

# Vail approves six additional unit purchases toward deed-restriction goal

Plus, the town takes another look at its community housing lottery process

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**Ali Longwell** [FOLLOW](#)  
alongwell@vaildaily.com



On Tuesday, Sept. 20, Vail Town Council approved the purchase of six units, which it will place deed restrictions on and use for municipal employee housing.

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The town of Vail continues to chip away at its goal to acquire 1,000 additional deed-restricted properties by 2027 — one property at a time.

At its Tuesday, Sept. 20 meeting, the council approved the purchase of six additional residential properties, increasing its inventory of deed-restricted properties to 1,028 in the Vail community. This number includes the 72 deed-restricted units that are currently under construction at the Residences at Main Vail Project, according to the town’s housing director George Ruther.

Of the most recently approved purchases, two of the properties were condominium units located at the Matterhorn Inn, and the third was the Hamlet Chalet, which contains four homes, all six of which are located in West Vail. The two Matterhorn properties were approved for a purchase not to exceed \$745,000 plus closing costs for each unit and the four homes within the Hamlet Chalet were approved for \$1.8 million plus closing costs.

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Further, these properties will be “used to provide housing for municipal employees at the town of Vail,” Ruther said.

“As the fourth largest employer in Vail, the town of Vail too is challenged by the need for housing its workforce. As the (full-time employee) count for the town grows, so does its need to support housing for the employees,” reads a memo in the Sept. 20 Town Council agenda.

The town, Ruther added has more than 335 full-time employees.

### **Changes to lottery process coming**

The town is leveraging these deed-restricted units for local employees in a number of different ways. While these six will be used for municipal employees, earlier this year, the town purchased two residential properties in Vail, which were deed-restricted and offered to qualified residents via the town’s lottery sales process in July.

In this lottery process, the town had 48 qualified applications for a Chamonix Vail townhome and eight for a Pitkin Creek Park condominium.

At its afternoon meeting, the council discussed possible changes to this lottery process based on the learnings of these most recent housing lotteries.

Martha Anderson, a housing coordinator, said that the town received a lot of feedback on the process and wants to create a more “clear, concise and efficient process” for the lotteries moving forward.

Currently, the town awards up to five tickets for these housing lotteries including one ticket each if: the applicant completes an application, the applicant currently lives in Vail, the applicant has lived in Vail for five or more years, the applicant is currently employed in Vail, and the applicant has worked in Vail for five or more years.

However, in presenting to the council, Anderson said that verification of some of these factors – primarily the length of employment and residency in Vail – was hard to verify and created ambiguity in the decision process, which goes against the town’s housing goals.

“We received a very different number of documents that could be misinterpreted in order to issue this number of tickets, so we had a number of disagreements with several applications,” Anderson said. “I think that just hurts the credibility and integrity – not just of the housing department – but also the integrity of the housing lottery. One of our objectives is to be fair with everybody and not have a process that is ambiguous and not specific in a way that there could be some disagreements with applicants.”

Missy Johnson, another of the town’s housing coordinators, said that as the town anticipates that these lotteries will continue to grow in the future, “there will be so many people applying and we must make it fair.”

In having the discussion about making changes to the lottery, Johnson said that the main goals were: “How can we get people in housing? And how can we make it fair and verifiable across the board?”

Moving forward, the town’s housing department proposed the lottery be simplified so that one ticket was issued for: those who complete the application; those that are currently a resident of Vail; and those that are currently employed in the town of Vail. The memo also dictates exactly what documentation would be accepted to validate this employment and residency.

Additional improvements and requirements to the project were also included in the presentation to council.

Currently, the town requires the winning applicant to take a homebuyer education class within six months of winning the lottery. However, Johnson said that the housing department fielded numerous questions relating to financing and purchasing a home. Moving forward, it was the town staff’s recommendation that this education course is required prior to one’s entrance into the lottery.

These changes also included moving to a “bingo-style drawing system,” moving the application process online, enhancing the town’s frequently asked questions, and more.

The Town Council discussed these changes and improvements at Tuesday’s meeting, honing in on incentivizing longevity in the lottery. Of the several details debated, there was no consensus over whether long-term employment or long-term residency held more weight.

Ultimately, council members requested more information from the department before making any official changes to the process.

“This is tough because we’re essentially picking winners – we’re handicapping certain people over others and that I just struggle with as a government, are we handicapping for the right reasons?” said Mayor Pro Tem Travis Coggin.