

Housing Matters:

Ketchum Community Housing

Key Informant Interview Summary

Submitted by Agnew::Beck

Overview

Between October 18 and December 20, 2021, our team interviewed more than 30 individuals from the Ketchum and Wood River Valley community to gauge perspectives on housing and assess readiness for action to support strategic efforts. Conversations were primarily held with groups of community members, although some individual conversations took place due to scheduling constraints. The interviews and questions were constructed to both gauge individual perspectives and spark creative thinking on the part of community members.

The summary presented below does not represent the entirety of those conversations. Instead, it articulates the key themes and highlights that emerged over the course of our interviews. It is intended to provide a broad overview of Ketchum community members' ideas and opinions and initial recommendations for community engagement based on those sentiments.

Additionally, although the City of Ketchum commissioned these interviews and report, the perspectives shared were largely reflective of housing conditions throughout the Wood River Valley.

Interviewee	Organization
Alyson Witmer	Pioneer Saloon
Anonymous	Community homeowner
Ben Pettit	Sun Valley Community School
Bob Crosby	Sun Valley Board of Realtors
Brittany Shipley	NAMI Wood River Valley
Brooke Pace McKenna	The Hunger Coalition
Chip Atkinson	Atkinson's
Courtney Hamilton	Council Member
Dave Hausman	Lefty's
Dave Hutchinson	VP Companies
Erin Pfaeffle	St. Luke's
Harry Griffith	Sun Valley Economic Development
Jacob Frehling	Maude's
Jeff Bay	Tamarack/ Hotel Ketchum
Jen Smith	Community homeowner
Jenny Emery-Davidson	The Community Library

Krzysztof Gilarowski	Community member
Mark Nieves	Independent Goods
Michael David	Council Member
Michelle Griffith	ARCH Community Housing Trust
Nancie Tatum	Community member
Nathan Harvill	Blaine County Housing Authority
Olin Glenne	Sturtevant's
Paul Conrad	Conrad Brothers
Reid Sanborn	Engel & Volkers
Sally Gillespie	Spur Community Foundation
Scott Fortner	Visit Sun Valley
Steve Shafran	Spur Community Foundation
Susan Scovell	Ketchum Urban Renewal Agency
Tim Wolff	Spur Community Foundation
Tim Silva	Sun Valley Company
Tish Short	Hemmingway Elementary

In addition to the interviews conducted by Agnew::Beck, the City of Ketchum shared interview notes from their conversations with the following community members.

Interviewee	Organization
Caitlin Hegwood	Men's Second Chance Living
Lisa Horowitz	City of Hailey
Shannon Nichols	The Advocates
Sonya Wilander	Men's Second Chance Living

Three themes were discussed with all key informants:

- **DATA and INFORMATION:** What we know or would like to know about the need for community housing today and in the future.
- **STRATEGY and METHODS:** What you think is working and not working about how community housing is provided today, and ideas about how to increase and improve the amount of community housing to meet current and future needs.
- **COMMITMENT:** What you and your organization have done, are doing, or are prepared to do in the future to support development of community housing.

Interviewees were provided with the opportunity to review notes for accuracy and give permission for quote attribution.

Key Themes & Recommendations

Housing Needs

Stakeholders uniformly understand that housing is a major challenge for the Ketchum/Blaine County area, but there is not a consistent understanding of what kind of housing (size and rental/ownership) is needed and at what price points. While stakeholders do not want the city to pause current efforts to address housing, they are looking for more concrete analysis and data to help inform next steps.

Recommendation: Publicize the upcoming Housing Needs Analysis in a transparent, easily accessible format for community members and stakeholders.

Intentional Housing Framework

Although stakeholders have varying opinions about existing housing proposals, they uniformly would like to see a strategic, actionable plan that encompasses a variety of housing strategies and tactics. Those interviewed want to understand how proposed or current strategies and ideas are meeting the housing needs of residents.

Recommendation: Utilize the Housing Needs Analysis and subsequent policy discussions to create a policy and financial framework for community housing in the Ketchum area.

Longevity & “Fortitude”

A majority of stakeholders noted that during the last 20 years, a number of promising community housing projects were not successful – largely because of community opposition and potentially because other priorities emerged post- Great Recession. Unfortunately, this has likely contributed to the difficult housing environment the community finds itself in today. A sustained, strategic, long-term effort is needed that will weather the ups and downs of the economy and build community trust and good-will.

Recommendation: Create a Housing Action Taskforce to take the results of the Housing Needs Analysis and community survey, review the Housing Toolkit and build a long-term, strategic framework for housing in Ketchum (with information to be shared with adjacent communities in Blaine County). This taskforce could ultimately evolve into a permanent commission that reviews housing policy and practice.

“I would love to see Ketchum think outside of the box with their solutions and then ‘hold firm’ and not give in (to difficult opposition).” –
Brooke Pace McKenna, the
Hunger Coalition

Data, Information & the Results of Housing Instability

Current State

Key informants almost uniformly believe that housing access in Ketchum and the Wood River Valley has become exponentially difficult in the past 2 years.

Interviewees noted that access to housing has always been more challenging in mountain communities like Ketchum; however, the pandemic has accelerated and exacerbated pre-existing issues and created some new ones. Specifically, the rise of remote work during Covid and corresponding migration to the Ketchum area has caused area rents to spike and made housing even more inaccessible during the pandemic. As one interviewee commented, “Even if you can afford to pay \$3000 a month for a studio apartment – there is no inventory.”

“During the pandemic we’ve grown 8%. That’s a decade’s growth within a year – Jacob Frehling

Information Access & Key Indicators

“How does the need stratify by income levels? What are reasonable expectations for growth and how does that match up with actual inventory?”
– Tim Wolfe

Access to timely and transparent information was a common request among interviewees. All respondents agree that housing is a significant problem for the area, but there is no common understanding of what kind and how many units of housing would be needed to solve this problem. Moreover, they were unsure of where to turn to find this information. One interviewee noted, “A breakdown that compares incomes to the housing that we have or is being created (would be helpful). It would be important to track that over time. Is it changing in a way where more people can afford to live here or less?” Nancie Tatum, community member, commented “No one knows which initiatives are underway... We need transparency and accountability for our tax dollars and a comprehensive strategy rather than just information about individual projects.” These comments point to the need for the housing analysis Agnew::Beck will perform to identify the number of units needed and at what price ranges for the community.

Business viability and access to a stable workforce was a common idea shared when interviewees were asked to identify a “key indicator” for the housing environment. Jeff Hay, of Hotel Ketchum and the Tamarack Lodge noted, “We have had difficulty fully staffing our businesses. We've had entry level and intermediate level positions open for the last several months that we've been unable to fill because of the inability to hire, primarily due to lack of available housing. At times, we are not able to clean all our rooms every night because we don't have sufficient housekeepers, so we can't sell every room every night. That has a direct impact on LOT (local option tax) collection, and it should be in the city's best interest to maximize those revenues and utilize it for affordable housing.”

Clearly, the experience in Ketchum during summer 2021 left an impression on business owners, employees and community members. Conversely a strong contingent of respondents believe that access to a strong workforce may serve as a sign that the housing situation is improving.

Perception & Reality

A difficult to quantify, though palpable, sentiment from a variety of interviewees is the sense that Ketchum is losing its identity as the housing market becomes challenging and people move away. Many respondents felt that the pursuit of accessible community housing represents more than a roof over community members' heads – it's a quest to maintain the "soul" of the community.

Moreover, housing instability is creating financial, social and emotional challenges for residents across the valley. Brittany Shipley of NAMI Wood River Valley elaborated, "This is what we are hearing from our clients: Fear of the unknown, stress of abandoning other people who they might be leaving behind if they move and confusion about what the relocation may look like. It's really hard for them to navigate the system as well."

"The community is at a tipping point of being something vastly different than it used to be because people are no longer able to live and work here. It's affecting the essence of our mountain town culture and what many value in our community." – Scott Fortner, Visit Sun Valley

Vulnerable Populations & Difficult Processes

The aforementioned stress resulting from housing instability is compounded by nonprofit and social service networks that can be difficult to navigate, especially for those in crisis. Respondents indicated that they, or their clients, were often shuffled from one agency to the next in an attempt to access resources. Often these clients would complete a process only to find out that they did not meet the eligibility criteria – and indeed, eligibility criteria may even specifically screen out some of the most vulnerable community members.

This report is focused on the needs and perceptions of community housing; however, based on these discussions, further conversations between city, county, Housing Authority and other nonprofit leaders may be warranted to streamline housing rental policies and processes and reduce trauma for people in these situations.

Strategy & Methods

“We Just Need More of It”

Employer-Assisted Housing

Employer-assisted housing efforts give employers a way to help their employees with the cost of owning or renting a home, typically in neighborhoods close to the workplace. This can be provided in a variety of ways, including down payment grants or loans, homeownership counseling and education, rental subsidies and direct investment in the construction of rental housing.

“The mixed market rate/deed restricted projects are best because you can’t tell the difference between who lives here. We are all neighbors here and it creates community.” - Jen Smith, community homeowner

Employers interviewed for this survey were already engaged in many of these efforts. The ability to procure or develop specific housing for an employee base gives them a more stable workforce and a potential competitive advantage in the marketplace.

“We have had to cut hours/reduce days or completely close...The employees that we do have are exhausted.” – Local business owner

Respondents were cautious about relying too heavily on this strategy, however. Some of those who were able to provide employee assistance were wary of “getting into the landlord business” both from an employee equity perspective and because they were concerned it would detract from their primary mission. In addition, smaller business owners noted they simply do not have the ability to provide these kinds of resources for employees.

One notable employer, the Sun Valley Company, has a strong background and experience in the construction and management of employee housing. Numerous respondents cited them as a positive example that has taken the burden off of the rest of the housing market because of their ability to utilize their own land and resources for housing production.

Policy

Those interviewed noted that some policy responses (Ketchum and other communities) have been positive and productive. Respondents expressed support for ADUs, up-zoning, tiny homes and density bonus provisions. However, respondents also articulated concerns that some policies and processes may be hindering the timely development of housing - especially community housing. Historic preservation, parking requirements and “in lieu of” fees were listed as policies that either have or could potentially affect housing development. The “in lieu of” fees received mixed reviews, depending on the respondent. However, even those in support of these fees pointed to the need for a more transparent connection to usage of said fees.

“There ought to be a connection between the in-lieu fund and what the target strategy is. People need to see connection between that money and where it goes.” – David Hutchinson

State policy was also identified as a key barrier to community housing development. Many interviewees recognized the challenge that Ketchum leaders face in a “Dillon’s Rule” state; however, they expressed support for ongoing dialogue with state leaders and other resort town areas to address policy issues. Specifically, Idaho’s unfilled Housing Trust Fund, short-term rental policies, real estate transfer policy and state general funds were mentioned as key obstacles.

“If we get the boot (from our rental) I don't know where we'll go. We own a successful business and would have to move in with our parents. I want to start a family and I want to contribute, but I don't know if we can do that.” – Jacob Frehling

Short Term Rentals (STRs) were consistently mentioned as a concern or potential problem in the housing market. However, the degree to which STRs are impacting the housing market for local workers remains unknown to date beyond some limited data sets and anecdotal information. Despite this, the feelings about STRs are quite strong and palpable. Most interviewees knew a friend or employee who had lost their housing due to sale or conversion to a short-term rental and suggested policy responses were varied. Due to the lack of thorough data, a reasonable step to address this could be to require some form of licensure that would provide better data

for the community and ensure that the local option tax is being equitably collected on these properties.

Community Acceptance & Support

While respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of affordable/community housing already in existence, many expressed frustration that several promising projects did not come to fruition over the years. This may be for a variety of reasons; however, the general sentiment is that “Nimbyism” (Not In My Backyard) is at the core of the lack of additional community housing development. Interviewees felt that litigation or the threat of litigation has successfully stymied good developments and further hindered the housing environment in Ketchum.

“People say they are for affordable housing, ‘But it needs to be someplace else.’ Attitudes need to change about who actually lives in affordable housing” – Community Homeowner

Conversely, interviewees reflected on past periods of support for community housing development and suggested that a sustained, public effort with clearly defined strategies and proposed outcomes could overcome the majority of objections. Sally Gillespie, Spur Community Foundation, compared this to other community-based efforts, “When we have a fire, everyone in the community bands together. For something to succeed regarding housing, we need to band together.”

Commitment

Our interviewees consistently expressed support for action on community housing in the Ketchum area. Perhaps, in part, because of the group selected, no one interviewed dismissed the need for affordable housing or minimized the importance of housing to the Wood River Valley area. However, respondents articulated that their support could be enhanced when and if the community creates a more comprehensive strategic plan for housing that is tied to metrics and outcomes.

“We have to collaboratively decide what the right things are. The anecdotal/idiosyncratic approach doesn’t work. There has to be a method.” – Steve Shafran

Significant efforts are already taking place in the area (employer-sponsored housing, public/private partnerships, etc.) but the consensus is that these efforts can be elevated if done in a more coordinated fashion.

In addition to current endeavors, respondents identified philanthropy and increased funding from the Local Option

Tax as potential sources of support to achieve housing goals for the area. As noted, however, that support is contingent on the creation of a strategic plan for housing.

Conclusion

The Ketchum community, if activated, is in a strong position to come together on the issue of housing and achieve meaningful results. Doing so will require the aforementioned intertwined strategies:

- accessible, transparent data and information for community stakeholders
- combined with an engaged and diverse task force of committed stakeholders
- leading to the creation of an intentional, comprehensive housing action plan.

Together, Ketchum can create housing opportunity for its residents and build a thriving community.