing.
- Homebuyer assistance. This could include down-payment assistance.
- Annexation. The town could negotiate deed-restricted housing as part of annexation agreements.
- Housing rehabilitation and weatherization. This means improving the quality of existing homes, making them safer and more energy-efficient.
- Commercial linkage. Linkage programs require developers to contribute to affordable housing in proportion to the new employment created.

The plan was approved with a 6-0 vote at the Aug. 23 Town Council meeting.