It’s not every day that one has the opportunity and privilege to be part of the creation of a new town, let alone to help midwife a place that, in the span of a few decades, would be recognized around the globe as one of the world’s premier ski areas and mountain communities.

What started as a dream in the eyes of Pete Seibert and Earl Eaton to build an internationally acclaimed ski resort soon compelled the need to create a next generation municipal government capable of providing basic — and ever expanding and demanding — community services such as police, fire, public works, art and symposia, parks and open space, transportation, libraries and environmental protections to a growing array of local residents and international guests and visitors alike.

To mark and celebrate Vail’s first 50 years, the town staff has called upon community historians to help capture an accurate and compelling narrative of the origins, dreams and decadal evolution of the Town of Vail, a town that shaped not only snow moguls but served as the formative life-shaping experience of many, if not all, who — citizen or visitor — have had the sublime experience at being at elevation in body and spirit.

Terry Minger
Vail Town Manager
1970–1979

As this retrospective of the last 50 years makes evident, leadership in Vail hasn’t always been easy. Being bold and taking risks is no sure path to popularity. But an inspection of the community’s defining moments reveals a pattern. Actions that can now be seen as visionary, ahead of their time, required commitment and resolve on the part of elected leaders, the municipal staff and the citizens.

New challenges will present themselves during the next 50 years, and new leaders will emerge. Their successes and visions will be built on the remarkable history that is celebrated in the pages that follow.

Stan Zemler
Vail Town Manager
2003–current

CONTRIBUTORS
1960s

Vital Necessities

’62 Building a ski town from scratch demanded more than lifts and trails. Indoor running water, wastewater treatment, fire trucks and fuel were also needed. To get this done, Vail’s creators started a propane company and organized special tax districts for critical services. The first was Vail Water and Sanitation District, which was set up in 1962, just a few months before the ski area opened.

Later, as the community expanded, five additional water districts were formed. Creation of the Vail Fire Protection District in 1963 enabled purchases of equipment for use by volunteer firefighters and construction of a two-bay firehouse. Eventually, more fire districts were formed, followed by a wave of consolidation in water and fire services in the 1970s and ’80s. Holy Cross, the electric co-op, was also pivotal in the start-up, taking on the responsibility in water and fire services in the 1970s and ’80s.

In securing the permit to construct lifts and trails on federal land, Pete Seibert and his partners were required to raise more than $1 million to demonstrate the project’s viability. Stock shares of $10,000 each were offered to 100 limited partners. This included four life-time ski passes. There was also an option to buy a lot for $100 if the building was constructed within two years. Above, homes on Willow Place are among the new residences.

Schooling Before Skiing

’62 Vail Country Day School, now known as the Vail Mountain School, was opened even before the ski lifts began running. The first class, held Oct. 15, 1962, consisted of a handful of students gathered around the Seibert dining table. Following its second year, the school’s trustees were already exploring expansion options, noting, “A school is the most important factor to future investors, businesses, employees and customers.” VMS has since blossomed into a K-12 college preparatory school with a campus that serves nearly 350 students from Eagle and Summit counties.

A second school for Vail was constructed after townspeople convinced the Eagle County School Board to float a bond issue. Red Sandstone Elementary opened in 1977 and was built on land provided by the town. The importance of Red Sandstone as a community anchor has been put to the test in recent years as the school district has contemplated closure of the school to reduce costs.

Books Came Early, And a Library Later

’64 Not long after the ski area opened, Vail had a library. It was by no means conventional. After interest was shown by Betty Seibert, wife of Pete, the Colorado State Library loaned 600 books, which were kept for public use at Vail’s Books ‘n Things, a shop in the Plaza Building on Bridge Street owned by Fran Moretti. When expansion of the shop’s merchandise required removal of the books, space was found first above the new firehouse and then, in 1972, in the new municipal building, with help from Friends of Vail Public Library. In 1982, voters approved a $3 million bond issue for construction of an earthen-topped library designed by Pam Hopkins, which opened July 4, 1983. Newly remodeled, the library hosted a grand reopening celebration in 2013.

Vail Mountain Opening Day
December 15, 1962

Tending to Vail’s Medical Needs

1965 Vail’s medical services have long been traced to John D. Murchison, one of the ski company’s original investors, who had a skiing accident in 1964. Because there was no place to receive medical care in Vail, apart from what he received from the ski patrol and a primitive clinic in the Red Lion building, he was taken to Aspen to be treated by long-time friend, Dr. Robert Oden, who agreed to help with Vail’s emerging medical needs.

At the start of the 1965 ski season, the two men created the Vail Clinic Inc., housing it in the Mill Creek Court Building and hiring Dr. Tom Steinberg as the community’s first full-time physician. The clinic moved to a newly-constructed building on West Meadow Drive in 1967. The next step was to build a hospital. Murchison, as president of the board, set up a foundation to raise $770,000 for construction. In 1966, the first hospital was built near Golden Peak.

1966 The next logical scenario was to draw visitors to Vail for the winter and provide medical care for them. In 1965, a wing to the medical clinic was completed, and gradually the clinic expanded to accommodate obstetrics, general surgery and orthopaedics. In its first year as a full-service hospital in 1980, the Vail Valley Medical Center had 350 full-time physicians on staff. There were 65 surgical operations performed and 25 babies born that year, too.

Taking a Swing at Summer Diversity

1966 The idea for a year-round resort emerged rapidly among Vail’s brain trust. With a growing number of lodges, shops and restaurants already in place, the next logical scenario was to draw visitors during the summer to defray the costs of operation and fulfill a loan requirement by the Small Business Administration. Vail’s summer convention business got its start in 1965 when it hosted the 10th Mountain Division Reunion.

In 1966, the Vail Metropolitan Recreation District was formed with Dick Hauserman and Fritz Benedict, a seasoned architect from Aspen, to design their new ski village with a European influence. Included was Scott’s insistence that Bridge Street be curved to create curiosity about what lies ahead. Their work has become a textbook example of master planning. As members of the architectural committee, the trio carefully guided the design themes used to create Vail’s first commercial buildings and residences. As each piece of ground was sold and platted, covenants were placed on the property to establish uses. These designations included mixed commercial and residential town centers, apartment/condominium areas and single family/duplex residences as well as open space and recreation areas. The covenants also addressed the suitability and quality of building materials and the impact on neighboring properties, making certain that no improvement will be “so similar or dissimilar to others in the vicinity that values, monetary or aesthetic, will be impaired.”

The covenants became a masterful planning doctrine for Vail and were used as the basis for the town’s first zoning ordinances in 1969.
1960s

Vail Becomes a Town

In the beginning, Pete Seibert and his investment partners were too focused on the monumental task of developing a ski resort and its ancillary components to give much thought to creating a town. They weren’t even sure one was needed. As ski operations tasted success, Seibert, then general manager of Vail Associates, came to a different conclusion. Could others pay for snowplowing, maintaining the parking lots, policing and the many other services needed in a resort? It was time to incorporate, but how?

Seibert and his team learned that the new community had too few property owners to qualify as a town. To reach the minimum, Vail Associates devised a solution by selling two steep lots above the sewer plant on West Forest Road to 20 couples, including Dick and Doris Bailey. Dick, an architect, had been hired by Fitzhugh Scott, while Doris worked for the Vail Resort Association.

With enough qualified voters now confirmed, the election to incorporate as the Town of Vail was held on Aug. 23, 1966. Approval was granted, 43-19. The two lots were sold back to Vail Associates, as had been the original agreement. The Baileys and the other partners enjoyed a tidy profit while also helping birth a new town.

Getting Down to Business

After incorporation, the first election held on Nov. 8, 1966, seated the town’s first mayor, Ted Kindel, and six town trustees: Pete Seibert, Mitch Hoyt, John Dobson, Harry Willett, Larry Burbick and Joe Langmaid. Hoyt later resigned and John Donovan was appointed in his place.

The first meeting over which Mayor Kindel presided was used to establish an organizational structure. The agenda included appointment of Blake Lynch as interim town recorder, adoption of Robert’s Rules of Order, establishing the day and time for regular meetings, plus ordinances to create the positions of town recorder, town treasurer, town attorney, police magistrate, town coordinator and town marshal.

A 5-member Planning Commission and the Local Licensing Authority (liquor board) were also created. Taxes, too, were established at that first meeting, including a 2 percent ski lift tax and a 2 percent sales tax on lodging, restaurants and bars, retail sales of personal property and retail liquor stores, plus an agreement to accept applications for utility franchises. The town’s first budget was also adopted, including $104,415 for operating expenditures and $24,710 for capital projects.

Influencing the Route of I-70

Vail has always attracted people with environmental sympathies. They love mountains and the natural environment. Those sympathies became evident in a dispute about the route for Interstate 70. State highway engineers wanted to build the highway directly from Silverthorne to Vail, a savings of 10 miles as compared to the route over Vail Pass. The road was to follow Gore Creek to a tunnel under what became known as Red Buffalo Pass, but marooning a chunk of the Gore Range-Eagles Nest Primitive Area and sullying the adjacent natural lands. Some within Vail favored the shorter route to expedite business.

Opposition was headed by several 10th Mountain veterans, including Bob Parker, the vice president of marketing for Vail Associates, and environmentalists William Bird Mousey and Merrill Hastings. They maintained that shorter would be more expensive, because of tunneling costs and the safety problems posed by rockslides and 25 avalanche paths alone between Vail and the spine of the Gore Range, and also argued for the need to protect remaining wilderness.

In 1968, Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, in whose department the U.S. Forest Service was administered, denied a permit due to intrusion into the primitive area. In 1976, with the support of part-time resident President Gerald Ford, the tract was designated by Congress as the Eagles Nest Wilderness. The I-70 route over Vail Pass was completed in 1978.
A Sanctuary for Many Faiths

Religious services were initially held in a variety of unlikely locations, including the Casino nightclub, where some of the attendees happened to be holdovers from the night before. After identifying the need for a more sophisticated place of worship, the Vail Religious Foundation was formed in 1963 to study establishment of a permanent chapel.

Following a two-year, $100,000 fund drive headed by Rod Slifer, the real estate broker, and Mayor John Dobson and his wife, Cissy, groundbreaking for the Vail Chapel occurred in September 1968 on a beautiful site along Gore Creek donated by Vail Associates. It was dedicated in November 1969, well before the town settled on larger buses. The town soon joined as a partner in Vail's free bus system, which had just opened. The purpose was to make it easy to move between the two gondolas and the two village centers.

While the bright orange Ginkelvan wasn’t pursued as a permanent solution in Vail, primarily due to its small size, its design features were revolutionary with a floor height just 13 inches from the ground, not unlike the low-floor buses used today to transport passengers between Golden Peak and Lionshead. Mayor Lindsay, meanwhile, became a frequent visitor of Vail, serving as the keynote speaker for the first Vail Symposium.

Vail Transit Born

In November 1969, well before Vail’s transit system became one of the largest free systems in the country, Vail Associates introduced a pair of repurposed school buses to transport skiers for free between Golden Peak and Lionshead, which had just opened. The purpose was to make it easy to move between the two gondolas and the two village centers.

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The Vail Symposium

In the 1970s, the community showed a new side to its personality beginning in 1971 with the first Vail Symposium. The inspiration of Mayor John Dobson and Town Manager Terry Minger, the intellectually stimulating discussions quickly became a celebrated gathering that drew up to 1,500 people. Many of the early symposia participants described and celebrated mountain communities as the last best hope to escape from the urban center and reconnect with the natural world.

In the 1973 symposium, French microbiologist, experimental pathologist and humanist René Dubos coined a phrase still heard frequently today – “think globally, act locally.” Another memorable year was 1975, when President Gerald Ford attended, along with New York Mayor John Lindsay, Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm and Stewart Udall, the former Secretary of the Interior. Today, the symposium continues to stimulate community enrichment through its multi-faceted programs.

Defining How a Community Will Grow

By the late 1960s and early ’70s, Vail was growing at an alarming rate. New construction was increasing by as much as 25 percent annually. Community leaders decided their new town had reached a crisis. The solution, they decided, was to create an aggressive course of action to remedy the problems caused by rapid growth.

In 1973, a six-page planning document was adopted that identified a forward-thinking master plan vision that continues to define the community today. Known simply as “The Vail Plan,” its components include an emphasis on pedestrian connections and many of the other qualities for which Vail is known. Implementation included:

- Significant down-zoning and reductions in building height.
- Rigorous design standards and procedures to ensure architectural and landscape compatibility within Vail.
- Creation of a transportation hub to provide centralized parking, transit and visitor information services.
- Strict time management restrictions for loading and delivery activities in Vail Village, especially during peak pedestrian times.
- Extensive network of bicycling and walking trails throughout town.
- Emphasis on open space acquisition and landscape beautification to reduce impacts of sprawl.
- Development of a major community park-cultural center at Ford Park.

The Vail Plan was accomplished by a first-of-its kind public participation process that engaged the entire community, including the Town Council, in authoring the plan’s goals. It is profound in its scope and timeless.
Voters Boldly Agree to Parks, Parking

Vail’s first bond issues were put before voters in 1973 with two bold undertakings that have helped define the community. A bond totaling $5.5 million for construction of a 1,000-space underground parking garage in Vail Village was handily approved, 207-31, as the community took a daring step toward a carless village. During the same election, a $3 million bond to acquire 39 acres of land was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 229-8, beginning Vail’s pursuit of open space.

By a similar margin, voters that day increased the town sales tax from 3 percent to 4 percent, earmarking half the revenues to pay for the two projects. The town’s acquisition of the Antholz Ranch preempted construction of some 200 condominiums on the property. Following the election, the town condemned the land, which later became Ford Park.

The Price to Pay for Covered Parking

Parking was a problem in Vail from the beginning. Vehicles chaotically parked most anywhere and everywhere. Soon, the charming alpine village intended for pedestrians was being overrun by cars and delivery trucks.

Town leaders determined that the first step toward a permanent parking solution would be to build the Vail Village parking garage on land acquired from Vail Associates. They had the $5.5 million in bonds, but also expected to defray operating costs with proceeds from year-round parking fees.

However, when the parking garage opened in December 1974, the Town Council was already hearing complaints that the published rates were too high.

Following the first winter season of paid parking, the town adjusted its business model and parking became free during the summers thereafter. The town’s initial parking goal was completed in 1981 with the opening of the Lionshead parking garage following approval of a second construction bond totaling $7 million.

Today, the parking issue continues to create lively debate in the Town Council chambers with opinions divided on the appropriate mix of free and paid public parking.

1974-75 PARKING CENTER RATES

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<th>Time</th>
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Expires November 1975

Source: Vail Trail, Sept. 30, 1974

© 1974 Vail Trail. Used with permission.
Vail's First 50
1962-2012

1980s

But is it Art?
Claes Oldenburg’s Fishing Pole

In planning for a sculpture for Lionshead, Vail officials cast far to secure the work of Claes Oldenburg, who had been making a name for himself from New York City to Los Angeles with his enigmatic sculptures of often ordinary objects and actions. Sizing up the setting in Vail, he returned with a model of a giant fishing pole, to rise 62 feet above Gore Creek, the pole and the line arcing 160 feet and yielding an orange 55-gallon “tin can.”

Some Vail residents were offended. One called it “sacred” to the stream. “If we need an orange fishing pole to be noticed, that’s sad,” said a council member. Mayor Rod Slifer favored the sculpture, predicting it would “shower prestige” on Vail. He philosophically noted that the sculpture had already served a purpose in getting people interested in public art. Everyone had become an expert, it seemed. A playful interpretation of Oldenburg’s fishing pole even appeared at Dowd Junction.

In the end, the town politely passed on Oldenburg’s sculpture, and he took his $10,000 commission and left. Today, a model of Oldenburg’s proposed installation is displayed in the Vail Public Library. Donated to the town by the Rosenquist family, it is signed by the artist and inscribed “for Vail.” Ironically, this model has become one of the more valuable works of art in the town’s collection.

Pursuit of a Year-Round Economy

Some things never change. One of the early citizen advisory committees convened by Vail’s first mayor was to consider “a pressing problem facing Vail” — the need for a convention-type facility. A study to build one in Ford Park was met with resistance by those who had other ideas.

By the 1980s, interest in a conference center surfaced again. As before, there were many beds for rent, but not many customers for long stretches of the year. In 1987, a proposal for a convention center called Congress Hall was submitted to voters. Sponsors of the proposal said the conference center would even out Vail’s economy. Voters weren’t sold. The measure was defeated.

About the same time, a proposal went forward to build a $5.5 million aquatic center in Ford Park. Proponents said it would be a year-round attraction, compatible with ski vacations but available at other times of the year.

During the ‘80s we saw a shift from economic dependence on neighboring states to a broader reach for guests from the East and West coasts, plus internationally. In partnership with Vail Resorts, we began pursuing the 1989 World Ski Championships and improving our services for guests and locals. We also completed the public library and expanded the free bus system. The ski company and the town had common goals to make Vail better!

But the desire to level the economy remained. In 1993, a second attempt to build a conference center also failed. Then in 2002, taxes to support construction of a conference center were approved, but voters said no to additional taxes for operations. Will the idea reemerge? Time will tell.

Rod Slifer
Mayor
1977-1985
2003-2007

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Rod Slifer
Mayor
1977-1985
2003-2007
Wilderness and Water Battles

'88 The 1980s brought additional environmental attention to the Vail area. After the end of mining almost a decade before, the final residents of Gilman, the company town located about six miles from Vail, were evicted in 1985. By then, state officials had begun negotiating cleanup of mine tailings, which were polluting the Eagle River.

Dependent upon recreation, including fishing in local waters, Vail had a direct stake in the outcome, even if its Gore Creek, which had been named a Gold Medal trout fishery by the Colorado Wildlife Commission, was unaffected.

At great length, river clean up began and continues to be monitored today.

Vail also had an interest in protecting local waters from diversion. Front Range cities – Denver, Aurora and Colorado Springs – owned extensive water rights in and around Vail, including the Eagles Nest and Holy Cross Wilderness areas.

The Congressional law creating Holy Cross Wilderness in 1980 specified that the designation did not preclude the ability of Colorado Springs and Aurora to divert water from inside the wilderness.

The two cities set out to do just that, expanding their existing Homestake water supply, by a complex set of tunnels and canals. Many Vail residents joined an opposition group, the Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund, and the local water district also became an active adversary.

In 1988 Eagle County commissioners denied the necessary permits on environmental grounds. Court challenges and procedural issues delayed the outcome, but local interests in the Homestake II case prevailed. No additional water left Eagle County.

Nearly two decades later, water flowing in local streams was further secured through the cooperative effort of local and Front Range water providers.
1990s

Kicking the Habit, Cleaning the Air

'91 For years, a crackling fire at the end of the day had been part of the mystique of a ski vacation in Vail—until the Environmental Protection Agency came calling. Vail, the community that cherished the natural environment, was a polluter in the eyes of the federal government. The popularity of wood-burning fireplaces had caused the air particulate levels to exceed acceptable standards. On busy weekends, smoke sometimes created a lid above the valley floor.

In 1980 during the Presidents Day weekend, the town initiated a “smokeless weekend” campaign to bring attention to the problem of smoke from open-hearth fireplaces. The campaign became an annual event for more than a decade while the town worked to address the valley’s poor air quality.

A pivotal turning point occurred in August 1991, when the Town Council voted 7-0 to ban installation of wood-burning fireplaces while allowing new cleaner-burning wood stoves or natural gas fireplaces that aesthetically mimicked the old-fashioned fireplaces. Conversions of existing fireplaces were given incentives. The combination of carrots and sticks worked. Within a few years, Vail’s brown cloud had disappeared and the air quality met federal standards. To this day, the town waives permit fees on wood fireplace conversions.

Growth Pact Precedes New Ski Terrain

'95 Today’s Blue Sky Basin represents so much more than its 645 acres of gladed skiing. Once known as Category III, the mountain’s newest terrain is the crowning achievement embedded in an historic managed growth agreement between the Town of Vail and Vail Associates.

Approved unanimously by the Town Council in April 1995, the agreement identifies a series of actions used to balance peak and non-peak periods. Included is the ability to increase the mountain’s early season carrying capacity via Blue Sky Basin as well as a “manage to” number of skiers on Vail Mountain at one time of 19,900. The town’s carrying capacity was also increased with construction of the Main Vail roundabouts, which were partially funded by Vail Associates. The review of Category III was exhaustive, and the expansion vigorously opposed by some within Vail. Arson fires on Vail Mountain in October 1998, later determined to be the work of out-of-state animal-rights cells, were the largest act of eco-terrorism in U.S. history — and brought a fractured community together, united in its resolve to overcome adversity.

 Inspired by the past, our goal was to ensure the ongoing success of Vail: regional transportation, continued commitment to open space, Blue Sky Basin, roundabouts and affordable housing for sale to locals. Partnerships and unwaivering determination turned into rewarding, sustainable outcomes.

Peggy Osterfoss
Mayor
1991-1995

Today, roundabouts are an accepted engineering solution in the U.S., which now has more than 3,000.
Vail Commons: A Turning Point

‘95 From the outset, finding a job in Vail was easy. The challenge was finding a place to live. Over time, couch surfing and car camping became a rite of passage for many young workers. The municipal government had long understood the dilemma and in 1978 asked voters to consider creation of a real estate transfer tax to be used for employee housing as well as open space and recreational or park purposes. The measure failed. The conclusion: leave housing to the private sector.

By 1995, with studies showing an alarming gap between an employee’s income and the cost of housing, Mayor Peggy Osterfoss and the Town Council courageously stood before the community and expanded the role of government. The town government, they insisted, must deliver employee housing, a crucial component of the local economy. The 6.6-acre Vail Commons property, acquired by the town in 1993, became the battleground for the new housing policy. Plans for a mixed use development on the site stirred community emotions and prompted petitions signed by hundreds of residents opposed to the project.

Despite the uprising and threatened litigation, the Town Council stayed the course and voted 7-0 in September 1995, to move forward with construction of 53 for-sale homes, 18 rental units, a daycare center and a full-service grocery store in partnership with City Market. The development eventually gained acceptance by the community and served as a catalyst for additional housing projects to be completed later in the decade.

LIVING IN VAIL

• Since 1996, the town has helped more than 175 local employees purchase homes within Vail’s boundaries.
• The Buzzard Park units, located on the grounds of the Public Works complex north of the golf course, have provided the resources needed to reduce seasonal overtime costs and provide a steady staff for the town’s seasonal operations.
• Eagle River Water & Sanitation District found that proximity counts when employees need to respond to after-hours emergencies. The town partnered with ERWSD to provide 18 for-sale units centrally located in Vail. Priority was given to critical employees, such as emergency responders.

Lodging Tax Elevates Summer Marketing

‘99 Summer business got a big boost on Nov. 2, 1999, when Vail’s electorate approved a 1.4 percent lodging tax for summer and shoulder season marketing. The vote was 827 to 233. While the tax had initially been structured to include Avon and Beaver Creek, a Vail-only tax was pursued when the other players withdrew support. Today, the Vail Local Marketing District Board, which is comprised of the Vail Town Council, determines how the estimated $2 million in annual tax collections are to be spent with guidance by a panel of appointed marketing experts. Since 2000, the tax has generated more than $24 million for summer marketing, which has resulted in Vail being the leader in the mountain resort industry with year-round branding and marketing efforts domestically and internationally.
2000s

Frothy and Fun: Whitewater Park

'01 With arrival of the new century, Vail set out to shore up its non-skiing economy. One approach was to make Gore Creek more of an attraction to kayakers and other boaters. In 2001, some 600 cubic yards of rock were used to create the Vail Whitewater Park, between the Covered Bridge and the International Bridge.

Dissatisfied with results of the initial design due to Gore Creek’s highly variable flows, the town created a first-of-a-kind mechanism. An automated system uses air to inflate bladders to various sizes, depending on the daily stream level. The system directs water toward the center of the structure, creating a wave that can be used for surfing and various other kayak tricks.

But what good is a whitewater park without ample water? To secure rights to the preferred larger flows, the town joined the Eagle River Water & Sanitation District in a pivotal court case in Colorado that resulted in a change in state law. The new law authorized a new form of water rights for recreation-al in-stream flows.

The newly improved Whitewater Park, opening in 2008, helped elevate the Teva Whitewater Festival into the Teva Mountain Games, designed to appeal to the growing interest in rock climbing and other participatory sports. Golf still mattered, but to new generations the games were changing.

Drought, Fires and Bark Beetles

'02 Bark beetles have always lurked in the lodgepole pine forests that blanket the hillsides in and around Vail. One epidemic flared in the early 1980s. But another epidemic that began in 1996 eventually became monolithic, the result of warming temperatures, maturing forests, and then the severe drought of 2002.

The dead trees became the catalyst for action. New building regulations adopted by the town banned wooden shake-shingles in new homes and required flame-resistant shingles on roof replacements. Also, property owners in forested areas were encouraged to create defensible spaces around buildings.

Most prominently, the town joined with the Forest Service and Vail Resorts in 2006 to clear dead and diseased trees from adjacent hillsides and gave renewed attention to the town’s evacuation plan. From 2006 to 2012, some 10,000 trees were removed.

The compelling need for these measures was demonstrated by a wildfire that broke out on a ridge above Stephens Park in the Intermountain neighborhood in 2009. The fire was quickly contained, thanks to rapid response from local and regional agencies, but it could have been much worse. If major fires in the Vail area had been nearly non-existent, bark beetles and drought served notice that they were still possible — and, given enough time, with just the right conditions, quite probable.

From Blight to an Unparalleled Sight

'03 Never fully inviting, as compared to Vail Village, Lionshead needed a new face and a new body for the 21st century. An urban renewal authority, the legal tool that offered the best leverage for financing crucial public improvements, also carried the most risk.

By state law, establishment of the renewal authority required formal designation of the affected area as “blighted.” The law defined blighted as underperforming, which Lionshead was, but public perception drifts toward seedy warehouse districts and skid row apartments. Could Vail withstand the ridicule and possibly sacrifice its world-class reputation by declaring Lionshead “blighted?” The town called upon a group of business leaders to help evaluate its prospects. Cautious at first, the business leaders announced their support after realizing the blight designation would apply exclusively to public property, such as inadequate street layout and inferior utilities.

In 2003, the Town Council voted to create the Vail Reinvestment Authority. This allowed incremental taxes resulting from the upgrades, estimated at $14 million to $16 million, to be plowed back into improvements of public property within the Lionshead district. These improvements coincided with private sector investments, including Arrabelle at Vail Square, and rehabs and facelifts for many older lodges. Memories of blight receded as this partnership of public policy and private enterprise produced a triumph, a new Lionshead, one that looked and operated differently, a place where people wanted to be.

THE ARRABELLE

Vail’s Billion Dollar Renewal began in earnest when the development application for the Arrabelle at Vail Square was approved by the Town Council in April 2004.
First of 10 hybrid buses added to Vail Transit fleet.

Vail’s Toby Dawson earns freestyle moguls bronze at Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy.

Voters approve construction use tax.

Town requires bear-proof trash containers.

Holiday-tree decorations converted to energy-efficient LEDs, which use up to 80 percent less energy than incandescent. More than 25-miles of LED lights used to decorate Vail’s roundabouts, plazas and other public spaces.

Loading and delivery regulations revised to include increased use of underground delivery bays and limited on-street parking.

Groundbreaking for Arosa Drive deed-restricted duplex on town land in West Vail.

Community Garden opens.

Vail Fire Station No. 3 opens.

Voters approve Conference Center Fund reallocation.

Vail hosts USA Pro Cycling Challenge Time Trial.

Public ceremony on Dec. 15 commemorates opening of Vail Mountain 50 years earlier.

Bold Marketing in Face of Recession

When the Great Recession hit Vail in the fourth quarter of 2008, one option was to hunker down, trim spending and ride out the storm. Another was to be bold. The Town Council chose the latter, electing to mount a winter marketing campaign, something traditionally left entirely to Vail Resorts and individual businesses. Following the endorsement by a citizens group, the town appropriated $550,000 to fund a citizens group, the Gore Creek water protections have become a community priority.

The town appropriated $550,000 to fund a citizens group, the Gritty Realty in Gore Creek

The 15,000 cubic yards of sand spread on Interstate 70 each winter to give motorists crossing Vail Pass traction was not an immediate threat. But, pebble by pebble, the sand had trickled from the highway to the valley below, and by 2000 a bizarre, beach-like landscape was evident along Black Gore Creek. In places, the sand was several feet thick and the impacts were disturbing.

With support from the town government, the Eagle River Water & Sanitation District and Eagle River Watershed Council began working with the Colorado Department of Transportation, the U.S. Forest Service and others to find solutions. Each year, sand from along the highway was swept up, before it could trickle into the valley below. Also, 58 sediment basins were installed along the highway in 2008, to trap the sand so it could be removed in summer. All have helped.

But Gore Creek faces broader threats as the town and its partners work to reduce impacts to the creek, restore its natural functions and improve water quality. Unaffected is its status as a Gold Medal trout stream.

Distant No More: West Vail Fire Station

After years of study and indecision, Town Council members approved construction of the West Vail Fire Station in 2009. As predicted, response times to calls vastly improved after Station No. 3 opened in 2011, delivering greater security in the community’s western neighborhoods, particularly given the heightened worries about the risk of wildfires. The need for a station was first identified during the West Vail annexation in 1980.

Ever Vail Ready for Next Steps

Looking to position Vail as a leader among mountain resorts for the next 50 years, the Town Council gave Vail Resorts Development Company permission to pursue its Ever Vail mixed-use development in December 2012. The pair of enabling votes came after more than 80 public meetings spread across five years as the community reviewed plans for the new portal to Vail Mountain. The gondola terminal, residential and commercial real estate and other components would be built on a 13-acre site in West Lionshead. The town’s conceptual approval is good for eight years. Ever Vail still requires site-specific plans. As now defined, it represents the largest redevelopment in the town’s history.
Vail Town Council Members

1966
Ted Kindel, Mayor
Mitch Hoyt, Mayor Pro Tem
John Donovan, Mayor Pro Tem
Larry Burdick
John Dobson
Joe Langmaid
Peter Seibert
Harry Willett

1968
John Dobson, Mayor
Joe Langmaid, Mayor Pro Tem
Dick Bailey
John Donovan
John Kaemmer*
Ted Kindel
Peter Seibert
Tom Steinberg

1970
John Dobson, Mayor
Tom Steinberg, Mayor Pro Tem
Chuck Anderson
Dick Bailey
John Donovan
Clay Freeman
Gerry White

1972**
John Dobson, Mayor
Ted Kindel, Mayor Pro Tem
Tom Steinberg, Mayor Pro Tem*
Dick Bailey
John Donovan
Joe Langmaid
Josef Staufer
Gerry White

1973
John Dobson, Mayor
Gerry White, Mayor Pro Tem
John Donovan
Kathy Klug
Joe Langmaid
Josef Staufer
Tom Steinberg

1975
John Dobson, Mayor
Josef Staufer, Mayor Pro Tem
John Donovan
Bill Heimbach
Kathy Klug
Bob Ruder
Bill Wilto

1977
Rod Slifer, Mayor
John Dobson, Mayor Pro Tem
Bill Heimbach
Scott Hopman*
Kathleen Klug
Paula Palmateer
Bob Ruder*
Tom Steinberg
Bill Wilto

1979
Rod Slifer, Mayor
Bill Wilto, Mayor Pro Tem
Bud Benedict*
John Donovan
Scott Hopman
Paul Johnston*
Paula Palmateer
Bob Ruder*
Tom Steinberg
Ron Todd

1981
Rod Slifer, Mayor
Bill Wilto, Mayor Pro Tem
John Donovan
Kathy Klug
Joe Langmaid
Josef Staufer
Tom Steinberg

1983
Rod Slifer, Mayor
Paul Johnston, Mayor Pro Tem
Chuck Anderson
Colleen Kline
Kent Rose
Hermann Stauffer
Gail Wahrlich

1985
Paul Johnston, Mayor
Kent Rose, Mayor Pro Tem
Eric Affeldt
Dan Corcoran
Gordon Pierce
John Slevin*
Hermann Stauffer
Gail Wahrlich-Lovewenthal

1987
Kent Rose, Mayor
John Slevin, Mayor Pro Tem
Eric Affeldt
Michael Cacioppo*
Merv Lapin
Gordon Pierce
Tom Steinberg
Gail Wahrlich-Lovewenthal

1989
Kent Rose, Mayor
Tom Steinberg, Mayor Pro Tem
Lynn Frittsen
Jim Gibson
Merv Lapin
Rob LeVine
Peggy Osterfoss

1991
Peggy Osterfoss, Mayor
Merv Lapin, Mayor Pro Tem
Bob Buckley
Jim Gibson
Rob LeVine
Jim Shearer
Tom Steinberg

1993
Peggy Osterfoss, Mayor
Merv Lapin, Mayor Pro Tem
Bob Buckley
Jim Gibson
Rob LeVine
Jim Shearer
Tom Steinberg

1995
Bob Armour, Mayor
Merv Lapin, Mayor Pro Tem
Kevin Foley
Rob Ford
Michael Jewett
Paul Johnston
Rod Slifer*
Peggy Osterfoss

1997
Rob Ford, Mayor
Ludwig Kurz, Mayor Pro Tem
Bob Armour
Michael Arnett
Kevin Foley
Michael Jewett
Sybill Navas

1999
Ludwig Kurz, Mayor
Sybill Navas, Mayor Pro Tem
Bob Armour
Sybill Navas
Kevin Foley*
Rob Ford
Chuck Ogilby
Greg Mofett
Rod Slifer

2001
Ludwig Kurz, Mayor
Sybill Navas, Mayor Pro Tem
Bob Armour
Sybill Navas
Kevin Foley
Robert Ford
Chuck Ogilby
Rod Slifer

2003
Rod Slifer, Mayor
Dick Cleveland, Mayor Pro Tem
Kerry Donovan
Kevin Foley
Farrow Hitt*
Ludwig Kurz
Kent Logan
Greg Mofett
Kim Newbury Ruotolo

2005
Rod Slifer, Mayor
Farrow Hitt, Mayor Pro Tem
Kevin Foley
Mark Gordon
Kent Logan
Greg Mofett
Kim Newbury
Margaret Rogers

2007
Dick Cleveland, Mayor
Andy Daly, Mayor Pro Tem
Kevin Foley
Mark Gordon
Farrow Hitt
Kim Newbury
Margaret Rogers

2009
Dick Cleveland, Mayor
Kim Newbury, Mayor Pro Tem
Andy Daly
Kerry Donovan
Kevin Foley
Margaret Rogers
Susie Tjassem

2011
Andy Daly, Mayor
Ludwig Kurz, Mayor Pro Tem
Kerry Donovan
Kevin Foley
Greg Mofett
Margaret Rogers
Susie Tjassem

2013
Rod Slifer, Mayor
Dick Cleveland, Mayor Pro Tem
Kerry Donovan
Kevin Foley
Farrow Hitt
Ludwig Kurz
Kent Logan
Greg Mofett
Kim Newbury Ruotolo

*Elected or appointed mid-term.  **Per Town Charter, elections changed from spring to fall, plus staggered terms established.