CORNELL UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

APPROVAL OF THESIS

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Graduate Field: CITY & REGIONAL PLANNING

Degree: M.R.P.

Title of Thesis:

WHO GETS TO LIVE IN THE MOUNTAINS?
Inequality, Planning, and the Housing Crisis in America's Mountain Towns

COMMITTEE SIGNATURES:

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WHO GETS TO LIVE IN THE MOUNTAINS?

Inequality, Planning, and the Housing Crisis in America's Mountain Towns

A Master's Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Regional Planning

By

David Alan Hedges

April 2023

ABSTRACT

Mountain towns can be understood as appendages of elite metropolitan centers, places where the ultra-wealthy and the very powerful go to purify themselves from the soul sucking hyper-productive world of the city. There they find nature which they use to resolve the economic and social problems they face. Authenticity is regained amongst the aura, nature, recreational pastimes, and romanticized working poor found in mountain towns. These places also serve as stores of surplus value, with the exchange value of land and real estate appreciating dramatically, covertly contributing to the unevenness of capital accumulation. Place is coopted in this way, drained of its democratic qualities, and enclosed. Mountain towns serve as microcosms of how socio-economic structures, ecological crises, and local politics conjoin and interact more broadly across the country. This paper analyzes the place belonging claims of the ultra-wealthy, the shocking data on housing market conditions, community cohesion, and the crisis of social reproduction in mountain towns, as well as the response municipal governments have mounted to address the housing problem. Questioning the fundamental logic and orientation of housing, this paper highlights progressive alternatives to the way housing is presently allocated and offers a strategy that the constituents of the mountain town underclass can employ to ultimately win the right to housing and the ability to democratically decide who gets to enjoy the mountains.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Hedges grew up in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood and attended University of Chicago's Laboratory schools, on the other side of the city, for kindergarten through high school. While David was a dedicated violinist from the age of four, he developed a fascination for geography and history and sport that drove him to explore outdoors whenever possible. After determining that conservatory and the professional world of classical music was too constricting for him, David pivoted to ultra-running which he used as a means for exploration and escape. By traveling many thousands of miles across Chicago by foot and bicycle in high school, David got to know the city on a visceral level, an understanding he highly valued. Moving to Colorado the day after graduation, David converted his passion for urban exploration to alpine environments where he developed his skills moving lightly and quickly across rugged terrain. David studied anthropology at Colorado College, focusing on environmental subjectivities and climate action. David spent summers working and many nights camping in mountain towns to run and ski. Experiencing the extent of the housing and inequality crises there and understanding the potential for planning to positively shape both rural and urban environments, David sought to deepen his knowledge of the subject and to develop his skills as a planning practitioner at Cornell University. Recognizing that the planning literature largely omitted analysis of mountain towns, David committed to writing this paper. David runs ultra-trail and mountain races professionally. He currently lives in New Hampshire's White Mountains and is in the process of moving to Asheville, North Carolina.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor George Frantz for the patience and encouragement he has shown during the process of writing this paper, as well as the push back and grounding he provided to my overzealous idealism during coursework and discussion. Much gratitude goes out to Professors Wendy Wolford, Scott Peters, and Rebecca Nelson in the Department of Global Development for helping me deepen my analytical abilities and develop a coherent theory of change. Similarly, I would like to acknowledge the indispensable tutelage of Professors Neema Kudva and Linda Shi who, despite the restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 Pandemic, were able to bring together my cohort around a shared theory of the planning profession and set us off on a successful MRP program. Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge all of the people, friends and acquaintances, who through discussion and lived experience, informed me about the hustle and sacrifices required to survive in mountain towns while pursuing their passion.

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Introduction: Mountain Towns and Planetary Urbanization

Mountain towns, using the colloquial definition of a high-amenity gateway community oriented around luxury tourism, adventure sports, and an 'unspoiled wilderness', can be understood as appendages of elite metropolitan centers. These are places where the ultra-wealthy and the very powerful go to purify themselves from the soul sucking hyper-productive world of the city. There they find nature which they use to resolve the economic and social problems they face. Authenticity, the morally imbued collection of traits that connotes legitimacy and social value (Grazian 2010), is regained amongst the aura, nature, recreational pastimes, and romanticized working poor found in mountain towns. These places also serve as stores of surplus value, with the exchange value of land and real estate appreciating dramatically, covertly contributing to the unevenness of capital accumulation. Place is coopted in this way, drained of its democratic qualities, and enclosed. The mountain town serves as a microcosm for how socio-economic structures, ecological crises, and local politics conjoin and interact more broadly across the country.

Exploring what is happening in mountain towns is not just an interesting way of viewing how nature is enclosed and commodified, not just an instructive analysis for local mountain town politics, but also as a way of describing the urbanization process. Indeed, I would argue that these places are key nodes supporting "the dynamic metabolism of the global metropolitan network" (Brenner 2019). Escaping the confines of the city allows the ultra-wealthy to obfuscate their role in the problems besetting the urban fabric, broadly understood. As a result, the wealthy are able to evade scrutiny by academics, state bureaucrats, and the public.

Justin Farrell (2020) insists that that there is not enough contextualized, complex study of the ultra-wealthy which has led to a "shallow understanding," which "is especially disconcerting given the immense economic, cultural, and political power" they wield and "their growing interest in and impact on environmental issues." This lack of oversight accelerates capitalist restructuring without recourse. Just as it is impossible to understand

what is going on in the Global South without analyzing the Global North, it is impossible to understand poverty without interrogating wealth, and it is impossible to know urban inequality without investigating the refuges the powerful use as antidotes to the problems of the city.

Investigation is also a matter of environmental justice since by locking up nature within select preserves, the conservation regime is rendering scarce the basic elements needed for life. As the destruction of the environment continues unabated pursuant to the imperatives of capital, superficially conserving nature in this way both portrays a false sense of ecological stability and paints a grim picture of the hegemonic regime's trend toward eco-apartheid whereby the wealthy enjoy their vistas while the rest of the world burns or floods. Eco-apartheid is the "regime of greening affluence for the few at the expense of the many" (Aldana Cohen 2019). As an illustration, while mountain tops are stripped in Appalachia and entire mountain ecologies are toxified and desertified in the high Andes, the Teton Regional Land Trust has conserved some 40,000 acres over the course of the last 25 years (TRLT 2023). So certain landscapes deemed desirable or important by the capitalist class are conserved while whole geographies and the communities that inhabit them are rendered 'wastelands' or 'sacrifice zones'. Oftentimes the capital used to conserve is derived from economic activity in sacrificial geographies. This is displayed in the phenomenon Farrell (2020) experienced where his fossil fuel industry executive interlocutors professed their passion for large landscape and charismatic megafauna conservation.

Therefore, I would venture to state that the problems associated with capitalism's ravenous metabolic processes must not be solely or even primarily confronted in the city but also in the mountains, since the "variegated spaces of the non-city have been continuously operationalized in support of city-building processes." For while we emphasize the growth of cities, it is the "extra-metropolitan landscapes of capital," which "are being comprehensively creatively destroyed…contributing directly to the forms of mass dispossession and displacement that are uncritically catalogued or celebrated in mainstream

urban policy discourse" (Brenner 2019). In other words, it is incumbent on social movements and critical scholars to politicize the hinterlands, the mountains, and the city if we wish to renegotiate the spatial foundations for our collective planetary future. The mountains are being almost entirely ignored.

In 2020, the 'Zoom Boom' lead to a rush of outmigration from cities to amenity-rich places. It was not so much that cities emptied out—and by cities we are really only discussing centers of capital and elite culture such as New York, San Francisco, and Seattle—but that money poured into the real estate market in resort towns and other peripheral places. It was not the migration of people so much as the migration of the problems of the city into remote areas which really characterized the Zoom Boom. The simmering affordability and housing crises in these places boiled over. But the influx of capital was not a function of anxieties about urban density related to the COVID-19 Pandemic, for the trend has slowed some but it has not abated in the years since (Holder 2022). Plus, amenity-led migration was becoming more and more prominent before the Pandemic, as the crises presented by planetary urbanization and inequality have come to a head.

Data that demonstrates the extent of this influx of capital and the related social and material conditions in mountain towns will be presented in the 'Data' section beginning on page 37. But to briefly summarize, mountain towns have experienced a truly jaw-dropping degree of real estate asset appreciation and resident displacement. In 2021, the average price for a single-family home in downtown Aspen reached $12.6 million and $7.9 million county wide (Blevins 2021, May). Out of state buyers represent the bulk of demand for these high-value housing units and the majority of houses are seasonally occupied second homes. 89% of units in Breckenridge are non-resident occupied (Singer 2022). In Ketchum, 70% of units are seasonally occupied (Ketchum 2022), and 65% are similarly vacant in Truckee and North Tahoe (Brown 2021). Meanwhile, rental vacancy rates have plummeted as units have been converted to short term rentals or replaced by luxury developments. Residents

increasingly have to compete with very high-income remote workers for rentals. In Ketchum, the proportion of the housing stock rented out long-term decreased from 31% in 1970 to 10% in 2019. Now, just 7% of Ketchum's workforce lives in Ketchum itself, down 41% since 2002 (Ketchum 2022). A staffing shortage that effects all industries and the public sector has followed, as has a crisis of community cohesion. Workers are commuting incredible distances from down-valley, mountain town centers have emptied out, and the surrounding rural communities are being folded into the problem. Beyond the great wealth-based levels of inequality, racial and generational disparities in the housing market exist as well. To address the housing crisis and the issues radiating out from it, mountain towns desperately need to construct or convert extant housing to affordable units.

What is causing this descendance of capital onto mountain town real estate? It has both economic and sociological origins. "The escape from the city is less about lifestyle transformation," Osbaldiston (2012) writes, "and more about a new mode of status-related consumption." The vacation home destination has long been a place for "ritualistic encounters" that "enable the re-enchantment of life" to take place for those with means. Immediately with the inception of the modern city, the urban became profane and the non-city sacred. This rendering sacred has permeated cultural notions of authenticity and well-being in relation to place whereby environmental amenity is "accentuated through a cultural patterning that distinguishes it as untouched, pristine, and spectacular." Likewise, the people who inhabit such places cultivate a "spirit of rebellion against a driving inauthentic force that is capitalism" (ibid).

It is the inversion of urban scarcities that have come to differentiate mountain towns from other places in the United States. Indeed, I would define mountain towns by their access to and orientation around abundant 'unspoiled' wilderness, not just their proximity to mountains. It is perhaps a crude label, that of mountain town, to describe what I mean as a conglomeration of elite influence in a remote location. Some seaside resorts also fit into this regime of classification since they have been developed as and portrayed to be ecological

havens, not urban nor rural, not productive nor working, not a wasteland, but a conserved paradise. The boundaries between these geographies can be conceptually and practically blurred, but the conceptualization, a dialectical process corresponding to Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (1991) is still clarifying.

Lefebvre (1991) describes how under the accelerating logic of contemporary industrial capitalism, in this consumer society, the commodification of formerly abundant 'natural' resources has rendered them scarce. This has attributed to them significant exchange value, especially since they now must be produced. As urban space becomes more and more detached from natural space, Lefebvre writes, natural space becomes a scarce commodity. Scarcity becomes spatial. This country's conservation efforts have succeeded in producing this scarcity of natural elemental commodities to a drastic degree. But the rendered scarcity is not just a function of resource conservation, rather conservation is part of the process of capital accumulation which increasingly prioritizes the production of space. By delimiting which spaces may be 'kept wild', all remaining land is dedicated towards capital accumulation via extraction and private ownership.

Since capitalism's exponential expansion motive is antithetical to the conservation of natural resources, since it "cannot accept material limits or boundaries," the economic approach is "to incorporate ecosystem services into the economy by placing capital values on it and selectively integrating it with capital accumulation itself" (Foster 2022). In other words, capitalism subjects all natural processes to "exchange on the market for profit—all in the name of conservation and climate change." But because "capital makes nature scarcer and more marketable by destroying it" (ibid), the overall effect of conservation is to make nature ever scarcer, therefore increasing its asset value. In mountain towns, hyper-localized conservation efforts works to conceal ecological destruction elsewhere, furthering an "anti-systemic conceptualization of nature and ecology" (Farrell 2020), obfuscating the environmental and social problems taking place outside of the Eden mountain towns have been constructed to impersonate. Conservation in mountain towns also "directly and

indirectly intensifies wealth inequality by making the area uniquely attractive to the ultra-wealthy, creating intense housing demand *and* land scarcity" (ibid). Therefore, conservation works to produce scarcity on both the macro and micro levels.

Lefebvre (1991) writes that "capitalism has taken possession of the land, and *mobilized* it to the point where this sector is fast becoming *central*…capital has rushed into the production of space in preference to the classical forms of production." This mobilization has contributed to the "*general unevenness* of development," and to "the *segmentation* of the economy as a global reality" to a great degree. It is no coincidence then that since the time of Lefebvre's analysis, each economic shock has resulted in the further enclosure of space in mountain towns. We can understand this process as constituent of the process of planetary urbanization. Neil Brenner argues that the city

> is only one element within, and expression of, the multiscalar, polymorphic, and restlessly mutating geographies of capitalist urbanization. These are constituted through the relentless *implosion* of sociospatial processes into dense centers of population, infrastructure, and economic activity and through the equally dynamic *explosion* of sociospatial relations across vast territories, landscapes, and ecologies that are likewise being perpetually enclosed, operationalized, industrialized, and creatively destroyed in support of capital's voracious, profit-driven metabolism (2019).

The exclusivity of mountain towns in the United States can therefore be understood as an integral element of planetary urbanization whereby the wealthy both further the unevenness of capital accumulation and placate the social and ecological contradictions generated by their role in the process of capitalist development.

Counterintuitively perhaps, the creation of mountain towns as such can be understood as a part of the process of deterritorialization, as formulated by David Harvey and invoked by Brenner (2019). Real estate there has circulated and appreciated in tandem with other luxury commodities such as art. Though the physical geography of mountain towns is inert, for prospective buyers, despite gestures to the contrary, it does not truly matter where in the world these places exist, so long as the conditions that make them appear close-to-nature and authentic exist. Just to illustrate—the towns of Aspen, Telluride,

Jackson, Ketchum, Tahoe, Stowe, Banff, Whistler, Zermatt, St. Moritz, Gstaad, Verbier, Courchevel, Wanaka (and so on) all fit the description. The qualities of these places, despite having divergent histories, have been reduced to a palpable sameness by developers, designers, and planners to serve the material and social interests of the ultra-wealthy who are globally mobile.

Perlik (2019) traces this distinction of landscapes to the post-Fordist regime shift in the 1980s where topography became "systematically valorized under the label of specific and unique landscapes." As state objectives fell away in favor of the imperatives of exchange values after the neoliberal turn, a process of subsidiarity took place whereby state and federal government devolved responsibility to municipalities who invariably turned to the private sector. For mountain towns which have gained a high level of distinction, the commodification "strategy changes the character of value adding from an export-based economy (via manufacturing or tourism) towards a residential economy (via new taxes, fees, retailing, and personal services)" (ibid).

It is impossible not to feel this shift in governance imperatives while visiting these places or when working for local governments and tuning into local meetings there, as I have done. The process of elite capture is so totalizing that no discussion concerning public goods can escape considerations of property values and the petty concerns of 'residents' (i.e. homeowners). For, borrowing Neil Smith's (2007) dissection of the capitalization of nature under the climate regime, these places of distinction have been produced under markets controlled by narrow class interests. Ironically, much of the value used to create these places in this way was pillaged from other geographies, extracted from places and people rendered productive. So, while the rest of the planet is sapped of distinction, rendered undifferentiable domains for maximal extraction, a handful of places are uplifted and coopted by capital to reattach capitalists with a sense of meaning and authenticity that they are unable to grasp in 'reality'. Indeed, Farrell (2020) found that the ultra-wealthy feel as though they had to sacrifice their authentic selves to realize financial success in the real world. They aim, by

going to the mountains, “to regain a part of themselves that is more genuine, sincere, virtuous, and uncontaminated.” As a result, these privileged places are decidedly unreal since they serve little purpose beyond catering to the rich and storing their surplus value, which also makes them undifferentiable.

This deterritorialization of space—where places are created to be distinctive irrespective of their particular regions or histories—functions in the same way as elite urban space does. For the super wealthy interested in accumulating more wealth and status, it does not truly mater which global city—New York, London, Paris, Shanghai—they choose to buy and do business in, so long as the conditions for financial profitability and social prestige are met. The technologies of detached financial instruments, globalized markets, multinational brokerage firms, private jets and yachts, security details, tax havens, Slack and Zoom, and so on have worked to expand spatially, accelerate temporally, and restructure spatiotemporally the entire Earth. They have liberated the global elite from the confines of productive and polluted spaces, allowing them to retreat to the mountains (or islands or yachts) where they can regain their privacy, operate without political scrutiny, reintegrate themselves within a ‘close-knit’ community, rectify their personal relationship to nature, and de-alienate themselves from the material world. The territorial organization that configures mountain towns and financial centers as elite spaces can be understood then as a spatial fix for crises in the accumulation of capital, namely those crises of inequality and environmental destruction.

Elaborating on this insight, Farrell (2020) writes that “nature takes on a unique power for the ultra-wealthy, allowing them to confront the urgent *economic* and *social* problems they face—such as how best to enjoy, share, or multiply their money, and how best to respond to social stigmas and feelings of inauthenticity or guilt.” They resolve those dilemmas by leveraging nature to climb even higher on the socioeconomic ladder. This leveraging takes the form of conservation easements, private parks and resorts, environmental philanthropy, and a reverence for the spiritual, therapeutic, and healing tonic

of the great outdoors. Furthermore, Farrell points out that the ultra-wealthy "use nature and rural people as a vehicle for personal transformation, creating versions of themselves they view as more authentic, virtuous, and community minded." This is what I describe as the cooptation of place whereby the ultra-wealthy use their status and power to "buy into the idea and experience of primordial America that offers salvation from the careerist rat-race and the moral temptations of high society where life is simpler, and the honest rural values of the dusty cowboy, noble native, and nature-loving bohemian prevail." By performing the social conversion from hard-charging, beau monde urbanite to rustic, noble, simple, communal, wild, and authentic mountainite, the ultra-wealthy use place to recreate themselves. In turn,

> love for nature and rural people can create a thick veneer that helps to morally justify vast natural resource consumption, romanticize the ugly reality of rural hardship as an idyllic choice…deliberately conceal outward indicators of socioeconomic inequities, gain rewards for trivial acts of individual charity and selective environmentalism that hide patterns of structural harm, alleviate personal guilt, and ultimately disguise and foreclose the need for economic and political action to address pressing local and global problems (Farrell 2020).

Places are pervasive in their particularities, that is to say the local is the general.

Following Casey's formulation (1996). While mountain towns, as places, do not necessarily do a great job of telling us what a how a region disposes itself, except by contrasts (rural versus mountain, Wyoming versus Jackson, New Mexico versus Santa Fe, Idaho versus Ketchum, the Front Range versus Boulder, the Gunnison Valley versus Crested Butte, etc.), they do discursively anchor how extra-urban space is contested. They also reflect the suite of narratives that have come to characterize the landscapes and histories embedded in them. So, despite my collapsing of mountain towns into structural terms, there exists historically contingent and highly contested threads that reproduce these places and in which exists the kernels of resistance. In the American West, indigenous peoples have imbued these places with meaning, agency, personhood, and spirituality for millennia. After all, the reason these incredible landscapes exist is because indigenous ontologies have

conceptualized the relationship between land, body, and community in a reciprocal life-giving way such that the maintenance of these relationship have yielded great flourishing of the more-than-human world (Dorries 2022). With settler colonialism, mountain geographies became loci on the frontier. They became mines and ranches. They were and are the retreats for the convalescent, havens for artists, home base for alpinists, the domain of dirtbags, hippie colonies, vacation spots for the middle class, and destinations for blue collar Latin American immigrants to start anew. So, it is not as though the super wealthy descended upon a space, creating mountain town places from scratch as they constructed their luxury compounds, rather they are continuously coopting places and remaking them, a process which can be renegotiated.

Skiing and Aspen's Exclusionary Beginnings

Skiing, the activity which helped birth these places, has its own history of cultural distinctiveness. The ideology, termed *Alpine modernism* by historian Andrew Denning (2015), describes how skiing "was at once reflective of the dynamics and velocity of modern times and uniquely suited to counteract the stresses of these very same modern conditions. Individuals seeking meaning and transcendence in a disenchanted world were stifled by the institutions, practices, and mores of modern civilization, which conspired to force individuals into unnatural and unfulfilling modes of existence." Not only did skiing allow the modern (Western) subject to escape the materialistic synthetic concerns of the city, but it also "allowed him to master time and space by neutralizing the dangers of winter and covering great distances, thus reenchanting an increasingly banal and instrumental world by enabling acts of heroic self-assertion." Skiing, then, was used to reassert the modern as an agent of modernity, rather than a passive object subsumed by it.

More than that though, the sport played a key role in the 'heroic' modern ideal which "both reflected and informed the rising popularity of fascism in Europe" (Denning 2015). The *Übermensch* "mastered himself and the world around him through the exercise of his

will." Skiers left behind the harmonious, artistic, romantic identities of their sport and replaced them with self-discipline, using skiing to "overcome the apathy and torpor of modern urban life." Athletes "towered over what Nietzsche derisively termed 'the last man': the apathetic, decadent, overly secure modern individual. Through sport, and especially the test of courage and will in Alpine skiing, moderns could master themselves and achieve heightened powers of body and mind." This ideology remains extremely attractive, especially to the ultra-wealthy who have achieved their position of status by embodying the modern culture of self-improvement, mastery, and domination.

Cycling, triathlon, sailing, golfing, and car racing have similar characteristics and functions within elite society. But it is no coincidence that skiing, which can only be practiced in highly select geographies, has secured the reputation that it maintains. Whole mountains must be built out with infrastructure and patrolled so that skiers can experience the ultimate joys of speeding down the slopes on two, very expensive, engineered planks of laminated wood, fiberglass, and polyethylene, connected to the skier by rigid carbon-fiber boots and bindings. The self-consciously modern veneer, however, has fallen away. As a result of the climate regime and of the placemaking process described above, ski resorts and skiing are now depicted as natural, organic features of the landscape. Moreover, skiing allows so disposed members of the ultra-wealthy class to cultivate high levels of what Farrell (2020) calls 'natural capital'. To experience and associate with nature in the particular way skiing allows, one must have "the right combination of wealth, land, free time, recreation capability, romantic attachment, and gilded environmental concern." These factors, as well as skiing's more rough-around-the-edges projections, make it the ideal recreational activity for authentic re-creation.

The first chair lifts in the world opened in 1936 at Sun Valley, Idaho. Sun Valley was developed by railroad baron Averell Harriman as a marketing ploy for the Union Pacific. Harriman brought out all of Hollywood on his rail line to be seen at the 'St. Moritz of America'. Lake Placid, Stowe, and Squaw Valley, Tahoe all opened in the mid-1930s.

But I find Aspen to be the most instructive historical case study. It opened to the public in 1946, the pet project of Walter Paepcke, a Chicago industrialist. Paepcke 'discovered' the sleepy mining town in the 1940s and immediately bought up the majority of the lots in town for himself and his friends. He did so in secrecy for "he didn't want the development of Aspen to become a land-grab affair for vulgar people" (Allen 1983). Paepcke, himself an ideolog of modernity, wanted Aspen "to be populated…by a 'high type' of person, interested not in commercial exploitation but in tasteful restoration, gracious sociability, and cultural life." He selected individuals to promote for public office in Colorado to pursue this vision. And he invited none other than Walter Gropius, a friend of his, to design a master plan for the town.

Planning, a relatively new institution, had been championed some thirty years earlier, a couple hundred miles south, in the City of Santa Fe. Planning there had been used by influential (pseudo)-anthropologists, conservationists, architects, and affected elite residents to create a truly distinctive place worthy of international reputation and certain forms of capital investment. In 1912, Santa Fe's planning board opined that

> the preservation of the ancient streets, … and structures in and about the city is of the first importance and that these monuments of the first Americans should be preserved intact at almost any cost, that neither climate, healthfulness, pre-historic ruins nor scenery compare in value as an asset to Santa Fe, with these relics of a Romantic history and that it should be the duty of all city officials to guard the old streets against any change that will affect their appearance or alter their character (Tobias & Woodhouse 2001).

The respected architect and city planner William Templeton Johnson added, in 1916, that Santa Fe would best position itself to attract "cultivated and intellectual people," (ibid) if it enforced extremely strong land use controls. So planning, from the outset, was established in the American Mountain West to produce the sort of elite places—mountain towns—this paper is dedicated to interrogating.

At Aspen's town meeting, Gropius presented his long-range planning vision which took into account the city's "traditions, institutions, geography, and climate, and the interests

of its residents," to help realize this place to "the high taste of its sponsor" (Allen 1983). That sponsor, Paepcke, went on to found the Aspen Company, the Aspen Institute, and the Aspen Music Festival, and to capitalize the Aspen Skiing Corporation. The purpose of the Corporation, "like the entire Aspen development," was to "create not so much a financially enriching resort as a refined and somewhat exclusive vacation community that could nonetheless turn a profit." But Paepcke was not content with simply building a resort, instead he sought to ingrain Aspen with the cultural cachet befitting *the best* of mountain towns. Hence, the creation of the Aspen Institute and Aspen Music Festival. The Aspen Institute was committed to "the instruction of people's lives, energies, and leisure." It would be a "champion of high culture against low, of noble man's elegance against the mass man's sloth" (ibid).

That high cultural ideal was built on exclusion. The earliest planning done in Aspen, as we have seen, was meant to construct a certain type of place for a certain type of person. By the 1960s, Aspen had a hippie 'problem'. To rid itself of the undesirable social elements, the city passed a vagrancy ordinance, which led to many instances of harassment and arrests. A comprehensive growth-management plan was also passed, "designed to channel the 'right kind of growth'." The motivation was to prevent the wrong type of development, to keep the undesirable factions of society out, and to "create a housing scarcity that rapidly increased prices and reduced the supply of affordable places to live." So the housing affordability crisis was intentionally designed by Aspen's first growth-management plan to rid the place of those who challenged the uber-wealthy's inclinations and preferences. That exclusive-cum-xenophobic mentality was reinforced in 1999 when the City Council of Aspen "unanimously passed a resolution petitioning the U.S. Congress and the president to restrict the number of immigrants entering the United States…one of their primary reasons for encouraging tougher immigration laws was the purported negative impact of immigrants on the nation's ecosystems" (Park & Pellow 2011). Aspen explicitly stated what the place was all about by passing that resolution and its growth management plan.

Scholars Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Pellow (2011) interpret these actions, preserving the quality of life for a select few in privileged places, as environmental racism at work. They reveal "the disconnection between the way of life in a place like Aspen, and the social and environmental relationships that make that lifestyle possible." The Aspen Institute amplifies the ideology under the veneer of expertise and progress. The Aspen Logic "suggests that social change occurs only from the top down," which when it comes to nature, "suggests that in order to be a true environmentalist, one must be a millionaire or billionaire." By writing the rules and defining the space for environmentalism, environmental politics become "a politics of the rich and comfortable that claims progressive ideals. Mainstream environmentalism thus becomes entirely consistent with—and a close cousin of—nativism and racially exclusionary politics."

The gaze of the Aspen Institute falls upon the problem 'hot spots' in society, diverting attention away from the actions of the wealthy and the behavior of capital. This obfuscates the way that class, race, and place interact to create urban and rural poverty and environmental destruction. Park and Pellow (2011) argue that "to understand the ugliness of racism and nativism, we need to go to Aspen." We need to "turn our eyes toward the people and institutions that create poverty and environmental destruction in the first place: those places on the earth where the economically wealthy, the politically powerful, and the racially dominant live, work, and play." Since what passes for environmentalism in the white tents and elegant residences of Aspen is really a mask for power and privilege.

Jackson's Inequality Problem and the Pervasiveness of Elite Capture

Teton County, where Aspen's more rugged cousin Jackson can be found, is far and away the richest and most unequal county in the country. Surrounded by the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, 97 percent of the county's land is federally owned and around one third of private property has been placed under conservation easements (Greenwood Mapping). The charismatic fauna (wolves, moose, grizzlies, mountain lions)

and the pristine landscape of lakes, forests, and summits are therefore only accessible to the individuals who are wealthy enough to own land in Jackson. The cost of lodging, the lack of campgrounds, and the passing of no-parking ordinances has meant that visiting is no longer tenable for many. Teton County's mean per-capita income was $318,297 in 2021, while its median per-capita income was around $55,000 (Thuermer Jr. 2022). Bozeman, West Yellowstone, Big Sky, and even Livingston, Montana have suffered similar fates nearby. Justin Farrell (2020) writes that "perhaps nowhere else on the planet are these issues," of wealth concentration and inequality and their effects, "seen in sharper relief than in Teton County, which is an ideal real-life social laboratory for research into these puzzles because of its nation-leading wealth and inequality, as well as its location in what is arguably the epicenter of American environmentalism." There is much to learn there.

Teton County's land itself has become enormously valuable due to the conditions of real and artificially produced scarcity. The median home price in Teton County topped out at $4 million in early 2022 (Sotheby's 2022), while the statewide average was around $325,000 (Zillow 2022). Purchasing land and placing it in an easement yields "sometimes millions of dollars in deductions from federal income taxes" (Farrell 2020). Conservation then is used to accumulate capital, enclose land, and enhance social prestige. Land under an easement becomes an instrument for "cumulative advantage," whereby "people who reap the million-dollar tax deductions are those who had the economic capital to purchase the land in the first place." This conservation-cum-accumulation strategy is married with a similar xenophobic exclusionary local politics witnessed in Aspen.

Politically active 'residents' explicitly try to preempt poor people, lowly folks, from upending the paradise they have constructed, or coopted rather. They have passed ordinances which effectively ban development of what is considered lower-quality units which would damage property values, ruin the aesthetic value and 'community character' of the town, and invite in the wrong sorts of people. These local policies present a huge contradiction in that those espousing them have made their fortunes, for the most part, on the

backs of hyper growth-oriented industries, free market financial policies, and the opening up of oil and gas wells everywhere and anywhere. The ultra-wealthy, then, have used the land in Teton County, and the politics governing it, to reshape the place to match their material and social expectations.

In a revealing episode during the early days of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic, the Town of Crested Butte, "directed all visitors, tourists and part-time residents to leave, explicitly banning non-resident property owners" (Bowlin 2021). This was meant to free up health and safety resources—ambulances and hospital beds—for those who had no alternative but to stay in the remote Gunnison Valley. The implicated 'part-time' residents, largely wealthy Texans, were furious. The Texas Attorney General, whose buddies and campaign donors were some of these aggrieved subjects, was phoned. Then, the Texans created a political action committee, or super PAC, to oust the county commissioners responsible for the non-resident ban. Perhaps, as an aside, it is no coincidence that the Kochs'—very successful right-wing organizers and the paradigmatic billionaire brothers—own one of their favorite retreats in the area. Nonetheless, the quotes retrieved by the High Country News journalist Nick Bowlin are revealing.

In response to the ban, the group of second-home owners who refused to leave cited the entitlement of the less-fortunate permanent residents, calling them "irresponsible, non-tax-paying, bored children who will never plant roots here successfully," and jealous "takers". The second-home owners challenged the depiction of themselves as rich, since they consider themselves to be *very* hardworking, in contrast to their 'lazy' neighbors. Moreover, the way they see it, "our money supports all of the people in the valley…where is the appreciation and gratitude for the decades of generosity?" It was due to the generosity and goodwill of the second-home owners that the working poor and the entitled ski bums got to have a life in the first place, they asserted. "People who rely on others for their livelihoods," one second-home owner wrote, "should not bite the hand that feeds them." These same folks were besides themselves, indignant, after a George Floyd protest that

summer. Their secluded escape was so challenged by the threat of racial reckoning that they felt the need to demonstrate their revulsion.

That attitude permeates the housing market as well. Most owners are perfectly content to leave their house maintained professionally during the 50 weeks of the year they are absent. Renting to a local would endanger the fine furnishings and art hanging on the walls (Minor 2020). Leasing units out as short-term rentals (STRs) has become much more attractive to owners, since the potential returns are absolutely enormous. So attractive that many of the long-term rental units in places like Crested Butte have been flipped to short-term or just to new single-family units. In fact, the housing crisis has become so acute since the early days of the Pandemic and subsequent 'Zoom Boom', that many restaurants and local businesses have gone under, short of staff. The 'Zoom Boom' refers to the period of 2020 where white-collar workers, usually in the technology or finance sectors, switched to working remotely using softwares such as Zoom and Slack. Local policy measures that are considered progressive have included the opening up of certain parking lots and public parks for workers to use to live in their cars in. Other measures have been to more generously grant permits for affordable housing projects or offering homeowners cash incentives to lease to locals. Usually, however, these projects are spearheaded by the ski resort which then places strict conditions for which employees are granted access to the units.

Yet, for the ultra-wealthy owners of land in mountain towns, their guilt over the social crises around them is assuaged by a renewed prioritization of nature. Nature, the ultimate "purifier, a source of goodness, and a protector from the shallow allure of crass materialism," provides a "more predictable return on charitable investment'' than does dealing with "human and social services issues" (Farrell 2020). For those are seen as corrupted, political, inauthentic, too-close-to-home, and decidedly uncomfortable. Nobody escaped to paradise to have to think about misery. In the first place, the remoteness of mountain environs, "combined with their pristine natural environment, seems to *transform* poverty into something very different," becoming "synonymous with the simplicity, purity,

and ruggedness of nature," as opposed to the unsavory poverty found in the city. Indeed, poverty itself is seen as a way to escape the moral quandaries of wealth and the city. These notions of poverty are, of course, wrapped up with deep racial animus. The fantastical working poor character of the mountains is the ski bum, the white "romanticized scapegoat," used to "justify great wealth and great wealth inequality, and ultimately, to obscure the real face of people struggling in poverty." For most of the working poor in any of these places, outside of New England, are immigrants from Latin America. Efforts to accommodate the working poor and provide affordable housing would invariably tarnish the pristine environment in the eyes of 'residents', so it goes.

I have traced how mountain towns were produced as peculiar spaces under modernity and how they have become important features of uneven accumulation since the neoliberal turn. They are the places where inequality and nature intersect to create a glaring form of environmental racism and eco-apartheid, indicative of broader global socio-economic trends. Where the ultra-wealthy go, I argue—to recreate themselves, reimbue their lives with a sense of authenticity, multiply their wealth in secrecy, obtain a virtuous reputation, and go about their lives without the scrutiny afforded to them or the contradictions presented to them in the city—is key to understanding how to confront the conditions that have led to such inequality and socio-spatial stratification in the first place.

This paper will dive further into the cultural and political role real estate and property have come to play in the construction of place in mountain towns. It will further flesh out the historical and social conditions that have yielded the reality experienced in alpine environments and mountain towns today. Then, it will analyze the shocking data on housing and land use in mountain towns, connecting the material reality of exorbitant prices with the experience of place and community. The paper will analyze steps towns have taken to address the housing and inequality crises, the recommendations official authorities have made to make more progress in that domain, and the progressive alternatives posited by the grassroots organizations that have begun to pop up in certain towns. Finally, the paper will

take a step back to help renegotiate the terms on which housing works in mountain towns, deciphering lessons that can be integrated in contemporary planning considerations across America's diverse communities.

Housing as Property

Housing has, since the neoliberal turn, come to play an integral role in global capital's circulation. As a store of value, housing furnishes means of funding effective demand when other sources dry up. Furthermore, part and parcel of Harvey's theory of capital switching and the second order process of capital accumulation, housing constitutes a fix for the overaccumulation in the primary production circuit. As a result, housing plays an outsized role in fostering economic growth. More fundamentally,

> the ideology of housing today epitomizes capitalist ideology more generally, inasmuch as private property ownership, market allocation mechanisms and accumulation strategies are decisively privileged…housing not only epitomizes but buttresses that wider capitalist ideology: it is in and through housing that much of the political work of reproducing and reinforcing the ideology of capital is performed (Aalbers 2016).

Consequentially, housing's value as a commodity far surpasses its use value in socio-economic terms. It becomes a commodified investment, today freely floating in global markets. This tension between commodity and the basic requirement for housing for reproduction yields the following condition: "No other commodity is as important for organizing citizenship, work, identities, solidarities, and politics," for commodifying housing means that "living space is distributed based on the ability to pay and provided to the extent that it produces a profit" (Madden & Marcuse 2016). Pursuant to its commodification under capitalism's ideology, a permanent crisis of housing smolders, growing hotter and ever brighter.

This rise of what Samuel Stein calls the 'real estate state,' "a political formation in which real estate capital has inordinate influence over the shape of our cities, the parameters of our politics and the lives we lead," (2019) has had a direct and profound effect on mountain towns. Stein observes that the real estate state is "most firmly grafted onto municipal governments…because that is where much of the capitalist state's physical planning is done." The planning profession's alleged agenda of safeguarding residents' best interests has been, if not eclipsed, then certainly held in contradictory tension with the

prerogative of inflating real estate values. Enhancing the municipality's attractiveness to investors puts a town on the map and, crucially, tends to yield higher property tax revenues. This is seen as the only way to improve conditions in the public sphere given the chronic austerity politics on the federal level, the near-complete capture of regulators by the real estate lobby (Stein 2019), and the economic primacy of the real estate industry itself in relation to still vanishing productive sectors like manufacturing, resource extraction, land management, public works, agriculture, and so on. As a general rule, then, good planning often results in gentrification, "the dispossession of those who cannot pay" and in displacement.

Under the Reagan administration, not only was private capital and the real estate industry released from strict oversight to take dominion over the country's towns and cities, but the administration also dismantled many of the housing protections that had been won by prior progressive movements. It "ended tax policies that incentivized private investments in low-income housing, cut back on public housing tax benefits, decreased the amount of federal-government-assisted housing, and slashed funding for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development" (Chattoo et al. 2021). The housing crisis then is driven by three main public policy directions: high rates of poverty and inequality, weak government regulation, and the real estate industry and private capital's penchant for gentrification.

As presently structured, no non-profit or municipal government has the tools to change the course of these fundamental policy failures (Chattoo et al. 2021). Politically, moreover, progressive housing initiatives tend to fall through because actors concerned about housing justice—whether municipal employees, politicians, or non-profit workers—benefit from rising housing costs even if they do not condone the resulting displacement. They have a vested interest in homeownership. After all, for the non-ultra-wealthy, assets wrapped up in housing represents a large portion of one's wealth and financial security. "It is thus impossible to explain growing race and class inequality…without taking housing

tenure and asset-based wealth into consideration, including on the left of the political spectrum" (Greenberg 2021). This paper will conclude with a series of insights and suggestions that can be used to renegotiate the terms of housing, to make bigger steps in rectifying the untenable housing crisis. Suffice it to say that the tools planners and housing activists are working with are very blunt and often contradictory given present structural conditions.

Mountain Towns

Skiing as a mass-participation sport, distinct culture, and form of interacting with the environment really got its start in the mid-20th century. Veterans of The 10th Mountain Division, returning triumphant from the Apennines and Italian Alps, became America's ski heroes. They were both expert consultants and public relations figureheads. The 10th Mountain Division was made legendary for its training in Colorado's rugged backcountry, where modern ski touring and avalanche navigation techniques were developed in the 1940s. After the War, many of these charismatic soldiers with ski mountaineering experience and cultural cache went on to become pioneers in ski area development back Stateside. Before long, the ranks of skiers "exploded" from half a million "in 1956 to three million over the next decade. During the '60s and the first half of the '70s, the sport grew at a rate of fifteen percent a year…between 1960 and 1965, 386 new ski resorts sprung up across the country" (Hansman 2021). Almost immediately, during the 1960s, the industry shifted its attention from the slopes to the town. Condos were developed to cater to the middle classes who had gained vacation time. Real estate promised to rake in far greater returns to the resort and aligned developers than lift passes ever could. "Second homes and rental real estate became a major planning play" (ibid).

During the 1970s as that middle class began to crumble, skiing's popularity plateaued. "US skier visits have been in the 50-million-a-year range since…1978" (Hansman 2021). With stagnant growth, the priorities of resorts and the towns they inhabited began to concentrate even more heavily on real estate investment and catering to elite visitors. According to Hansman (2021), "mountain management largely shifted from 10th Mountain Division veterans, to real estate developers with MBAs." Resorts began to consolidate into the corporate monopolies we encounter today and "by 1982, when Beaver Creek and Deer Valley—the last big destination resorts—were built, they were fully designed to cater to high-dollar, out-of-town visitors…Skiing became synonymous with luxury" (Hansman 2021). It was in the 1980s, then, that towns took on their present form

with a romanticized group of subaltern ski bums working to make rich people's visits as splendid as possible.

A starkly stratified society has been ingrained and deepened in the subsequent decades, creating the particular typology of place that I am referring to with the moniker 'mountain town'. A peculiar place-based class culture has emerged since "social class deeply informs both individual and collective ways of doing and understanding…these elements 'lash up' and become institutionalized, which then shapes class interests and the distribution of life chances" (Stuber 2021). That institutionalization has reproduced the deeply unequal built environment, housing market, economy, and levels of access to the outdoors experienced in mountain towns. However, "symbolic resources like cultural capital do not perfectly align with financial capital, giving them an autonomous and powerful role in place-making." Here, sociologist Jenny Stuber is invoking that mythical ski bum once again. A freeride skier who wins a major international competition or films a viral backcountry ski video highlighting the beauty of the Elk Mountains, or say, the Alaska Range, might be afforded a great deal of cultural capital which brings them not just respect, but also potential employment, ambassadorship at the resort, a rare housing lead, or other material resources and opportunities. This glimmer of upward mobility has, arguably and amongst other factors that will be addressed later on, prevented a certain amount of class solidarity and political engagement amongst the working classes and 'ski bums' in mountain towns because many believe that if only they hit that epic jump, climb that first ascent, or win that race, they too can gain a permanent foothold in a place such as Aspen.

Despite how I characterized mountain towns as homogeneous in the introduction, important differences, real or imagined, do exist. Though the workings of real estate capital and inequality work largely the same, Aspenites for instance frequently invoke a sense of authenticity that their town embodies due to its history and culture. Unlike their neighbor on the northern side of the Sawatch Range, Vail (considered "fake and corporate"), Aspen grew up around a thriving mining industry in the late 19th century Victorian era and, after the

aforementioned developments by Walter Paepcke, became a counter-culture hotbed in the 1960s. Characters like Hunter S. Thompson and the hippies of the 1970s shaped the town's place narrative. Aspenites like to think of their town as a 'real', non-corporate, authentic town shaped by an intermixing of "celebrities, artists, and renegades," (Stuber 2021) who all comingled in the town's formative years.

Though they may be worth many millions, homeowners position themselves in that lineage of 'quirky locals' who made Aspen the Aspen it is today. Despite its retail being dominated by luxury boutiques and its crowd overwhelmed by jet-setting tourists, Aspen is still considered, by the influential members of its society, 'cool'. Furthermore, "the word *community* emerges time and again in conversations with locals, explaining why they chose to make Aspen their home" (Stuber 2021). An interesting discourse has emerged in Aspen where planning has been aimed at maintaining the 'funky character' and 'coolness' and 'lights-on' vibrancy of the community. In other words, the place making discourse is focused on looking after the authentic built environment and locals and *not* giving way to real estate capital and ultra-wealthy multiple homeowners.

Yet, it is no coincidence that the average single-family home price in downtown Aspen reached $12.6 million in April of 2021 (Blevins 2021, May 11). And it is no coincidence that the common saying that in Aspen people either have three houses or three jobs rings true. In Aspen especially, these locals who may not be Goldman Sachs executives (in other words, Aspen's working and middle classes) still have the economic and human capital that comes with an Ivy League or liberal arts education and, for example, the social capital of inheriting an Aspen condo from their grandparents (Stuber 2021). These realities corroborate Samuel Stein's theory of the real estate state's ascendency. It is not despite, but rather because of Aspen's 'progressive' municipal politics, social orientation, and emphasis on community that it has been rendered so unaffordable and one of the most wealthy and unequal places in the country (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2022).

Yet, contrasting with Justin Farrell's critique of class mixing discourses in Jackson, Wyoming, Jenny Stuber finds that in Aspen, the working locals repeat the same 'classless' down-to-earth sentiments about their community as the super wealthy homeowners. Beyond the peculiarities of Aspen's history and mystique and other contingencies, it may be the case that the town's relatively progressive tax, social spending, housing, and planning policies (which will be delineated later on) have made it so that working Aspenites experience a higher quality-of-life than their counterparts in Jackson, despite having similar economic prospects. This would be in keeping with Armstrong and Stedman's (2013) findings—in four similarly oriented natural amenity rich communities in upstate New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine—that "as residents' overall assessments of their communities are more positive, they are less likely to perceive culture clash among permanent and second homeowners." Therefore, there may be a role for local governments to play, by making available more public goods and doing better planning, to improve community cohesion and quality of life for all residents without actually effecting material conditions. Obviously though, if a contented working class Aspenite's landlord decides to double the rent or flip the unit to an STR, it does not so much matter what their quality-of-life measure is since they will no longer be a resident, or they will have to scramble to find someplace else to live while their name sits on the waitlist for a deed-restricted lease.

Belonging, Place, and Class Relations

To understand the class relations in mountain towns, it is important to contextualize them within an analytical framework of belonging. Mountain towns present an environment of extreme scarcity due to geographical obstacles to development and the socio-political prioritization of open and 'wild' spaces. Many thousands more people desire to live in these places than they have a capacity to accommodate, irrespective of the high rates of housing unit vacancy and the unaffordable housing markets found there. Claims to place are often premised on notions of authenticity and belonging. Farrell (2020) finds that many of the

ultra-wealthy residents of Jackson couch their claims to place using an economic and moral rationality. Using the discourse of deservedness and the foregrounding the primacy of property, they attribute their place claims to the hard work in the urban world that has afforded them such abundant resources to allow them to purchase access to the mountains. Through the mechanisms of the real estate state, I argue, the place claims of the ultra-wealthy attain an ascendant political position, overwhelming those of other community members. But other claims exist and have come into conflict with one another in different ways in different mountain towns. These contestations "not only highlight the explicit normative values and assumptions that define particular places…but also surface the often implicit meanings previously disregarded, as the established orthodoxies of these places are challenged" (Ingalls et al. 2019).

In mountain towns, claims that challenge those of the ultra-wealthy owners of real estate include those by Native Americans, settlers who came before the development of ski resorts, recreationalists, and environmentalists, as well as those involved in resource extraction commonly known as the 'white working class'. In places such as Santa Fe, Taos, Flagstaff, and Lander, the indigenous claims hold more political weight than in a place like Vail. Communities involved in resource extraction have more powerful claims to places like Bozeman (ranching), Leadville and Moab (mining), New Hampshire's North Country (timber), and Asheville (paper). The Forest Service is an important stakeholder in many of America's mountain towns. Meanwhile, in Northern New Mexico, the Forest Service serves "as the primary arm of the state, enforcing game laws, grazing restrictions, and timber and fuelwood harvesting regulations" (Kosek 2006). The Forest Service dictates who can access land and to what ends. The orientation of federal land management to 'the greatest good for the greatest number' for the 'overall good of the Nation' under Gifford Pinchot's leadership infused public policy with an economic rationality that has had an outsized influence over the regional economy and mountain town communities. In the case of Northern New Mexico, marrying colonial racial prejudice and the new scientific forestry ethic, the Hispano

community and their relationship to land was deemed antithetical to the purposes of the Nation. Local communities were alienated from their traditional means of subsistence. Land was expropriated, grazing and hunting rights expunged, forests clearcut, DDT sprayed, and recreation for white affluent visitors and new residents privileged. Resorts, real estate development, tourism, and conservation are all important parts of this legacy. So power either uses or circumnavigates conflicting place claims to its advantage, diminishing their amplitude in the process.

The myriad place claims to the mountains come into conflict with one another to such a degree that building solidarity across communities has become exceptionally difficult. In Northern New Mexico, for instance, disputes between ranchers, Hispanic and indigenous communities, environmentalists, federal bureaucrats, and wealthy landowners are very intense. It takes a skilled mediator to help resolve these conflicts and turn the conversation into a productive one (Moore 2013). Still, when access to the mountains is granted either to the highest bidder or to the workers servicing that highest bidder, claims to place belonginess grant alternative communities little standing, no matter how authentic or fervent. How groups as disparate as recreationalists, workers in the ski and hospitality industries, indigenous communities, federal bureaucrats, local governments, and environmentalists can form bonds of solidarity to democratize access to the mountains despite their priorities and political orientations so often butting heads is a question that will be explored towards the end of this paper. Suffice it to say, as long as solidarity does not exist among them, the place claims of the super wealthy and their tools of capital will always win out and a smaller and smaller fraction of society will have access to the mountains, which represents a privatization of the more-than-human-world as well as a privatization of the non-city.

Simultaneously, a discourse of resource dependency has become disseminated among working class local residents that ensures minimal recrimination is directed towards the real estate state and the ultra-wealthy. Local residents rely on a cultural frame to “make

sense of their broader economic circumstances…that situates second homeowners as central to the tourism economy and as the primary resource that will ensure the town's economic sustainability" (Stiman 2020). A confluence of conditions has made this framing of the role of the second homeowner the "more readily accessible, and permissible" one. The discourse both legitimizes and encourages "the in-migration of second homeowners, justifying their inclusion in the community" (ibid). These findings are largely consistent with the observations of Farrell (2020), Park & Pellow (2011), and Stuber (2021) in Aspen and Jackson. There, despite the precarity of eking out a living and finding housing in these places, interlocutors generally express a sense of gratitude towards the super wealthy patrons of local businesses or donors to local organizations, and they express a certain resignation to the extreme conditions of inequality. With the rise of housing justice organizations in mountain towns, however, it appears sentiments are changing

Yet, the futures of mountain towns envisioned by second homeowners and by local residents are not the same. For instance, Stokowski et al. (2021), describing the divergent imaginaries relayed by distinct groups in Burke, VT, write that "permanent residents' emphasis on the imaginaries of idyllic rurality (in the form of pastoral agricultural landscapes and historic rural villages) stood in counterpoint to second homeowners' focus on imaginaries related to an idealized picture of Burke as an old-fashioned, charming, beautiful place, and to community leaders' insistence on new imaginaries of place characterized by carefully planned development of sports, recreation, and wellness amenities." Crucially, these imaginaries place the groups who voiced them squarely within the future of Burke. But devoting more and more real estate to out-of-town buyers, devoting more land to real estate capital, and pursuing luxury tourism development necessarily results in exclusion and displacement for those without the capital to find a place within this shiny new world. For, beyond the material conditions of scarcity and luxury inherent in the development model, a modern and diverse local community does not fit with second homeowners' imaginary of an idealized rurality.

Therefore, as the second homeowners wield much greater power than their working-class counterparts, those residents who do not fit the idealized rural mode will be marginalized. This marginalization takes place along the lines of race, gender, educational status, social capital, and economic class. One notices this dynamic in play in Vail and Breckenridge, for instance, where the majority of Spanish-speaking service workers live to the west in Eagle County and the white resort workers live four to a room in Dillon or Frisco or Avon, down valley but much closer to the resort. The latter groups, the ski bums, can be found walking around town or grabbing drinks at the bar, but one rarely sees the Spanish-speaking community members in public spaces, especially Latinx women. Similarly, the wealthy older, retired long-term residents and second homeowners of the Wood River Valley live in Sun Valley, while their younger wealthy counterparts and children live in Ketchum. The mostly white residents who work in the tourism, hospitality, and the NGO industries live 20 minutes south in Hailey. Even further down valley, past the airport, live the Spanish-speaking service and manual labor workers and the blue-collar white extractive industry workers. The resources available to each of these communities spans a stratification just as broad as their wealth differentiation. A more in-depth discussion of community cohesion will follow in the data analysis section.

The preferences of second homeowners are evident in mountain towns' local politics of exclusion. In Washington State, "nature plays a strong role in second homeowners' vision of the rural idyll, for which they have the cultural, political, and economic capital to force to the top of the public agenda" (Kondo et al. 2020). Second homeowners leverage state regulation to "keep the landscape as it was at the moment of purchase," a phenomenon known as 'last settler syndrome.' To keep land from being developed, second homeowners advocate for the use of "lot-size zoning regulations, conservation easements and land trusts…in order to preserve their sense of privacy and isolation, to protect the environment, and to avoid or reduce environmental disamenities" (ibid). Park & Pellow (2011) and Farrell (2020) have parsed out the eco-fascist

undercurrents of such exclusionary tools used on the behalf of the super wealthy. And, of course, that suite of land use restrictions and conservation instruments significantly drives up real estate values and, in the case of conservation easements, can be used as tax write-offs. While protecting the rural landscapes is a laudable goal, it is not justifiable when it is used to exclude others, entrench privilege, and assuage the guilt the comes with owning capital gained by destroying environments and communities elsewhere.

There is an additional contradiction that arises when the ultra-wealthy and real estate capital remake mountain towns and, by extension, mountain landscapes. Theorizing on urbanization in the Swiss Alps, Meili (2014) writes that "tourism seems to have abandoned the tacit agreement long shared by nearly all of the activities in the mountains: the pathos of alpine nature as an alternative world to the city." Physically and symbolically, the city has been brought to the mountains to cater to the second homeowner. For though they profess a desire to escape, the development of private luxury vacation homes represents a colonization of the non-city by private capital. "The decline of the hotel has an almost programmatic dimension to it," writes Meili (2014), for "the year-round availability of a private (vacation) home requires no significant change from everyday life; there is no need to adapt to the mountains themselves nor to any other social structure." The mountains now represent a sort of consumable good or pleasant artistic wallpaper which high society uses as a backdrop, rather than an alternative world replete with deeply human and visceral non-commodified experiences, remaining independent from networks of capital accumulation. Meili (2014) eloquently evokes the reconstruction of the alpine:

> The romantic construction of an 'expedition' into the alternative world of alpine nature has been abandoned in favor of the expansion of the city…The traces of the 'sublime' in the perception of nature have given way to the pleasure of sheer topography or sculpture: the framed valleys and basins convey to the visitor from the flatlands the impressive, even pathos-laden dimensions of spacious nature and the immensity of its sometimes bizarre constructions—but now no longer steeped in the evocative, metaphysical atmosphere that once characterized city dwellers' descriptions. Valley topographies have become the mountainous setting of an oversized, urban scale: a kind of metropolitan staffage, comparable to the silhouette of

> Manhattan, the nocturnal sea of lights in Los Angeles, or Lake Zurich on a crystal-clear evening.

As capital descends on mountain towns as a new geography for the storage and accumulation of value, the meaning, physical landscape, and community of mountain towns are changing as those people, places, and meanings that do not play a role in the circuit of capital accumulation or that do not conform to the ultra-wealthy's preferences are swept aside. Beyond the inherent workings of capital and the socio-cultural meaning attributed to the mountains since the Enlightenment that has made them an intriguing place to discover, the trends of inequality and gentrification facing mountain towns also represents a condemnation of the capitalist city. It is a failure of the city that so many people feel like they belong more in mountain towns which have much greater public amenities, a cleaner environment, idealized closer-knit communities, what is considered a more organic economy, and importantly a certain degree of classlessness, than in the places they come from. Even for those who can afford the best amenities of the city and do not ski, embark on long tours on foot, or climb, mountain towns have become a preferred place to conduct private and public life.

There is an inherent attraction to what are known as amenity-rich locations in the language of the planner, but the planning literature has long prioritized the city as the place of greatest desirability and social, cultural, and economic activity. But unlike in most cities, in mountain towns, the externalities of capitalist growth are hidden. Inequality can be camouflaged or rendered unimportant in daily life there. The language relating to the mountains and outdoors and being active is seen as politically neutral which recasts the daily experience of living in mountain towns as pure and removed from class structure. In other words, whereas class distinction and the externalities of capitalist growth and inequality are inescapable in the city, the mountains serve to placate them. Indeed, snow conditions, the quality of the season, and the future prospects of the 'mountain' or 'resort' which all parties act as though they are deeply invested in, become the shared economic groundworks and

primary discourse for the entire town. In mountain towns, one can pretend that there is no globalized capitalist economy, for the only currency that matters is the snow and the stoke. Yet, to maintain this moral paradise for the super wealthy, certain factions of society must be excluded or marginalized. This is where the politics of housing come into play.

The Data

To get a sense of the extreme conditions that exist in mountain towns, a set of observational qualitative and quantitative data are presented and analyzed. The data was pulled from census bureau, real estate organization, planning agency, not-for-profit housing, and journalistic sources pertaining to the following categories: rental vacancy rates, rents, real estate values, median home sale prices, second homes, the non-local population, housing inventory, the quality of the housing stock, demography of the population, STRs, housing unit needs, community cohesion, and class, race, and generational-based inequality. The data does not represent an exhaustive survey, but they are robust enough to portray what the material and social conditions are in these places and tell the story of how the process of planetary urbanization plays out in some of the most remote, yet exclusive, places in the country.

Property Values

First, to illustrate the inordinate influence real estate capital increasingly has in these remote places, a review of real estate transactions and property values. In 2020, $15 billion changed hands in property deals in eight resort counties in Colorado. This represented a 61% increase over 2019's numbers despite a three-month shutdown of all real estate activity due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Pitkin County, home to Aspen, logged 106 deals for more than $10 million each in 2020 (Blevins May 2021). The median price of a single-family home (SFH) in Pitkin County rose 97.5% from 2019 to 2021 to $5.75 million in value (Svaldi 2022). In 2021, Pitkin County's mean SFH listing price was $7.9 million. That number was $3.35 million in San Miguel County where Telluride is located, and $2.26 million in Eagle County which includes Vail (Blevins March 2022). Meanwhile, in downtown Aspen, the average price for a SFH reached $12.6 million in April 2021 (Blevins 2021, May). In Telluride, the median listing price stands at $3.65 million as of September 2022, a 41.9%

year-over-year increase from an already high $1.46 million pre-pandemic median listing price.

For reference's sake, Nantucket's median listing price was $3.7 million and Los Altos' was $4 million during September 2022, but the Pandemic's 'Zoom Boom' and real estate boom did not affect them nearly as much with a 23.4% year-over-year boost for Nantucket, and a 8% upward trend for Lost Altos (Realtor.com 2022). Interestingly, coastal destinations proximate to America's newest technology capital, Seattle, experienced a boom similar to that of Telluride. Bainbridge Island, Washington, a suburban island a short ferry ride across the Sound from Seattle, experienced a 46.3% year-over-year increase in median listing price to $1.4 million. Cannon Beach, Oregon's listing price swung up 33.4% to $1.2 million. Finally, speculative destinations for billionaires have seen enormous investment. For instance, Jeff Bezos recently spent $78 million on a house close to Paia, Hawaii where the median listing price hit $4.3 million in September 2022, a 169.3% year-over-year increase (Realtor.com 2022). In the Pacific Northwest's burgeoning mountain towns, a similar story can be told. In Washington's Methow Valley where the town of Winthrop is located, the median home sale price in 2020 was up 56% from that of 2016 (Methow Housing Trust 2021). In Whitefish, Montana, the gateway town to Glacier National Park's western entrance and home to a popular ski resort, the median home price also doubled from pre-pandemic levels (Tognini 2022).

To Colorado's south, over 18% of New Mexico's gross state product in 2020 came from the real estate industry, a value of around $18 billion that year, making it one of the state's most important industries. Interestingly, Santa Fe County, the original elite destination cultivated by the planning discipline, has not experienced a dramatic influx in real estate capital in recent years, perhaps because the market is already saturated, is no longer in vogue, or perhaps because of political conditions in New Mexico. Teton County, meanwhile, has experienced a dramatic influx. In November 2021, the median listing price of a SFH there was $4.4 million at an average of $1,602 per square foot. Median SFH prices

jumped 44% there from 2019 to 2020 alone, according to the Teton County's 2022 Housing Needs Assessment (Teton County 2022). In North Lake Tahoe, the median price of a home has vaulted to $1.125 million, a 129% increase from before the pandemic. Similarly, in nearby Truckee, those real estate numbers were $1.083 million for a median home price in fall of 2021, a 44% jump from the start of the Pandemic (Brown 2021).

Seasonal Occupancy

This boom in real estate prices is primarily derived from seasonally occupied second home sales. Really, this is housing acting as a luxury asset class. Once the Pandemic-fueled stock market crash (and unpredictable rebound) lead wealthy individuals to look towards the second circuit of capital accumulation for their own accumulation strategy and luxury real estate in mountain towns has had solid returns since the demand for such exclusive assets rose in the 1980s. Plus, during the Pandemic, the investment offered an attractive escape mechanism from the supposedly higher COVID-19 risk areas wealthy buyers came from. The proliferation of seasonally occupied second homes and the vacancy rates in mountain towns are astounding. In Mazama, Washington, 78% of the housing stock is seasonally occupied (Methow Housing Trust 2021). 89% of Breckenridge's housing stock is non-resident occupied (Singer 2022). That number is 74% in the Town of Mammoth Lakes (Mono County Grand Jury 2021). Only 50% of housing units in the huge area made up of Eagle, Pitkin, Summit, Routt, Grand, and San Miguel counties, Colorado, are occupied by full-time residents (NWCCOG & CAST 2021). 70% of Ketchum's housing stock is seasonally occupied (Ketchum 2022). 65% of North Tahoe and Truckee's homes are not resident occupied (Brown 2021). There was a 45% unoccupied vacancy rate in Telluride in 2019 (Colorado DOLA). The year-round population is declining in North Elba and Lake Placid in the Adirondacks as well, as units are flipped to vacation homes and real estate investment properties (North Elba & Lake Placid 2020). Mountain towns across the Green and White Mountains, not to mention in the Catskills and Berkshires, are experiencing

similar trends and their corrosive effects on affordability and community cohesion. The one outlier in this story of exploding vacancy rates is Teton County. Not because there are units set-aside for year-round working class locals, but because Wyoming lacks a state income tax, encouraging the super wealthy to claim occupancy and conduct more financial transactions there. 73% of Teton County housing units are, as a result, occupied by resident households, on paper anyway (Teton County 2022).

Crested Butte serves as an instructive case study for how housing vacancy spatially takes form. 36% of Crested Butte's housing units were unoccupied in 2021. But Crested Butte's mobile homes and multifamily residential units were occupied on a full-time basis at a far higher rate than SFHs, duplex units, or accessory dwelling units. However, mobile homes represented a slim share of the housing stock, with SFHs making up the bulk of the housing stock and multifamily houses coming in second in terms of quantity of units. In Crested Butte's North Valley neighborhood, a very similar pattern emerges, with the exception that multifamily residential units are much less likely to be occupied, indicating that STRs or other forms of vacancy are encompassing multifamily houses further from the town center where regulation is less strict (Colorado DOLA 2022). So it can be observed that the unit types that actually house residents are, proportionally, overwhelmingly multifamily and mobile homes which are far less valuable asset types than SFHs.

The trend of outside buyers descending on mountain towns, constituting the bulk of the demand for units there, predates the Pandemic. In 2016, 90% of sales by local homeowners in Vail were to non-residents (HUD 2021). In that wide multi-county area of Colorado mentioned before, 60% of newcomers and 70% of part-time residents work for an employer outside of the county (NWCCOG & CAST 2021). In 2020, 51% of buyers in Pitkin County which encompasses the Roaring Fork Valley, home to Aspen, were from out of state. The highest percentage of non-Roaring Fork Valley buyers came from Texas, followed by Florida, California, and New York (Blevins May 2021). The entire state of Vermont has experienced something similar, driven by its handful of luxury mountain

towns, namely Stowe, Killington, Warren (Sugarbush), Ludlow (Okemo Mountain), and Dover (Mount Snow). In late 2019, 33% of purchases in the state of Vermont were from out-of-state buyers. In October, 2020 that number had risen to 60% of sales. Stowe had 176 sales for a total of $132 million in 2020, a doubling from 2019. Most of these 2020 out-of-state buyers came from Boston and the counties surrounding it, with nearly 1,200 purchases by Massachusetts residents. Over 600 came from Connecticut residents. 368 buyers were from New York City. 127 were from Westchester County and another 223 were from Long Island. 244 out-of-state buyers in 2020 were from Florida (Audette 2021). So the Pandemic conditions only accelerated out-of-state demand for mountain town real estate.

Rents

With the hyper commodification of luxury real estate, there has been a corresponding tightening of the rental market. In Ketchum, the proportion of the housing stock rented out long-term decreased from 31% in 1970 to 10% in 2019. There, nearly half of the housing stock was built between 1970 and 1989 (Ketchum 2022), a common scenario in mountain towns. Most houses in these places were constructed in the 1970s and 80s, as skiing exploded in popularity and the real estate state began its transcendent rise. As land prices and construction costs rose, and as not-in-my-backyard politics set in to protect property values, development became more and more exclusive, tailored to high dollar buyers. Condos became less popular as they grew less affordable for the middle classes and developers looked for higher margins in luxury units. Some building took place during the 1990s and 2000s in Mammoth Lakes, but there has been virtually no new construction in town since the Great Recession (Mammoth Lakes 2019). For that reason and as a result of owners flipping units they previously rented long-term to short-term rentals, rental vacancy rates are extremely low.

Methow Valley has a less than 1% rental vacancy rate (Methow Housing Trust). Teton County also has a less than 1% rate, with approximately a quarter of listings priced at

the $15,000-$25,000 per month range. The average rent in Teton County is $3,469 (Teton County 2022). North Conway, New Hampshire is experiencing a 0.7% rental vacancy rate (Kelly 2022), and Santa Fe, a larger and more economically diverse city that can also be considered a paradigmatic mountain town, has a 3% vacancy rate with an average rent of $1,067, far higher than the statewide average and far out of reach for most residents (Santa Fe Association of REALTORS 2021). During the Pandemic, the multi-county Colorado ski resort area experienced a 20 to 40% rent increase in one year. Rent in Ketchum is only affordable to households earning more than $107,000 a year (Ketchum 2022). As rents increase, locals are priced out and seasonal employees are unable to find a place to live. Facing a dire labor shortage, business owners and second homeowners alike have been forced to reckon with the housing crisis.

Short Term Rentals

Perhaps the primary target these two powerful groups have focused on are short term rentals (STRs). An analysis of online listings in Summit County, Colorado, revealed that 9,800 units are being listing for STR purposes, which accounts for 50% of the entire vacant housing inventory and a third of the entire County's housing inventory. The number of owner-occupied households dropped from 7,600 to 6,400 between 2010 and 2017 in Summit County, while the number of renter-occupied households remained the same (Summit County 2020). This indicates that the number of buyers in search of STR income has risen dramatically. With the rise of STRs, the potential value of the housing unit, especially of a condo, has exploded, since they represent a consistent source of income, not just desirable real estate. A landlord can make as much on STRs in a high season weekend as they could renting long term for an entire month. The number of STRs in the state of Vermont grew from 1,000 in 2015 to 8,000 in 2019. Town after town has concluded that supply and availability of long-term rental units are being constrained by the increasing number of STRs and the increase in home prices (North Elba & Lake Placid 2020).

24% of part-time residents and 13% of new residents lease their homes short-term in the Colorado multi-county resort area studied in the Mountain Migration Report. Whereas only 3% of full-time residents lease their homes short-term. 4% of part-time owners rent their home mid-term, between 1 and 5 months, and barely a handful of part-time owners lease long-term (NWCCOG & CAST 2021). Clearly a cleavage exists between part-time and year-round homeowners in terms of their motives for living in mountain towns, as well as their orientation towards the local community. Since long-term residents wield more political power than their part-time counterparts, the efforts to cap STRs have been widely successful, at least on paper. STRs were already prohibited throughout much of Teton County before STRs became a major political issue. But no active monitoring program exists. The County and municipal governments rely on complaints to locate unpermitted or unlawful STRs which may or may not face fines. While local governments have failed to create a STR inventory, dozens of renters have responded in surveys that they have been forced to move in the past three years due to conversion of their units into STRs. Additionally, property managers and other locals involved directly in housing, have anecdotally reported owners flipping potentially hundreds of units to STRs in the past year (Teton County 2022).

Housing Needs

This paper will delve much more into how towns have responded to the housing crisis shortly, but the other step towns are increasingly taking is to conduct a housing unit needs assessment. These assessments are predicated on encouraging targeted development and programs to house resort workers specifically which is meant to sustain the tourism and real estate economies. Each and every town I investigated has a several hundred-to-thousand housing unit deficit of units to meet its proclaimed overall housing need. In Colorado, Summit and the five surrounding counties mentioned before have a collective gap of 2,400 housing units, with the vast majority of need for renter housing at up to 80% of the area

median income (AMI) (Summit County 2020). The tiny North Elba and Lake Placid communities in the Adirondacks have an estimated housing need for 1,534 workforce and affordable level housing units, namely 929 rental units and 605 owner-occupant units, to meet the area's housing needs (N Elba & Lake Placid). Santa Fe has calculated a shortage of 7,343 rental units in its metropolitan statistical area. Some 5,328 of renter households are already eligible for down payment assistance, but ownership options are obviously highly limited (Santa Fe Housing Report). Ketchum's housing needs assessment estimated that the City needs between 660 and 980 preserved, converted, or new homes in the next ten years to meet demand. Blaine County, where Ketchum is located, needs between 4,700 and 6,400 units (Ketchum 2022), numbers which seem genuinely impossible to attain.

5,300 housing units are needed in the Teton Region to increase the rental supply to a functional level, house the presently homeless, keep up with job growth, and replace retiring employees. This means that 60% of new homes in Teton County, Idaho (across the border from Jackson) and North Lincoln County (south of Jackson), and 80% of homes in Teton County, Wyoming, will need to be priced below market prices to support local residents and employees (Teton County 2022). According to their housing unit needs assessment, the City of Bozeman should be adding 6,000 units in the next five years (Sisson 2021). The Aspen to Snowmass area in Colorado has a 3,000-unit shortfall currently, which is projected to more than double by 2027. There is, however, a surplus of 1,000 housing units in the Aspen to Snowmass area for people making above 160% of the AMI (Roaring Fork Region 2019). In other words, there is no deficit in housing units in mountain towns, there is a deficit in units that can reasonably be afforded by anyone not in the ultra-wealthy class. Indeed, despite the oftentimes price-neutral language around housing needs in these housing unit assessments, empirically it can be concluded that constructing new market-rate housing does not move the dial on affordability or availability. In Summit County, since 2010, the inventory of housing has grown from approximately 29,900 units to 31,400 units, but this is accounted

for by an increase in 2,800 units dedicated to seasonal use, vacant most of the year, and a *decrease* in 1,300 occupied housing units (Summit County 2020).

Discrimination

Not all communities are affected equally by this rental and affordable unit squeeze. Whereas some resort workers (who tend to be whiter) are able to access employee housing and earn relatively high wages, Spanish-speaking residents generally are not. In Colorado's Summit County, 84% of the Spanish-speaking community earn less than 80% of the AMI, compared to 33% of the non-Spanish speaking population. There, the Spanish-speaking renters spend an average of 44% of their income on housing, compared to 21% for non-Spanish speakers. 72% of this population are renters, compared to 31% of non-Spanish speaking locals, and they live in smaller units and more crowded housing situations (Summit County 2020). According to reports from local social services organizations, a large proportion of Jackson's Spanish-speaking population feel like they are illegally kept out of housing and discriminated against for jobs. Recourse is even harder to come by due to many of the community member's immigration status, making it more difficult to claim human services and housing and legal-assistance resources from the government. During the Trump presidency, this precarity and racial bias was exacerbated when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) swept through Jackson nearly every month (Hansman 2021). This discrimination and housing insecurity is widespread. Around a third of Jackson, Mammoth, and Telluride's populations are Spanish-speaking, for instance. Therefore, when imagining the problem in mountain towns, it is not accurate to conjure up the mythical ski bum who would be content to sleep on any surface in any sort of structure if it meant unlimited ski days. No, just as the planetary urbanization process has created huge gulfs of inequality in cities, often along racial lines, mountain towns which are experiencing a parallel vector in the planetary urbanization process are experiencing the same.

The differential effects of the housing crisis also play out along generational lines. Just as the older, Baby Boomer, generation has reaped the majority of the rewards from the country's economic growth, they too benefit most from the housing equation in mountain towns. Between 2001 and 2017, 60% of newcomers to the Greater Roaring Fork Region, where Aspen is located, were over 65. Only 20% of the growth was in the population between 35 and 64. The additional 40% of growth were under 35 (Roaring Fork Region 2019). This younger cohort represents the resort and service industry workers who are bearing the brunt of the housing crisis' effects and, due to the precarity of housing, likely living in town on a transient basis. Despite being a professed 'real' community, the number of families living in Aspen is declining and many of those that remain or have recently arrived are living down valley and are part of the Spanish-speaking community, which is not represented in Aspen's self-narrative. The senior generation however tightens its grip on resources and, as a result, fewer and fewer full-time residents are able to move in. With municipal policies focused on enhancing property values and providing housing for a means tested resort worker population, regional economies are becoming even more segmented and singular (around tourism and real estate), and the number of people wealthy enough to afford access to the mountains shrinks. Furthermore, the cohesion of the community suffers.

Working adults with children who are cost-burdened are more likely to be renters, and are spending, on average, over half of their income on housing in Colorado's Summit County (Summit County 2020). In the Town of Mammoth Lakes, the median income of individual full-time, year-round workers was only $34,341 for women and $42,933 for men according to the United States Census Bureau . The gender pay discrepancy gap having to do with which industry or on what level the jobs are in. Meanwhile, the State of California's median income was $80,440 (Mono County Grand Jury 2021). Ketchum's workforce primarily consists of low- and middle-income households making under $45,355 per year, meaning that the majority pay more than 30% of their pre-tax income on housing costs (Ketchum 2022). So not only are wealthiest residents in mountain towns exceptionally

wealthy, but the non-wealthy residents are, most of the time, less wealthy than the statewide average.

Inequality

In Teton County, Wyoming, the top one percent of earners make 233 times more than the bottom 99% make which represents the highest income disparity of any county in the entire country. Of that reported income, roughly 85% is from investments and only 15% of all income in Teton County comes from wages. More than a third of jobs in Teton County are related to tourism which are more likely to be part-time and low-wage and insecure than jobs in other sectors. As Heather Hansman (2021) describes, "there is world-class art, charity, wildlife, and recreation in Teton County because the wealth brought in philanthropy, but there is also widespread poverty and homelessness." Moreover, in Jackson, Wyoming as in all mountain towns, an increasingly large share of rental units is being filled by non-local workers. These are second home renters or work from home tenants employed in higher paying jobs outside of the area who are willing to shell over many more times the rent local workers are. "The competition and resulting rent increases have been devastating to local workers seeking rentals. Also contributing to rising rents are escalating home values, which in turn increases property taxes and, therefore, rents charged by landlords to cover costs" (Teton County 2022).

Just to move in, renters are required to pay many thousands of dollars up front for first and last months' rent and a security deposit, which is simply unfeasible for workers making far below a sustainable income. After all, car payments which are mandatory in most mountain towns, student loan payments, healthcare costs, and the exorbitant cost of food and services in mountain towns, makes saving nearly impossible. Adding to the stress, units that come onto the market are typically filled within days, if not hours. And "renters fear reporting needed repairs due to concerns of retaliation through rent increases or non-renewal of leases…and landlords have little incentive to make repairs and capital

investments" (Teton County 2022). In the Teton Region, Jackson's housing issues, rising rents and low availability, have infected places far afield. Renters "are now seeking homes further out, such as Pinedale, Wyoming, to the south and Saint Anthony and Ashton, Idaho, to the west. The commute to Jackson is three hours round trip in good weather from these communities" (ibid).

Community Cohesion

Speaking of commuting, mountain towns are increasingly suffering from empty center syndrome as units are left vacant most of the year and long-term rentals are flipped or overpriced. Only 7% of Ketchum's workforce now lives in Ketchum itself, which is down 41% since 2002 (Ketchum 2022). The Aspen to Snowmass area imports an average of 7,500 workers per day, and Glenwood Springs, the town on I-70 down valley, is a net importer of 2,400 workers. According to the Roaring Fork Regional Housing Study (2019), "these cross-commuting patterns are what happens when the 'market is left to its own devices.' That is, the market may be 'taking care of itself,' but it is not taking care of workers' quality-of-life." Employers suffer as well. During the 2021-2022 ski season, Loon Mountain, Sugarloaf, and Sunday River in Vermont were 20% short on staffing levels, while Killington and Pico were even worse off (Kelly 2022). The Community Development Coordinator for Crested Butte reported that on June 7th, 2021, there were 115 job openings but only one rental unit on the market to accommodate them (Horvath 2021).

In Conway, New Hampshire, the Town Manager "worries the lack of housing will affect the search for a new planning director, a position that pays $75,000 plus benefits. And he's concerned that finding a place to live is even harder for workers in the tourism industry, even as their positions in restaurants and resorts are central to the success of the region's economy" (McDermott 2021). The irony that the planning discipline in places like Conway has prioritized housing value inflation so heavily that planners can no longer afford to live there is a perfect parable for the real estate state's advance. When public, caring, and social

services sectors are snuffed out thanks to the prioritization of real estate capital, the concerns of the ultra-wealthy, and corporate monopoly profits, here taking the form of the mega ski companies (namely Vail and Alterra), whole towns are hollowed out. The contradictions that have arisen are becoming increasingly untenable as government agencies cannot hire, architecture and contracting firms have trouble retaining employees, ski lifts cut their operating hours, hospitals face a nurse shortage, schools cannot find teachers, and so on. Every mountain town one visits, one will find shuttered businesses with signs declaring 'short of staff'. But it has been the closing of beloved restaurants, coffee shops, and bars, and the staffing difficulties plaguing resorts themselves, that have prompted a tepid call for worker accommodations in some of these places.

The sort of dynamic, cohesive community that Stuber (2021)'s interlocutors referenced to regarding Aspen's mythical past is an impossibility today. The inequality in mountain towns is so extreme now that nearly ever relationship and interaction is mediated by class, even as wealthy residents and visitors imagine the ski bum, the quintessential mountain town local, to exist outside of the confines of class. Moreover, the extreme nature of the housing crisis preempts intra-group solidarity, since competition over housing, insecure housing tenure, and the treadmill of working longer hours to afford rising rents and cost of living, exacerbate the working-class populations of mountain towns' alienated status. Madden & Marcuse (2016) write that, "the experience of residential alienation in contemporary society…is precarity, insecurity, and disempowerment. It is fostered by commodification, displacement, and dispossession, and exacerbated by inequality. Residential alienation represents the painful, at times traumatic, experience of a divergence between home and housing." In light of the housing scarcity and unaffordability provided above, residential alienation is not the exception, but an entirely predictable rule, for those who work three jobs instead of owning three houses in these places. So long as housing is treated first and foremost as a commodity in our political-economic system, so long as housing "becomes more responsive to the needs of capital and less reflective of the actual

social need for residential space," (ibid) the trend will only become exacerbated. Moreover, since residential alienation works to preempt political solidarity, it will take a powerful movement to remedy this social violence.

The Response

As the crisis of social reproduction reaches a head, municipal governments, in partnership with the ski resorts and federal and state agencies, have sought solutions to the housing issue. Inroads are most often made using deed-restrictions to attempt to create an alternative housing market for local residents. Other incentives are being given to homeowners to 'lease-to-locals' or to convert their STRs to long-term rental units. Towns have amended, or attempted to amend, their zoning codes with mild inclusionary zoning set asides and density bonuses. Some towns are providing educational resources to help locals take advantage of state and federal housing programs. Some businesses have given out housing stipends to their employees or have attempted to house some of them themselves. Towns are attempting to promote market-rate developments by giving handouts to developers and deregulating the permitting process. And municipal and regional governments publish hopeful plans spelling out the lofty goals that they must achieve.

But the tools that these planning documents highlight for achieving their stated housing goals have failed to allocate the housing that they purportedly desire to be allocated, time and time again. Vague language is used to obfuscate the origin of the problem and the effects these tepid measures will have. Little effort is made to address the issues of vacancy, the rising cost of living, and the fundamental orientation of housing as an investment asset, status symbol, and moral balm for the ultra-wealthy class. Citizens who do voice concern about those issues are immediately silenced and bullied. Furthermore, these status-quo housing initiatives fail to interrogate the class relations, economic makeup, and legitimacy of the place belonging claims reproduced in mountain towns. This section will analyze the housing allocation measures towns have used and highlight the extent to which housing politics have been captured by the ultra-wealthy class and real estate capital.

Municipal Measures

Aspen

It is important to mention that the housing problem in mountain towns is not new, though it has accelerated dramatically. The earliest response to the problem came during the 1970s when Aspen began constructing deed-restricted housing for locals and formed the Aspen-Pitkin County Housing Authority in 1983. Deed restricted affordable houses are units that have a use-restriction that limits the rent or purchase price, requiring occupancy by low-income and fully locally employed individuals for a predefined number of years. This is perhaps the most popular form of workforce housing provisions used in mountain towns, with many town boards adopting Aspen's model in the 1990s. A good forty years later, however, Aspen has failed to achieve its stated goal of housing 60% of its workforce, now barely accommodating 40% (Hansman 2021). In fact, the problem has only gotten worse. But no planning document acknowledges that a deed-restriction strategy has failed, or explains why it may have failed, or posits a countervailing strategy. Instead, town after town pours resources into deed-restrictions.

Aspen has been a pioneer in providing any sort of affordable housing support because of a certain quirk in the way its economic base and political base intersect. In the 1960s and 1970s, Aspen's famous counter-culture heyday produced influential political leaders who implemented progressive tax policies. Moreover, Aspen has historically held municipal elections in May, state and federal being in November, both shoulder seasons when wealthier voters are less likely to be in town. Because Aspen's tax rate remains relatively high, the ultra-wealthy residents who dominate politics in towns like Jackson tend to declare their residence and register to vote in other towns where they own houses. As a result, Aspen's primary political constituency are year-round residents, 75 % of whom earn incomes between $25,000 and $200,000, far below the wealthy property owner average. "These locals are, moreover, extremely politically engaged and left-leaning," with high rates of voter turnout and Democratic party allegiances. "These demographic characteristics make

for a complicated dynamic: While the political and economic interests of year-round residents may differ from Aspen's uber-wealthy part-year residents and visitors, local officials must consider both groups in their place-making efforts" (Stuber 2021).

Unlike most mountain towns who face overwhelming pressure by these powerful ultra-wealthy residents and homeowners, and whose local working and middle class population is far less engaged, Aspen has been forced to provide some accommodations. These economic redistribution mechanisms include purchasing and distributing those units placed under deed restrictions and take the form of affordable housing, environmental, and transportation mitigation fees on market rate and commercial developments. Indeed, thanks to the progressive tax rate and support for public goods, Aspen has a municipal budget whose size and scope outrivals any other mountain town. Aspen's budget in 2019 was $120 million, which "equates to more than $16,000 per capita…the Pitkin County budget adds another $8,200 to that figure. These monies come from property taxes and sales tax revenues, which include supplemental levies for community projects. Although some of these monies are sequestered by the state for broader infrastructure projects, this extraordinarily large budget provides relatively unparalleled opportunities for place-making and promoting the well-being of residents and visitors" (Stuber 2021). In comparison, Colorado's combined state and local direct general expenditures equate to $10,525 per capita as of 2022, which is very close to the nation-wide average (Urban Institute 2022).

Because the budget is used to enhance Aspen's public spaces and quality of life, the ultra-wealthy faction of its society can get behind the taxes and budget. An Aspen city council member proudly invoked the town's large budget in conversations with Stuber (2021). He speculated that 85% of the budget is "derived from spending by visitors and other non-year-round residents," which he asserts represents a "trickling down in the form of subsides to affordable housing, education, and recreational opportunities that benefit the middle classes." But, just as Stein (2019) observed in New York City and others have found in San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, and so on, the progressive city paradox applies to Aspen.

The contradictory tension between the prerogative 51nflateng real estate values while attempting to safeguard residents' best interests has prevented Aspen from reaching its stated housing and community cohesion goals and has led to the excessive real estate value, housing shortage, commute times, and the inequality characteristics reported in this paper's data section.

Aspen's affordable housing program sheds light on the lofty goals and chronic cooptation of progressive mountain town politics. The program is premised on maintaining Aspen's identity as a "lights-on" community. Affordable housing is meant to allow "local characters" to live in town and contribute to Aspen's much touted authenticity. Aspen's Community Plan "institutionalizes this sentiment, specifying that housing projects need 'to further [a socioeconomic] mix and to avoid segregation of economic and social classes'" (Stuber 2021). An interesting paradox adds to the contradictions associated with progressive planning. By housing some sliver of these "local characters," Aspen is preserving the place identity that has made it so attractive to ultra-wealthy home buyers and residents. The token ski bums and bohemians who got lucky in the deed restricted housing lottery act to enhance the authentic charm and sense of place that makes Aspen, Aspen. This exacerbates the issue of gentrification and displacement in all the ways—luxury developments, flipping long-term units to STRs, rent hikes, and chronic scarcity—this paper has delineated. Put another way, the high tax rates ultra-wealthy homeowners pay in Aspen essentially acts as a hospitality surcharge, an authenticity fee. On the one hand, the town's housing program provides much needed assistance to some working-class families and individuals (a group that has been termed the "subsidized class" (ibid)), on the other hand, it placates the tensions inherent in such an extremely unequal place, maintains the town's exclusive character, and neutralizes the power of a unified working class. The last point is derived from the fact that the long-term residents who have benefited from such affordable housing accommodations are necessarily grateful to the super wealthy taxpayers who essentially pay part of their lease or down payment, and the carrot of getting lucky in the housing lottery leads residents in more

precarious housing arrangements to hang onto a hope that things will work out on their own. Political mobilization may only make things worse.

But that equilibrium instituted by these compromises may be unraveling as those numbers documented in the data section become more and more extreme. Even Aspen's Chamber of Commerce has had to come to terms with the untenable trends. The new Aspen Destination Management plan for 2022 through 2027 states that Aspen must rejigger its entire approach to tourism, arguing that the city's billion-dollar tourism industry "needs to reflect on how Aspen can survive its reputation economically (unhappy residents pose enormous business risks), socially (gentrification and seasonal impacts), environmentally (visitor pressure), and even existentially (losing its soul)" (Aspen Chamber 2022). Aspenites seek to maintain the town's authentic place characteristics, to keep its class-less feel alive, to live up to its lights-on reputation, to maintain the viability of local businesses, to enhance the intact biodiversity of its open spaces, and now to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions goals. Each and every one of those goals is jeopardized by the growing housing crisis due to the predominance of the real estate state, the demand for luxury homes by the ultra-wealthy, and the remote working Zoom Boom demographics changes.

Vail

Vail has employed deed restrictions extensively in the last three decades as well. The goal is to separate the local housing market from the out-of-town buyer housing market so that locals do not have to compete with the ultra-wealthy and Zoom Boom worker demographic to rent or buy. The property owner and the Town of Vail enter into an agreement to lease or sell to a 'qualified resident,' meaning a locally employed full-time worker. "The property's owner may be the qualified resident or rent to the resident. The agreement is in force in perpetuity and follows the property even if it is sold to a new owner, inherited, or given away" (HUD 2021). The agreement, however, does not limit the resale

price or rent that the owner may seek, so all that it does is restrict the potential renters or buyers to working locals whose budget is, on average, far below the market rate.

The stated benefits to the program are that the town gains workforce housing that it need not develop, manage, or maintain; that the town can add workforce housing without reworking the zoning code, which would somewhat more fundamentally alter how Vail looks and works; and that workers can more rapidly find a unit instead of waiting for projects to be permitted and built. On the flip side, property owners are furnished with "a substantial payout without having to actually sell their property" (HUD 2021). So, owners are subsidized by the town to lease to locals or to simply keep living in the house that they own. The majority of the deed restricted units are reserved for employees at the Sonnenalp luxury hotel and development company in town, highlighting the biased funding mechanism of the public-private partnership. Only sixteen units are available to any qualified resident year-round, and most units are reserved for seasonal employees which contradicts the claim that the Vail InDEED program actually provides housing to locals and does not simply help cover the Sonnenalp Properties' operating costs. Despite this, Vail has gone all-in on deed-restrictions to achieve its housing goals.

The Town of Vail's stated goal is to acquire 1,000 new deed restrictions by 2027. Since the Vail Housing 2027 Strategic Plan was adopted, Vail has focused on acquisitions for Town employees. A half-cent sales tax increase was passed in 2021 to fund housing programs. Compliance for the deed-restrictions is enforced with an online sworn statement and annual compliance form. But with just over 1,000 units already under deed-restrictions (Vail 2021), one must ask whether the program has really made a dent. The housing crisis in Vail is as bad as any mountain town. The story of Robyn Smith is revealing. She "is among the lucky few in the middle class who found what is considered affordable housing in Vail. Smith, who runs a private consulting business, and her husband, a snowcat operator on the mountain, entered a lottery for locals last year and were picked over 22 other applicants to purchase a 1,200-square-foot deed-restricted house in a 30-unit subdivision for $525,000"

(Pells 2022). The program, while purportedly open to the public, is in reality only available to a very small subsect of qualified residents. Subsequent units in that subdivision which have become available have had several dozen applicants for a unit that few working-class locals can afford, even after the deed is restricted for 'affordability'. But for many, mortgage payments and playing the housing lottery beats the experience of having to move frequently, sometimes multiple times a year, paying over a third of their income for rent, and commuting long distances from down-valley. So, in Eagle County, where Vail is located, the waitlist for deed-restricted units is nearly 500 employees deep (Singer 2022).

Deed restrictions are latched onto because they have proven to be one of the only palatable options for the ultra-wealthy and luxury real estate industry. The resistance to physically developing worker housing is fierce. When Vail Resorts proposed a $17 million complex to house 165 of its workers, the company faced loud opposition from Vail's powerful citizens. "I'm ready to go to war with Vail Resorts over this if we have to," was a quote from Vail's town councilman Kevin Foley in the Colorado Sun (Blevins 2022, Apr 18). The Resort pushed back, citing approvals by the town for luxury home developments nearby the project site where it was claimed that building would disrupt bighorn sheep habitat. Vail Resorts has been very short on staffing since the COVID-19 Pandemic exacerbated the housing crisis in mountain towns. It has also faced staffing difficulties, many current and former employees would add, due to severe ski area mismanagement and extremely poor working conditions. In 2022, Vail Resorts released plans to add 875 units in mountain towns across its national footprint to house workers. But does means-testing deed-restricted units to local workers and privately developing units for resort employees really address the housing issue? Or rather, does it do so in a just way?

When a town councilor for Avon, home to Beaver Creek, just down-valley from Vail, brought up the idea of a vacancy tax in 2020, all hell broke loose. Jake Wolf, the councilmember, learned about Vancouver, British Columbia's 2017 one-percent tax rate on vacant homes meant to incentivize second homeowners to rent to locals. "'that to me was an

eye-opener,' Wolf said. 'I was like, 'Whoa, well if they could do it up there, there's gotta be some merit to it.' Vancouver's still a functioning city from what I understand; it didn't go up in flames. Maybe we can learn from them'" (Minor 2020). When Mark Kogan, a retired Goldman Sachs partner who spends around half the year in Avon, caught word of the idea Wolf was entertaining, he became irate. It sent residents like him an unwelcoming message, he claimed. "'It would say you're second-class citizens because you've decided that you don't want to live here full time. We're going to take advantage of you,'" Kogan said. Wealthy residents, he explained, would choose to live elsewhere were a vacancy tax or fee imposed. "'I pay a lot of property taxes. I'm philanthropic. I don't use the roads much. I don't use the schools…and now you want to start telling me I've got to solve the housing problem by either having my house occupied the other four months a year or taxing me?'" (ibid).

Mark Kogan refuses to believe that members of the community like him have any role in the housing issue. He deserves to have access to the mountains and to keep a 7,500-square-foot home all to himself because he has accumulated vastly more capital than Jake Wolf or anyone else who would be renting in Avon. Kogan's home, he asserts, "'has a lot of expensive furnishings. It's got expensive art. It is my sanctuary. No one will ever take care of it the way I want to…The kind of people that need to have this housing, are not the kind of people, honestly, that are going to live in my house'" (Minor 2020). The disdain Kogan holds for the non-wealthy and the actual working-class members of society, as opposed to the mythical ski bum, is telling. Not only does his property and his presence in Avon distort the local housing market and drive gentrification and displacement, but his political influence makes the situation of inequality much worse. Moreover, according to a housing economist who works on the housing issue in mountain towns, a vacancy tax in Avon would in fact be highly effective (ibid).

Crested Butte

On the southern side of Colorado's Elk Mountains, Crested Butte has also experienced push back against vacancy fees. In 2021, voters approved a 2.5% increase in lodging taxes on STRs to fund affordable workforce housing projects, raising the STRs excise tax rate to 7.5%. STRs are unpopular both with working class local residents and ultra-wealthy second homeowners who, like Kogan, who have no need for supplemental income and hold disdain for STR visitors in their neighborhood. But a community housing tax was rejected. The tax would have charged owners of unoccupied homes $10,000 annually which would have generated nearly $2 million a year for affordable housing development (Blevins 2021, November 5). This sort of tax initiative, similar in scope to the one Jake Wolf proposed after reading about Vancouver, British Columbia, would have not only made a significant dent in the affordable housing supply problem, but also would have radically altered how housing is viewed in the town. It would make holding onto luxury real estate, treating it primarily as a commodity or an elite respite with benefits, a corrosive action rather than a perfectly acceptable one, as it is currently treated.

Just the fact that a community housing tax was put on the ballot symbolizes just how dire the housing crisis is in Crested Butte and it symbolizes that a constituency challenging the hegemonic orientation of housing is growing. Though the tax failed at the ballot box, Crested Butte did manage to pass an emergency declaration to allow the town itself to bypass certain regulatory hurdles in order to purchase units and flip them to affordable units (Horvath 2021). Crested Butte's stated goals are to increase the percentage of residents living in town by achieving a 75% housing fulltime occupancy (Crested Butte 2020). So, the issue of occupancy is central to Crested Butte's approach. However, beyond the rejection of the occupancy tax ballot measure, recall Crested Butte's COVID-19 saga detailed in this paper's Introduction which shows just how much friction exists between the working-class local community and the owners of second homes. Negotiating with the latter or challenging their priorities in any way will be faced with extraordinary pushback. So Crested Butte is

returning to deed restricting. 30% of the Town's units are currently deed restricted and while the Town is working on acquiring more deed restrictions to further its housing goals, the affordability issue still plagues local residents and businesses.

Carrots and Sticks

Other towns have used tax mechanisms to mitigate housing unavailability and attempting to thread the needle between addressing the housing crisis and appeasing influential homeowners and the real estate industry by raising funds on the margins. Oftentimes these taxes come concurrently with the effort to crack down on STR proliferation. In Summit County, a 20-year extension of the sales tax that funds the local housing authority was extended in 2021. Just as in the Town of Vail, while efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing are valiant, raising the cost of living using a sales tax for the people burdened most by the issue is a bit of a difficult square to circle. Elsewhere other taxes have been employed. In Avon Voters approved a two percent excise tax on STRs, Ouray in Colorado's San Juan Mountains passed a new 15% excise tax on STRs, and Leadville on the north side of Colorado's Sawatch Range also approved an increase in taxes on STRs. Another strategy is to use permit caps. Although Telluride already has a documented 790 STR licenses in circulation, voters there passed a measure to cap that number at 400 and create an annual lottery for permits.

Breckenridge, in Summit County, not far north of Leadville, is taking an opposite approach, using carrots instead of sticks. The Town is offering up to $24,000 to owners of STRs to sign year-long leases to locals. The program which essentially bribes homeowners to 'lease-to-locals' has already converted dozens of STRs to long-term rentals in Breckenridge (Singer 2022). The Town of Truckee, the gateway town to California's Tahoe region, has been working with a local renting agency called Landing Locals to "convince second homeowners to rent their empty houses out to Tahoe's employees" (Brown 2021). Truckee is offering up to $10,000 to homeowners to participate in the program which has

housed some 60 people thus far. The director of the program, who does not believe a solution to the housing crisis really exists, sees the program as a way the Town of Truckee can "'chip away at trying to create almost a second market [for locals], whether it's rentals, whether it's affordable, restrictive, low-income, or whether it's deed-restricted for sale properties. It's creating a second market that if you work here you have access to'" (ibid). The program director's theory is in keeping with the general goal of deed restrictions. That is to use public funding to subsidize ultra-wealthy homeowners and developers to offer up a room to a highly means-tested local worker.

Truckee has helped supply almost 300 affordable housing units as of the summer of 2021 using a combination of strategies, including Landing Locals and deed restrictions. Still, the problem is such, that the Mountain Housing Council there is "looking to make a way for people to park their live-in vans and RVs safely and legally for extended periods of time," and to allow more tiny homes (Brown 2021). Ketchum similarly has opened a small municipal park to long-term worker campers, a policy first championed by Aspen who allows local employees to park their cars in the back of a transit hub parking lot for an indefinite period. The author has spent several weeks sleeping in his Volkswagen station wagon in that parking lot and has had the rather jarring experience of encountering people at work in local business establishments who also woke up in their cars on the -19 degree Fahrenheit morning, but knowing that they were experiencing those chilly workday mornings all winter. Critics of these STR measures, except for those Breckenridge homeowners of course who enjoy up to $24,000 in subsidies, claim that such efforts will both hurt the tourist economy and simply incentivize homeowners, rich enough to afford the down payment on the unit already, to simply leave their homes vacant (Blevins 2021, November 5), like Mark Kogan does.

The 2022 Teton Region Housing Needs Assessment (Teton County 2022) outlines the progress that the region has made thus far in providing affordable housing opportunities to locals. It discusses the onboarding of more than 400 deed restricted housing units thanks

to efforts by the Jackson/Teton Affordable Housing Department to secure land in combination with mitigation funding, public/private partnerships and the land use code's incentive bonus. The report discusses the all-hands-on deck attitude of local stakeholders and agencies, who "have explored and implemented many innovative ideas including land use incentives, preservation, and public private partnerships." An excise tax was passed in 2019, raising $5.5 million for housing projects. Private philanthropy has raised many millions to support the effort. The Affordable Housing Department helped to construct a new apartment block, adding rental units at below 80% AMI. The Town of Jackson's employers have assisted their employees in acquiring 800 seasonal and year-round rental units. The town has distributed housing stipends as well. And finally, the report states that "the production of units with employment-, income-, and/or price-limits has helped to retain 61% of workers living locally." Clearly, judging by the data outlined in the previous section of this paper, these measures have barely made a dent in the problem, as the acceleration of the real estate state's takeover and the ascendancy of its luxury housing market outpaces any corresponding mitigation efforts.

The Town of Telluride is also working with developers to build units on town-owned land. This includes a massive project on 105-acres, six miles from the town center and well out of sight, to "build a community for locals" (Blevins 2022, March 31). Additionally, Telluride recently amended its land use code to require developers to provide affordable housing for 40% of the new employees projected to be added to the town's workforce by the development project. "This housing is provided in the form of cash payments, construction of new deed-restricted housing, or the deed-restriction of existing housing" (Telluride 2022). So developers have a wide berth in meeting this requirement and the town does not have to rework its land use or tax codes. Telluride also offers a density bonus to developers working on residential projects "to establish more secondary dwelling units." Finally, the regional housing authority there assists potential homebuyers in taking advantage of state and federal down payment assistance, mortgage credit certificates, and other programs.

In Northern Colorado, an anonymous donor gave $29 million to Steamboat Springs' housing authority explicitly for the purchase of ranchland to construct affordable homes for locals (Blevins 2022, March 31). Steamboat Springs' housing authority has already brought over a hundred units onto the market, so this will add several dozen to that affordable stock. Routt County, which encompasses Steamboat Springs, passed a property-tax increase that directs around $1 million a year toward affordable housing programs. Again, these are encouraging steps and provide much needed assistance to some fraction of Telluride and Steamboat Springs' working-class population, but these programs do little to stymie the flipping of long-term to STR units or to stymie the sale of units to private high dollar buyers.

In summary, the measures pursued by mountain towns to mitigate the crisis of housing do little to address the issues of vacancy, the rising cost of living, and the fundamental orientation of housing as an investment asset, status symbol, and moral balm for the ultra-wealthy in these places. Nor, moreover, do these housing initiatives interrogate the class relations, economic makeup, and legitimacy of the place belonging claims reproduced in mountain towns.

Shortcomings

Mammoth Lakes

The lofty language highlighting the progress in housing locals found in towns' official documents conceals some of the challenges and shortcomings agencies and plans have had in actually implementing programs. For instance, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, California has published a robust housing element, establishing its policy, strategy, and vision for housing existing and future residents in a manner affordable to them. However, "some of the actions for implementation, especially those related to funding the town's housing element have no designated responsible party and no specific target date for completion" (Mono County Grand Jury 2021). In other words, Town has little interest in

actually achieving their stated goals. The policies are mostly rhetorical. The State of California's recent affordable housing mandate to municipalities exposed just how unserious Mammoth Lakes has been about meeting the goals laid out in their Community Housing Action Plan. These goals include

1. Providing several hundred community housing units by this year, 2022.
2. "Targeting the full range of community housing needs currently not being met by the market, including rentals for households earning less than 80% AMI and ownership housing for households earning up to 200% AMI.
3. "Producing community housing at a rate faster than job growth in the near term to help address the current housing shortage, unfilled jobs, and provide opportunities for in-commuters who want to move to town."
4. Retaining "a strong base of residents and employees living in town" (ibid).

The vague language used, such as 'community housing,' 'targeting,' 'a strong base,' gives Mammoth Lakes an easy excuse to continue punting on housing.

Now, in the Town of Mammoth Lakes' update to meet the State mandates, Mammoth has reworked its approach. It will redraft its land use and zoning codes to "assure adequate sites for housing development" (Mammoth Lakes 2019). It will "promote the construction of an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of all sectors of the community." It wants to maintain "high quality, livable housing units and neighborhoods." And it seeks to "reduce governmental constraints to housing production and affordability" (ibid). This classic suite of yes-in-my-backyard housing policies retains Mammoth Lakes' vague language, leans heavily on supply-side tools, and enhances the town's attractiveness to developers. By upzoning the town without any set asides or fees, by promoting development of all housing types, by pulling back regulatory oversight of development projects, and by emphasizing 'quality of life' concerns, Mammoth is giving the green light to a luxury housing boom. By leaning so heavily on the language of 'community', the Housing Element obfuscates the actual community members that need additional housing and support, the working-class ones, making it sound like any sort of development will help the community as a whole.

From a critical perspective, it would appear as though Mammoth Lakes is attempting to compete with Jackson and Aspen for ultra-wealthy new residents not to house 'community members'. Mammoth Lakes, after all, has fallen behind on supplying luxury units to that ultra-wealthy demographic, comparatively speaking, since the majority of its housing stock was built in the 1970s and 1980s at a far less opulent standard. It is in these case studies that Stein's (2019) theorized dichotomy between the stated goals and structural imperatives of contemporary planning, as well as the ultimate dominance of the real estate industry, are laid bare.

Bozeman

Bozeman, Montana, a booming gateway community, has also experienced its fair share of shortcomings on the housing issue. In 2016, "Bozeman adopted an inclusionary zoning ordinance that mandated 10% of all homes in new subdivisions be affordable" (Sisson 2021). The ordinance was written in response to the realization that "developers failed to meet affordability goals even with incentives," (Kimbel-Sannit 2021) in previous attempts to spur affordable housing development. Only 17 affordable units have been produced since the inclusionary zoning ordinance was passed, but more were in the pipeline. Three years later, in 2019, Bozeman adopted its Housing Action Plan, which gave $500 million of its general fund money to private developers and companies to build affordable housing. But Bozeman is still hundreds of units short per year on closing its assessed housing needs gap. So, Bozeman is doubling down on the same sort of policies Mammoth Lakes has championed, upzoning neighborhoods and fast tracking the approval process.

Having given all its housing money to private partners, Bozeman lacks the cash needed to construct new affordable housing itself. Despite their best efforts and incentives, even the upzoning process has failed to deliver. Builders "keep gravitating towards single-family detached homes, not townhomes, because that's where they'll see the most profit," reported a city official (Kimbel-Sannit 2021). Regardless, developers and homeowners were

so incensed by Bozeman's (as well as Whitefish's, near Glacier National Park) tepid land use reform and set aside measures, that, in April 2021, they drove House Bill 259 through the state legislature, effectively banning inclusionary zoning. The bill's sponsor in the House, Sue Vinton, owns a general contracting firm in Billings. Bozeman showed its cards and lost. It gave away a lot of money and incentives to developers to build affordable housing, which was not built, it implemented light inclusionary zoning reforms that were struck down by the state, and it has no municipal money earmarked for public housing or purchasing deed-restrictions.

Ketchum

Idaho has similarly enacted preemptive legislation to prevent towns from making progressive land use and property reforms. As a result, Ketchum lacks the authority to limit STRs and benefit from a real-estate transfer tax. Making matters worse, one of the few apartment complexes in town reserved for affordable housing, the KETCH, was sold by the developer for $9 million. The new owner jacked the rental rates up by 50% to 60%, forcing KETCH's residents onto the street. In response, Ketchum heard the proposal for the Bluebird Village project, a 51-unit workforce housing development. The project has been in the works since 2018 and finally received its building permit and municipal financial support in 2022. The total price tag for the project has come to $25.7 million to build two four-story buildings on a 0.6-acre site. The City of Ketchum has committed a total of $3.3 million to the project, drawing from its Housing In-Lieu Fund. Rents are to be targeted to accommodate local workers making between 30% to 100% of the AMI (Foley 2022).

But Bluebird Village has faced major backlash, primarily from a group called the Affordable Housing Coalition of Ketchum. Lead by Perry Boyle, "a longtime executive at billionaire Steve Cohen's Point72 Asset Management and now-defunct SAC Capital Advisers," (Briquelet 2021). The group posits that it is "committed to solutions for community/workforce housing." They "believe through great due diligence, mindfulness

and respectful alliances with our community we can solve this issue" (Affordable Housing Coalition Ketchum 2022). Boyle, whose firm SAC was fined a record $1.8 billion for insider trading in 2013, retired to Ketchum in 2019 and has since run for mayor, losing but successfully mobilizing the ultra-wealthy faction of the population.

While running for mayor, Boyle published a paid advertisement denigrating the legendary 79-year-old Gary Hoffman, a physician who owns two area mobile-home parks that function as workforce housing. The author of this paper lived in the unincorporated town of Triumph in the summer of 2020, midway between and a few miles north of Hailey and Ketchum. Every one of the working-class residents the author of this paper got to know called Hoffman a upstanding pillar of the community who was the sole reason they could afford to live in the area since he electively rented out his trailer units at a below-market rate. Boyle was angry with Hoffman for criticizing Boyle's approach to community development in town and his compromised past and priorities. So, Boyle threatened to sue for libel, on top of publicly denigrating Hoffman. Having vehemently opposed Bluebird Village from the start, Boyle wrote, in a letter to the editor, that he thinks "Gary Hoffman's trailer park is the PERFECT spot for Bluebird. It's on the bus line and bike path. It is grossly underutilized land. You could build 4x the housing Mr. Hoffman provides. The neighbors would all prefer a more attractive view, so no NIMBY issue" (Briquelet 2021). Boyle, in other words, while running for mayor, threatened to use the town's resources to appropriate Hoffman's land which he uses to rent out affordable units to locals, highlighting the brazen political prerogative of the ultra-wealthy class.

Boyle's 'affordable housing group' opposes the Bluebird project on several points all of which would supposedly "have long-term negative effects on Ketchum's community housing, putting our unique town on track to be just another mountain resort town" (AHC Ketchum 2022). They claim that the project is too big. It is a bad financial deal since it would lower property taxes in the long-term, they say. It is in the wrong location since Ketchum's "retail core" would "be displaced by a low-income housing project." It would

exacerbate parking challenges. Bluebird would be low-quality housing, they claim, it "has the look and feel of a college dorm, not of housing worthy of our neighbors." And Bluebird would be segregated, they say, since it would concentrate low-income housing, "rather than integrating it throughout the community." Boyle, who in his mayoral campaign emphasized "quality-of-life issues" and his "distress with the government process," (Foley 2021) would prefer to use the deed restriction mechanism that other towns highlighted in this paper use instead of building designated affordable units. His vision of preserving Ketchum's 'quaintness' and 'classlessness' (Briquelet 2021) contrasts with his own $4 million home at the end of a cul-de-sac in a subdivision about a mile from downtown. Characters like Boyle wield incredible power in mountain towns. Having developed a sophisticated sleight of hand, they dress up the elite concerns of the property-owing class as 'community' and 'quality-of-life' issues and spend many thousands on political campaigns and propaganda to reinforce their message. While asserting that their attachment to place justifies any reactionary position they hold, they simultaneously belittle long-time residents like Hoffman who have genuinely invested themselves into improving conditions for their low-income neighbors.

Ketchum's own Housing Action Plan has stated that the town needs to add between 660 and 980 new units in town, and between 4,700 and 6,400 units countywide in the next decade to meet demand (Ketchum 2022). They have also stated that the rate of the workforce living in Ketchum itself of seven percent is unacceptable. Yet Bluebird Village's 51 units cost almost $26 million to develop and took over four years to get approval. No politician in Ketchum, as far as this author is aware, has offered a plan to deal with the 70% of the town's housing stock which is seasonally occupied and the 90% of units that are not rented out long-term. In the author's experience, however, plenty of Ketchum's working-class residents are extremely aware of the fact that the vast majority of mansions they pass on their way to work sit empty while they themselves are desperately hanging onto poor-quality rental units at an excessive monthly cost.

Whitefish

In Whitefish, Montana, an even more dramatic housing fight recently took place. 270 long-term rental units, including 48 affordable ones, would have been included within a 318 new housing development proposal, called Arim Mountain Gateway. The proposal was defeated in February 2022, after a mobilization by a couple of Whitefish's influential billionaires, insurance moguls Mark and Robyn Jones and Las Vegas Golden Knights owner Bill Foley. At a council meeting in January, Foley's representatives "objected to the project on the grounds that it didn't 'preserve and protect the character of [the] neighborhood" (Tognini 2022). But the greatest pushback came from Mark Jones who "threatened to revoke his family's philanthropic support for another affordable housing project, the 100 units at a city-owned property…if the Gateway development went ahead."

By threatening to withdraw his $1 million of promised philanthropic contributions, Jones was able to subvert the democratic planning process to shape the way Whitefish looks and who gets to live there. His preferred affordable housing site, called the Monegan Road project, "is located on land zoned for agriculture use on a partly unpaved road near Whitefish's sewage treatment plant," representing major infrastructural and health and safety concerns for the town and the development's future residents. Meanwhile, the billionaires took no issue in the construction of luxury homes just north of the proposed Arim Mountain Gateway project. Landmark Whitefish, the name of the development whose units are priced at between $925,000 and $3 million, broke ground unopposed. Whitefish is far behind in closing its housing gap. "A 2016 assessment of housing needs in Whitefish identified a shortfall of about 594 affordable housing units, but only 70 units—about 12% of that goal—have been built since then" (Tognini 2022). When a town can put forward or support very reasonable development proposals for meeting the housing needs of its lower-income residents just to have it struck down by billionaires who can hire representatives and spend (or withdraw) millions to quell actions that they oppose, one has little hope in a democratic future for mountain towns.

The sort of elite pushback on display in these anecdotes are widespread. Just this year, in 2022, a 300-unit affordable housing development in Glenwood Springs was fought tooth-and-nail by the group Glenwood Springs Citizens for Responsible Development on the grounds that it would create a fire evacuation route disaster. In the Roaring Fork Valley, where Aspen is, neighbors flooded public meetings to claim that a 135-unit affordable housing development that has been in the works for seven years, would create untenable safety issues. The "county is responsible when the first kid gets killed on this road," one wealthy neighbor exclaimed (Blevins 2022, April 18). In partnership with San Miguel County, the town of Telluride plans to purchase three 35-acre parcels, rezoning them to allow for more density, laying the groundworks for future affordable housing projects. A Telluride real estate broker and detractor of the initiative, incensed, asked, "how would you react if you paid $1 million for a lot next to this proposal and you built a $2 million house? You followed the HOA rules and now the county wants to build 400 local housing units next to you? Think about that." Meanwhile, an incredibly contentious 29-unit affordable housing project is being disputed in Telluride's historic downtown district, with the board of the historic review commission threatening to quit and neighbors threatening lawsuits.

Clearly, the approach mountain towns are taking to the crisis of affordable housing is either not working or not enough. All of the compromises, time, money, and effort planning boards and housing advocates have made have either barely made a dent in the problem or been undermined and shut down by the interests of real estate capital and the ultra-wealthy. The remainder of this paper will be spent discussing a possible path forward and reinterrogating the structural orientation of housing in these places.

A Path Forward?

First, this section will briefly highlight some of the official recommendations posited by planning agencies to understand where the discourse has landed regarding status quo solutions. The recommendations passed down from municipal and county officials or their hired consultants primarily focus on increasing the supply of housing and, to a lesser extent, keeping people in their houses. The pro-development angle makes a couple of assumptions. First, bringing on supply will automatically favorably impact the price of housing. Second, it is the only way to bring on deed restricted units or raise money for rent stabilized or cost capped affordable housing. And third, there is no way to challenge the of the real estate industry and affluent owners. These assumptions belie the limits mountainous geographies and fragile ecosystems present, and they delimit the shape the economy and social makeup will take in the future. Indeed, these housing planning documents do a great deal of work in facilitating the total capture of mountain towns by the ultra-wealthy, and the ski resort and real estate industries which ultimately determine who gets to enjoy access to the outdoors.

Since towns rely on increasing property values to fund public programs, their contradictory imperative remains the enhancement of conditions for real estate asset inflation as well as the provisioning of workforce housing. By reserving these scarce affordable housing units for resort employees or locals qualified by making a low income and working in designated tourism-oriented businesses, the mountain towns continue to fail in addressing the obstacles to living in them for those who make a middle-class income such as municipal and federal employees, teachers, architects, non-profit staffers, librarians, nurses, and so on. The lack of prospects for potential entrepreneurs, small business owners, blue collar workers, clergymen, essential service workers, farmers and ranchers, and others who could help diversify mountain town economies, making them more broad based, accountable to residents and resilient to future shocks like pandemics, fires, or snow-free seasons are also of no concern to local governments. Those people who are not traditionally employed or who live an alternative lifestyle, such as artists, writers, musicians, athletes,

mountain and white-water rafting guides, and yes, even the ski bums—in short, the people who made mountain towns the mythical places that they are—are forced out or kept out. Of course, the claims and meanings attributed to these places by indigenous communities are forgotten or ignored during land use policymaking.

Second, this recommendations section will highlight the progressive recommendations local grassroots organizations have posited to reform public policy and win affordable housing provisions. The contrast between the government sponsored studies and policy suggestions and what the grassroots organizations advocate displays the disparities between the structural interests of public institutions in mountain towns and the interests of the working class that resides there. Furthermore, the progressive advocacy highlighted here is indicative of a growing political mobilization taking place in these precariously housed and employed communities, a mobilization that has the potential to gain real power given the dependency mountain towns have on their continued exploitation.

Official Policy

Ketchum

With this framing being laid out, here are the action steps towns have officially landed on. In the City of Ketchum's Housing Action Plan, 2022-2023 (Ketchum 2022), the town lists their goals as the following.

One, to produce and preserve housing by "creating and preserving housing affordable for our local workforce and community housing," and by "maintaining a healthy balance of short-term/visitor lodging and resident-occupied housing." This incredibly vague wording gives market rate and tourism development the green light. After all, what counts as affordable? What is community housing? What is implied by a 'healthy balance,' and which residents are implicated?

Two is to update policy to promote housing. They aim to "build a regulatory and policy environment that strongly encourages housing development with an emphasis on

community and workforce housing, and which is consistent with other community goals." This pro-development land use de-regulation goal would put the ball squarely in the developer's court. Though inclusionary zoning and set aside mandates could be of use—though as has been shown, can lead to extreme pushback in states like Idaho—in adding new affordable units on the margins, these policies would further ramp up luxury market activity, raising rents, converting long-term rented units to STRs and luxury apartments, and furthering displacement. Then, one must ask again which community and which workers would be prioritized in this housing development emphasis.

Three, the City of Ketchum's seeks to expand and improve services to create housing stability which would "address immediate needs of unhoused and people at risk of displacement in our community." It would "integrate, improve and expand supportive services, rapidly rehouse, and prevent future displacement throughout the region." This band aid solution is a very admirable one, but it fails to connect the status quo polices and imperatives of the previous goals to the conditions of homelessness and displacement. Short of guaranteeing housing to anyone who needs it, the problem of housing insecurity will get worse. It was Ketchum, after all, that first passed an ordinance allowing certain working locals to camp in a municipal park long-term during the Pandemic as a stop-gap solution.

Four, Ketchum wants to expand and leverage resources. Ketchum hopes to "increase resources to support Action Plan Goals, including funding from a range of public and private sources." This goal, raising money, is where much of the compromises with influential unelected players are made. Recall Mark Jones holding Whitefish hostage with his million-dollar pawn. Partnerships with developers and resorts give those players an outsized role in determining the makeup of the town. Handing money to wealthy homeowners such as is the case in Vail for their InDEED program, Mammoth for their lease-to-locals program, or Bozeman handing over an incredible sum to developers to provide housing, may be beneficial in the short-term in some instances as far as opening up affordable units, but it ultimately runs the risk of compromising the authority of governments to independently look

out for the public good. Moreover, federal dollars almost exclusively go towards homeowners' assistance, which can make rental units more scarce and which funnels the target population into a prescribed pathway of qualified employment and homeownership.

Five, Ketchum seeks to inform, engage, and collaborate. They seek to "invest in building local capacity to make informed decisions about and execute on housing action." They want to "support regional partnerships and on-going communications to increase coordination and housing impacts." While this language could essentially mean absolutely anything one wants it to, it holds the seeds to a potentially transformative politics of housing. If vulnerable and working class people both locally and statewide bind together around the issue of housing, they could advocate for more transformative solutions in these planning meetings and vote as a unified block in elections to bring on politicians that might be able to push back against the unchallenged interests of the real estate capital, the tourism industry, and the super wealthy.

Teton County

In the Teton Region, the consultants who penned the (Teton County 2022) Housing Needs Assessment also emphasize this goal to inform, engage, and collaborate. "The magnitude of the issue requires a robust and regional response from all sectors of the community (public, private, non-profit) working collaboratively to engage community support and accelerate housing solutions." Through dialogue, a regional strategy, and cross-jurisdictional collaboration, the Teton Region harkens to a democratic, amiable, collaborative, institutional solution. While, again, this is a very admirable goal that plays into the narrative of the class-less, cohesive, good faith community, it is entirely consistent with a neoliberal governance strategy. No matter how sympathetic, real estate capital, the tourism industry, and the ultra-wealthy have priorities that directly conflict with any sort of collaborative response they can be party to. Yet, Teton County forges ahead.

Their recommendations are first, to grow funding and capacity, which includes "increasing funding sources with all currently available tools including public, private, and non-profit approaches." They seek to "create a predictable and transparent manner to allocate public funds to non-profit and for-profit development partners." They hope to influence legislators to create a "funding source," namely a real estate transfer and lodging tax, channel federal money better, and mobilize a statewide trust fund for housing projects (Teton County 2022). These more in-the-weeds suggestions could be quite valuable, but they also reveal just how low the bar for action is, especially in Wyoming. The fact that the only stable source of funding comes from philanthropic donations and non-profit sources proves that the housing strategy is compromised by the priorities of those donating the money and funding the non-profits, which, as Farrell (2020) shows, tend to be less-than-generous to the working class, especially the Spanish-speaking population, and completely unaccountable.

The second recommendation expressed in the Assessment (Teton County 2022) is to "expand who is at the table." The Teton Region's housing authorities are supposed to "engage and empower community stakeholders to address the housing issue by increasing and bridging collaboration and coordination between housing providers, businesses, and developers." This goal makes it seem as though the housing problem is simply a market failure that can be remedied by enhanced collaboration between landlords, the tourism industry, and real estate developers who will magically fix the supply and demand curve through pursuing their best interests. And, of course, 'community stakeholders' need to be empowered because they are, it is assumed, currently sitting back and letting the unfortunate market failure proceed. These stakeholders, which includes the ultra-wealthy and working class supposedly equally, are not portrayed to have any sort of power imbalance, just a miscommunication or lack of platform.

Within this second recommendation of expanding who is at the table, Teton County is urged to "engage in specific solutions" for their needs. They want to "dedicate resources

to a non-governmental entity to educate the community about the value of having the workforce living locally, housing terms, projects in the pipeline, and to track and demonstrate community-wide successes" (2022). The condescending attitude implies that those suffering with housing insecurity just need more education, which an educated NGO staffer would best provide. More generously, the message here is that, on the flip side, the ultra-wealthy homeowners just are not aware that the housing crisis has led to the shuttering of their favorite restaurant or boutique and to reduced hours at the ski lift and country club.

Teton County (2022) would like, also within this expansion of who is at the table recommendation, to smooth over tensions with the surrounding regions, which as this paper has discussed, have suffered from the consequences of Jackson's housing problem. To this end, they hope to "engage leaders and stakeholders in the Teton Region to understand and help mitigate impacts associated with housing 22% of the county's workforce in neighboring counties in the Region." They suggest building "a more robust" regional public transit system, and essentially opening up these neighboring places to mountain town-style real estate development. Additionally, to include more voices in the housing discussion, Teton County housing authorities seek to "actively engage representation from the Latinx community and diversify outreach and education to ensure community members can better access resources. This community has specific challenges and concerns that should be addressed when planning and building housing solutions." Yes, this community, which is often living 5-to-a-motel room 90 minutes from town, have specific challenges and concerns, namely poverty, discrimination, and criminalization. What the specific solutions for the Latinx community are beyond education is unclear, but the obfuscation of inequality and social and environmental racism in Jackson is fully on display by this suggestion.

The third recommendation that the consultants working for the Teton County (2022) landed on is the need to "align resources with the greatest needs." The strategies here include "better leveraging funds with non-profit partners…to target specific niches in the spectrum of need," to "ensure the preservation of the limited supply of 'naturally occurring'

affordable housing, such as mobile homes, small apartments, and accessory units," and to "expand investments in strategies that use the existing housing stock to serve the workforce." These strategies are meant to help fill the gaps in a highly skewed housing market. The report even advocates the growth of "programs to support tenant rights and help alleviate housing insecurity," and public investment in permanent deed restrictions below 120% AMI. The Teton County housing report reverts back to advocacy for the growth-oriented development policies so highly emphasized in Ketchum's housing plan, as opposed to low-income and tenant protection prioritization ones. But in the report's fourth imperative, the idea that public resources could be directly spent on improving housing stability for and preventing the displacement of local residents, is a step in the right direction. The fourth and final recommendation in the plan is to create more development opportunities which hints at looking outside Jackson for workforce development, ironically enough, as well as exempting deed restricted housing from the growth cap and "activating the private sector in housing solutions."

Progressive In-Roads

The next part of this paper's section highlighting recommendations to improve the housing situation will analyze the solutions that progressive housing advocates have posited. Though far from a complete survey of suggestions and voices offering them, this part of the paper will help shed light on the endogenous ideas to address the housing crisis that are floating around mountain towns. To the author's knowledge, such vocal grassroots housing advocacy is still in its infancy, but it has sprouted up over the course of the COVID 19 Pandemic as housing conditions grew especially bad, and governments and employers took relatively drastic measures to shut down ski areas and protect scarce hospital beds for locals. Plus, a certain political awareness was fostered during the mass movements protesting police violence and racism in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Moreover, the Bernie Sanders (a representative of Vermont, a mountain state) campaign did a lot of work to bring the idea

that housing should be a universal basic right which the federal government should be responsible for into the discourse, as well as the notion that worker protections, a higher minimum wage, and climate and conservation efforts can be won. Mountain town workers are also keenly aware of the inequities in the healthcare system because, likely, most of them have ended up in the emergency room with some form of orthopedic injury and have had to front the bill. Vail Resorts infamously offers extremely stingy benefits and has fired many employees who have sustained serious injuries on or off the job and were unable to return to work in the days following their injuries.

The growth of union activity has not left mountain towns untouched either. Breckenridge, Big Sky, Crested Butte, Steamboat Springs, Telluride, Park City, and Stevens Pass all have ski patrol union members under the United Professional Ski Patrols of America Local 7781 union. One Breckenridge ski patroller, hopeful that union activity can be "part of a growing push for workers' rights in mountain towns and beyond," described the union's purpose. "We're asking for what it takes, at the very base level, to not even thrive but just sustain yourself in this town…we are a microcosm of a much larger problem" (Hansman 2022). Finally, the Protect Our Winters (POW 2022) climate action group is directly targeting mountain town dwellers and outdoor recreationalists to vote for climate mitigation efforts to keep winter sports viable. Theirs is a voter mobilization strategy aiming to replace climate denying, and fossil fuel industry backed politicians in states like Utah, Nevada, Colorado, Maine, Alaska, and New Hampshire with pro-climate representatives. It so happens that these politicians often also have ties to the ski resort monopolies and real estate interests in mountain states who lobby for environmental deregulation, for instance to control more water rights for snowmaking, and pro-development land use and pro-business labor policies. The Sunrise Movement and National Resource Defense Council have also become more active in mobilizing outdoor enthusiasts. Building a political and class consciousness in mountain towns then is a first step.

While wealthier individuals and homeowners vote and become involved in local politics in droves, their working class and younger counterparts traditionally have not felt as though they had any political agency or that there existed any channel for them to advocate for the provisioning of basic material necessities. Though it appears that movements have begun to gain a foothold in mountain towns, major impediments still exist. For one, there are multiple structural and cultural mechanisms in place that prevent solidarities from being formed, and there does not exist a tradition in the region of movement building and leadership.

Voting itself is challenging as well. One needs a valid lease contract and, potentially, official mailing for proof of address, which those sleeping on couches, subletting, or rooming with multiple others may not have. If one does not possess an in-state driver's license, one needs to present a passport which is not always available. Then, questions of citizenship and fears of ICE presence are increasingly relevant. Finally, voting is not such a simple proposition for many. The first weeks of November are some of the busiest of the year as ski areas prepare the slopes, groomers, snow makers, and lifts for opening day. Hotels use the shoulder season to transition to winter operations, and many seasonal employees are just arriving, scrambling to find rooms and jobs. Then, the target population, when not working, is often not in town. When a Frisco, Colorado community organizer, Hayes Walsh was working on getting a local STR regulatory framework on the ballot in 2021 which would require anyone who wanted to run a STR out of a SFH to live in the house for at least half of the year, he found that one, "a lot of people in Frisco actually live in the nearby towns of Dillon and Silverthorne," and two, registered voters who would favor such a measure were never at home. If not at work, they were outside. "'So I'm knocking on doors of registered voters. They're just out mountain biking or rock climbing or sailing and like doing stuff', explained Walsh" (Horvath 2021). But these barriers are no excuse for not doing more.

Grassroots Organizations

There are several local organizations advocating for housing action in mountain towns, including land trusts and the non-profits just mentioned. But, in the author's mind, the most prodigious and comprehensive is called ShelterJH in Jackson, Wyoming. Jackson is the most unequal place in the country and has some of the most hostile state and local legislators to housing action and progressive politics. Still, ShelterJH has gained a lot of rhetorical ground and has begun to mobilize individuals from all factions of the mountain town underclass. ShelterJH, the only independent housing advocacy organization in Teton County, has a mission of "building grassroots support and political power to address housing insecurity in the Tetons" (2022). The organization has audited all of the vectors stemming from the municipal code, planning board, executive office, and influential citizens and businesses that keeps housing inaccessible to the Teton Region's working class.

Discovering the nodes of action, important electoral races, and political touchpoints, ShelterJH has devised an eight-point platform, comprehensive voting guides, educational material, and has engaged in strong public outreach. Some of ShelterJH's accomplishments include organizing a large march on Town Hall in support of homes for all, and ShelterJH has forcing updates to local and county housing regulations, including the ending of documentation-based discrimination in rental opportunities They have brought up the idea of tenant protections in the Town of Jackson for the first time ever, including introducing a 30-day lease termination notice period and housing dispute mediation programs. ShelterJH registered as a 501(c)4 to lobby and endorse political candidates with impressive success, with 60% of its endorsed candidates winning their elections in November 2020. Their coordinator has been appointed to the Housing Supply Board, effectively infiltrating a developer and homeowner centric institution. What is more, ShelterJH has raised awareness about unfair and illegal evictions and they were able to hire a part-time staff member which has made a significant impact since previously ShelterJH had been a completely volunteer

run organization, which according the group had lost many volunteers who moved away because of housing challenges.

ShelterJH has offered support for and challenges to certain elements of housing development projects, a rare voice that represents the actual people who truly need housing, instead of the interests of developer or wealthy homeowners. ShelterJH lobbies the Town and County of Jackson to grant DACA recipients the ability to apply for affordable housing with the Jackson/Teton County Affordable Housing Department. They have made strides in conducting outreach to the Spanish Speaking community, including hiring a bilingual organizer, and they have worked on establishing a regional housing council. ShelterJH's members have submitted to the Town Council over a hundred letters in support of a development moratorium, except of deed-restricted housing reserved for locals, to prevent further displacement before affordable housing protections are set in place. They successfully convinced the Town of Jackson to hire an additional Housing Department staff member to free up more time for investigating affordable housing possibilities instead of just signing off on new building permits and that sort of thing.

ShelterJH advocated for the institution of the Preservation Program, a new initiative in Jackson that ties down payment assistance to recording a permanent workforce deed restriction on the newly purchased home. Now, the organization is working on partnerships with realtors and legislators to develop a real estate transfer tax, as well as cross-institutional collaboration. It is growing its membership precipitously. And it is working on getting those members on public housing boards, again to infiltrate a heavily skewed system. ShelterJH continues to monitor development projects to make sure the affordable units promised materialize, it is attempting to make sure that the STR regulations are strengthened and enforced, and it pushes affordable housing to the top of the docket for new site plans. Lastly (though not conclusively, the organization has even more projects in progress), ShelterJH is "educating the Jackson Hole public about tenant rights, opportunities to engage with housing policy, local housing research and upcoming developments" (ibid).

The organization's policy platform supports establishing dedicated public funding sources to subsidize affordable housing development. They advocate for a state real estate transfer tax which would raise an additional $13 million annually at a 1% rate in Teton County alone. ShelterJH (2022) supports a preservation program that "helps keep existing homes in workforce ownership, so that as workers retire they can sell to younger workers instead of to second-home owners," and a tax abatement program to protect low-income individuals from rent hikes. Instead, they advocate for a sliding scale rate that taxes second-homeowners proportionally more. They also support a special purpose excise tax that would pool sales tax revenue into a community housing fund which would pay for deed-restrictions and interests in buildable land for deed-restricted housing development.

When it comes to the zoning and land use code, ShelterJH supports an inclusionary approach to all up-zones which mandates a proportion of new developments are deed restricted to specific income levels with appreciation caps to ensure permanent affordability and stricter enforcement. The organization also advocates for a general push to up-zone and make inclusionary all neighborhoods in the Teton Region, as well as to legalize accessory dwelling units and mobile home lots.

ShelterJH's measured approach addresses the heart of the supply and demand inconsistencies, and displacement-oriented tendencies. This sets it apart from other, real estate industry funded, yes-in-my-backyard housing advocacy groups. The aim is for the municipality and county to rework the land use codes to promote affordable development and *dis*incentivize luxury condo, STR, and mega-mansion compound projects that exacerbate the housing crisis. Another policy measure in the land use domain that ShelterJH supports is the strengthening of housing mitigation rules so that developers build or pay in-lieu for housing proportional to the economic growth they contribute to. Finally, the organization advocates for the establishment of a regional housing council, modeled after the famous Tahoe regional example, that "brings together all key stakeholders (housing groups, social service organization, businesses, large landowners, realtors, conservationists,

developers, etc.) in a *partnership framework* that is fully staffed and facilitated to solve our housing challenge together" (2022).

While ShelterJH bases its platform off the conviction that housing should be a universal basic right, its strategy is firmly liberal in that it advocates for electoral and local solutions that have been tested in many other, less conservative, states. There is no blatant call to 'eat-the-rich,' or end billionaire wealth, and so on, though such calls would not be unwarranted given the extreme inequality and issues of social cohesion in mountain towns, delineated earlier. Through voter outreach, constituent mobilization, public meetings, and getting to know elected officials, the organization pushes for thoroughly moderate solutions such as deed restrictions, inclusionary zoning, a real estate transfer and special excise tax, and so on. Development moratoriums have been implemented for various reasons in many communities across the country, including the Sierra Nevada's Tahoe region. These proposals come across as extreme in Jackson, however, because it is there where capitalist development has reached its apex and where capitalism's ultimate winners have sheltered themselves from the protests of those who have ended up on the losing end of the equation. But because the housing crisis did not begin and will not end in mountain towns, it is important to consider the more fundamental solutions to the problem and imagine what a truly emancipatory movement would look like.

Reinterrogation

While contemporary housing and planning research and policy—which includes the suite of more free market and regulatory strategies that mountain towns have employed to ameliorate the worst of the housing crisis' externalities—have some marginal potential to improve living conditions for the working class and to improve measures of social cohesion, they lack the structural tools to really make a dent in the problem. Contemporary housing policy is framed as a "benevolent regulatory activity that serves the 'public interest' over the powerful," yet "a consultation with the sociology of the housing and planning research and policy literature alternatively suggests that it serves rather than constrains power" (Allen 2017). For instance, the research and policy discourse is entirely premised on the ideology that housing is a commodity which is consumed, therefore tying housing to market conditions and economic standing instead of premising the discourse on housing as a human right. Invoking Bourdieu, Allen (2017) writes that this 'symbolic violence' "involves the use of knowledge, discourse and myth to coerce people into social roles, such as homeowner, thereby securing domination through consent."

Housing policy restrains conflicts over housing tenure, and the critical arm of research and policy in that domain amplifies the bifurcation between the powerful and powerless and the struggles between them over housing. While this emphasis on struggle for scarce resources, an analytical frame that this paper has relied on heavily, is useful in recharacterizing the liberal housing discourse, ideally housing would be transformed into a collaborative process of becoming. Housing would therefore be liberated from dependence on the state and market, making it an autonomous process of individual and communal actualization. Alternative housing models with varying degrees of individual and community autonomy have been pioneered in many places, notably in the American South during the Civil Rights Movement with community land trusts (CLTs); the garden city ideas posited by Sir Ebenezer Howard and demonstrated at Letchworth, UK which included land lease terms to ensure long-term affordability of housing; the regional city theory and related high-

quality affordable neighborhood planning done by Clarence Stein, most notably of the City Housing Corporation at Sunnyside, Queens; the limited equity cooperative model first pioneered by the Amalgamated Housing Cooperative in the Bronx in 1927 by the Jewish labor movement, under the leadership of Sidney Hillman; the squatting movement in 1980s Berlin, and the self-built housing movement in Latin America. Movements to rebuild neighborhoods and provide housing post-urban disinvestment are well recognized within American inner cities. What would a network of autonomous spaces look like in mountain towns, where conditions of inequality and housing scarcity are so pronounced? Is there a possibility for permanently affordable and democratic housing to be developed or reclaimed in these havens for capital?

Housing Sovereignty

A linchpin of achieving what might be termed as housing sovereignty in mountain towns is divorcing housing from both income and employment. Reserving affordable units for resort employees or for those working full time at a local business making close to minimum wage means that there can be no sustainable housing tenure. Given housing's commodified status and the incentives municipalities have to elevate real estate values, communal approaches to housing are out of the question for planning committees, as are ways of creating the sort of "housing relationships, material forms and aesthetics that not only reflect our being-in-common, as opposed to our status as wage-laborers, but also our immediate needs and desires as human beings" (Hodkinson 2012). Moreover, affordable housing in mountain towns is reserved exclusively for those who perform the labor that placate the desires of the ultra-wealthy second homeowners and visitors. They maintain the environmental and social conditions and reinforce the relationships that make these places so desirable to the ultra-wealthy and to luxury real estate capital. But reserving the mountains exclusively for those with lots of wealth and for those who serve that wealth,

accessing the mountains on their day off, makes for a pressing environmental justice dilemma.

It is my opinion that everyone who wants to experience the mountains should have the opportunity to do so and that the standard one must meet to live fulltime in the mountains should not be owning a vast amount of capital or the willingness to serve those with capital. Clearly there must be some form of growth management in place and some form of barrier to entry due to the inherent limitations of geography and the delicate ecosystems that we have been lucky enough to inherit in a largely intact state. So, I am not advocating for the wholesale subdivision of the mountains, but I am asking how can access to the mountains be democratized. This is not a question that the market or that contemporary housing and planning research and policy has an answer to. Yes, up-zoning can help densify neighborhoods, but zoning policy does little to effect affordability (Baiocchi et al. 2018) and the housing market does not respond to nudges in mountain towns the same way it would in cities.

In a word, it will take much broader structural changes and a reworking of governance regimes to ensure equitable housing opportunities in mountain towns (and in general). One of the original responses to the housing question under modern capitalism was voiced by Friedrich Engels in 1845 who argued that there was no such thing as a housing crisis, only a crisis of capitalism, and that "the only real alternative…was to 'abolish altogether the exploitation and oppression of the working class by the ruling class'" (Hodkinson 2012). While Engels' analysis is somewhat reductive and strategically unhelpful, it does beg the question of how power can be wrested from the capitalist class in order for everybody else to achieve a level of freedom that a housing system based on private, individual ownership and capital accumulation denies. However, a coalition politics that prioritized the right to housing could very much make an impact on the problem in mountain towns.

For anarchists studying housing, that would mean the creation of a "common housing movement that brings together public tenants, homeowners, private renters, squatters and the homeless around a political agenda to take all housing out of private property relations and into a form of 'commonhold' that would provide affordable, secure, collectively-controlled housing for all" (Hodkinson 2012). Commonizing housing would not yield the end of the housing question, but it can "help to circulate and expand the commons to improve life in the present and provide the basis for post-capitalism in the future" (ibid). Where this movement starts is with divorcing the housing and planning research and policy discourse from the notion that housing is inherently a profit-making commodity. For no amount of handouts to owners, developers, and investors to maintain profitability have proven to address the root cause and scope of the housing problem (Baiocchi et al. 2018).

A Federal Strategy

One influential politician began this movement building project in the United States not long ago. There are many reasons why those in power mobilized to disparage and force Bernie Sanders out of the presidential races in 2016 and 2020, but perhaps the most symbolic one had to do with housing. To defeat a real estate baron, an apex representation of the real estate state, Donald Trump, Sanders put forward his Housing for All platform which had six key intentions:

- End the housing crisis by investing $2.5 trillion to build nearly 10 million permanently affordable housing units.
- Protect tenants by implementing a national rent control standard, a "just-cause" requirement for evictions, and ensuring the right to counsel in housing disputes.
- Make rent affordable by making Section 8 vouchers available to all eligible families without a waitlist and strengthening the Fair Housing Act.
- Combat gentrification, exclusionary zoning, segregation, and speculation.
- End homelessness and ensure fair housing for all
- Revitalize public housing by investing $70 billion to repair, decarbonize, and build new public housing. (Sanders 2020)

Sanders' strategy would transform the housing landscape in this country, making it look much more like peer nations in Western Europe who have stronger social safety nets and a social democratic policymaking tradition. The aim of building millions of permanently affordable units by preempting their conversion to market rate dwellings, in other words building non-market affordable housing and strongly regulating their quality and lease and ownership terms, is something that would deal a large blow to the real estate industry, bring many millions of Americans out of poverty, and begin the movement toward allocating housing as a right. A national cap on annual rent increases and a just-cause eviction standard, as well as a national inclusionary zoning requirement, making federal funding contingent on planning best practices, implementing a fair housing agency to protect renters from discrimination and exploitation, and so on are policies that would radically democratize the country's towns and cities.

For reference's sake, in France, more than 40% of renter households live in the public rental sector, which has remained stable over recent decades, and allocates units to those with a broad range of incomes and age groups. The 2000 law *Loi Solidarite et Renouvellement Urbain* requires that municipalities publicly provide at least 20% or 25% of housing within their jurisdiction. The law affects hundreds of municipalities across France, including several in the mountainous departments of Savoie, Haute Savoie, and Isère in the Alps and Occitanie and Nouvelle Aquitaine in the Pyrenees, where many of the major ski resorts and their mountain towns are located. In the eighteen years between 2001 and 2019, "1.8 million units of public housing have been built…most are infill developments in desirable locations that prioritize high-quality design and are developed through an inclusive process" (Acolin 2021). France also employs extensive rental regulations to protect tenants in the application process, from unfair lease terms, and from evictions.

Lease terms are a minimum of three or six years for an unfurnished unit meaning that a landlord cannot grant a tenancy for a shorter period, and tenants are entitled to a minimum of one year duration, regardless of non-payment or other citations. Rent increases are tied to

a national rental index and tenants enjoy a substantial amount of public support in the form of universal rental assistance known as *Aide Personnalisee au Logement*. The minimum notice period for a landlord to terminate a tenancy is six months for an unfurnished unit and three months for a furnished one. Eviction procedures are extremely difficult. An average eviction takes 226 days to carry out which results in 226 days of lost rent on top of legal costs for the landlord. All of these measures, as well as their more progressive planning codes and agricultural land protections, mean that while French mountain towns have experienced similar booms in demand from very wealthy buyers and an influx of luxury real estate capital, residents have had a relatively much easier time finding and staying in housing. As a result, even the most exclusive mountain towns such as Val-d'Isère and Courchevel retain a vibrant community of younger people and working-class individuals who have dedicated their lives to the mountains. There are far more local businesses per capita, far more diversity, and far more accessibility to goods and services and to the outdoors as a result. Naturally, other factors are at play. For instance, the Alps are generally more encroached upon than their counterparts in the Rockies or Cascades or even parts of Appalachians. A long history of pre-industrial and contemporary agrarian production exists in the Alps. Workers also enjoy far stronger benefits and protections that allow them to enjoy a level of stability that Americans do not.

Back in this country's mountain towns, where land is extraordinarily valuable and the power of real estate capital and the ultra-wealthy dominate, the policies with the most promise in Sanders' proposal are:

1) To place a 25% 'House Flipping' "tax on speculators who sells a non-owner-occupied property."
2) The imposition of a two percent 'Empty Homes' "tax on the property value of vacant, owned homes to bring more units onto the market and curb the use of housing as speculative investments."
3) Sander's 'Sustainable Homeownership' policy package, which encourages the development of alternative social housing regimes.

This last component is inspired by Sanders' own experience helping to build the Champlain Housing Trust in Burlington, Vermont which is the largest CLT in the country and generates enough capital endogenously to be self-sustaining. Nudging towns to establish their own CLTs with billions of dollars in grant funding would make their introduction much more attractive to mountain towns and would do a lot to make long-term housing tenure a reality for the first time for mountain towns' underclass.

Sanders' 'Sustainable Homeownership' program would have had the most transformative impact across the country, mountain towns included, because it would have begun to interrogate the role of housing in society from the bottom up. By eliminating or drastically reducing profit-taking, housing would become decommodified for good and treated as a social provision, a shared commons, giving it a liberatory potentiality that presently does not exist in many domains of contemporary life.

Alternative Ownership Models

There is a rich history of alternative ownership models in this country and elsewhere. Sir Ebenezer Howard's garden city plans are founded on public ownership of all municipal land, which is then leased to residents. Native Americans had, and in the case of the Haudenosaunee in New York State maintain, nation ownership, giving them sovereignty over land, resources, and housing allocation outside of market forces. Indeed, it is this sovereignty in both socialist and nationally controlled property arrangements that has inspired such strong condemnation from capitalist states and free market devotees. Moreover, the radical arm of regional planning theory and practice has been sidelined for the same reasons: cooperative ownership, governance, and development fundamentally challenge the preconditions for capitalist hegemony. Therefore, the only alternative ownership model that has been allowed to expand in the United States is the hyper-local CLT. With policies such as Sanders' 'Sustainable Homeownership' program, perhaps CLTs could expand to the regional scale which would have a far greater effect. In the regional

capacity, CLTs could reshape ownership of housing at scale, as well as of agricultural land and businesses, giving CLT members far more democratic say over their lives and places. But, for the time being, CLTs largely function on a small scale, gaining sustainable control over mostly housing for neighborhood or apartment block wide communities.

CLTs are "community-controlled organizations that buy the freehold of land (and existing properties) and legally binds its use to providing affordable housing. By supposedly removing the land from the private property market and controlling its use in perpetuity, the CLT stops speculative and inflationary forces driving up property prices and rents for the existing community while any increase in value (or equity growth) stays within the local community and does not become private profit" (Hodkinson 2012).

The individual owner of a unit receives the right of possession, control, exclusion, enjoyment, and disposition over the house, while the community retains possessive rights over the land and the government reserves the right to collect tax and employ eminent domain (Loh 2021). While these rights very much resemble mainstream market ownership models, the two core principles which the CLT model are able to uphold are those of equitable and sustainable or long-term development. "Residents who live on and around the land guide the development process through participatory planning and direct democracy…Equitable or community-led development not only yields results like permanent affordable housing, but the process itself yields the empowerment of residents as they develop their leadership and technical capacities" (Baiocchi et al. 2018). This equitable development yields greater civic capacity premised on shared places which has empowering ripple effects across the community, both within and outside of the CLT. Moreover, this civic capacity enhances local sovereignty over resources because CLTs "require investing heavily in capacity-building at the community level to support…civic actions," and are "a form of financial infrastructure that can increase the capital absorption capacity of a place" (Loh 2021). The sort of empowerment and community building produced by CLTs and other community ownership models would have an extremely potent effect in mountain

towns as a result. While small charitable and advocacy organizations, such as ShelterJH, have sprung up recently in these places, there is a deficit of political coalitions representing and bringing together renters, the working class, the Spanish-speaking population, and the ski bums.

Beyond equitable development, the CLT's other foundational principle is sustainable or long-term development which is about stewardship and longevity. Part of the issue with status quo housing allocation in mountain towns is the understanding that workers and renters will stay at most a few seasons. The affordable housing provided either caters to transient employees, using lease terms and means testing to encourage such transience, or leans on deed restrictions which similarly only applies to 'qualified residents' and does not limit the resale price or rent that the property owner seeks. In the case of deed restrictions, the targeted local employees retain their subservient, exploited role, or face eviction. Moreover, the deed restriction model props up the real estate industry and individual SFH ownership standards because the municipality gives a substantial payout to property owners and developers without demanding that they actually sell their property. No structural or land use reforms are entailed, and the targeted community being housed lacks autonomy over the units they are occupying. CLTs, meanwhile, acquire the land itself and restrict resale opportunities to limit increases in housing values which "stabilize communities against speculative development" (Baiocchi et al. 2018), but usually generate their own self-sustaining capital. Government support, however, is mandatory, especially in such high value and buildable land-scarce places as mountain towns.

Getting municipal governments to reprioritize community ownership in their housing planning will be an extremely tough ask since, as numerous anecdotes relayed in this paper have displayed, town boards and councils are so thoroughly captured by real estate and second homeowner interests. Municipal government actions are, moreover, dictated largely by their reliance on property taxes for revenue. This is where a strong prod, such as the $50 billion investment to provide grants for CLTs as Bernie Sanders proposed, would be helpful.

It would represent the sort of strong federal guidance that has proven so successful in the French Alps and Pyrenees and which would be even more emancipatory in a community ownership manifestation. Absent strong government financial support or the gifting of public assets, the CLT project could become class exclusive, a problem it already runs into with its requirement for residents to finance the debt repayments through a combination of deposits and rents, no matter how relatively marginal that value amounts to (Hodkinson 2012). These sorts of challenges are inescapable with a model that, though clearly quite radical, still relies on private ownership within a wider private property system. Moreover, such small enterprises, when left to fend for themselves, are extremely "vulnerable to the power of finance capital and the instability of financial markets" (ibid). These challenges reinforce the necessity for public-sector support to absorb a larger share of the risk and responsibility for providing affordable housing.

But mountain towns are already selling or donating land to developers to increase supply, sometimes with affordable set aside requirements, and sometimes without them. Donating or selling land to non-market housing organizations at a discounted rate would do much more to further the housing and community cohesion goals town plans have professed to want to achieve. Furthermore, eminent domain remains an option for all levels of government to employ. That is a tool which has been used to displace many more precarious households for arguably less important 'economic development' projects. In mountain towns, where large compounds owned by those with several other residences which are left vacant most of the year, properties could be subdivided, rehabilitated, or repurposed to house many more individuals, individuals who are presently precariously or un-housed.

Housing Rights and Protections

The government can also, as it does in France, administer a right of first refusal where tenants are guaranteed the right to purchase the unit they reside in at a mandated fair price if it goes up for sale. These land and building policy suggestions are discussed by

Baiochi et al. (2018), who also cover the need for significant public funding for what they term *permanent affordable and democratic* (PAD) developments. Grants, low or no-interest loans, funds and subsidies for deep affordability, housing focused public banks, and tax exemptions for PAD developments are all necessary. Revenues could be raised using a real estate transfer tax for luxury residential properties, a non-occupancy tax for luxury units used as investment or second home, and property tax reform to more progressively target wealthy homeowners and corporations, and release some of the burden on long-term low-income residents. These revenue measures are tried and true.

In France, second homes are taxed so heavily that, on top of the onerous land use and building code regulations, make owning a second home effectively unprofitable. This has not stopped French people from owning vacation homes, the practice is widespread and stems from post-World War II economic development policies, but it has helped to limit speculation and luxury development that have outsized impacts on the housing market. There will likely be a measure included in France's 2023 budget to increase even further, a surcharge of between five and sixty percent, the *taxe sur les logements vacants* on second homes which is explicitly "designed to benefit rural communities on the coast or in the mountains" (Morgan 2022). In Vancouver, facing an extreme property rate hike between 2015 and 2016 driven by investment and second home buyers, the province implemented a speculation and vacancy tax, known as SVT, in 2018 along with new property taxes on homes worth $3 or more million. Owners can avoid the tax if they "rent out their property or designate their British Columbia property as their principal residence" (St. Denis 2022). Tax revenues from the SVT go toward affordable housing projects in the region. The revenue has helped add around 20,000 affordable units to the province's long-term rental stock between 2018 and 2020. Moreover, "the number of property owners who have to pay the SVT has dropped because owners have rented their properties out, have sold the property or have claimed the principal residence exemption" (ibid). In a word, the tax has worked extremely

well and could easily be applied to high amenity mountain towns on this side of the border if governments were receptive to it.

Important anti-displacement policy measures are also sorely needed. Baiocchi et al. (2018), in their paper on creating "people-driven alternatives to an unjust housing system," propose universal rent control to "set maximum annual rent increases, provide clear legal avenues for tenants to dispute rent increases; and implement vacancy control measures to prohibit the raising of rent upon vacancy of rent-regulated units" (ibid). As discussed, these sorts of rent control policies have been highly successful in France and other European countries. Rent regulations, moreover, have been shown to "benefit incumbent renters in controlled and maybe even proximate uncontrolled units by promoting housing stability…the impact of rent regulations on neighborhood stability is one area where there is broad agreement in the literature" (Pastor et al. 2018). Rent control is an effective tool to deal with sharp rent upticks, slow displacement, and "have less deleterious effects than is often imagined" (ibid). Rent control works.

Baiocchi et al. (2018) also propose a just cause eviction measure, fair housing enforcement, condo conversion restriction, and the right for tenants to organize. This last measure, paving the way for tenant unions, would fundamentally change the power landscape in mountain towns. By organizing and demanding fair rent practices, tenants in mountain towns would be granted a far stronger voice to advocate for their material conditions and rights. The Alternatives to an Unjust Housing System report (ibid) also proposes stronger inclusionary zoning measures and the implementation of special zoning districts to "preserve and create affordable units and prevent displacement of residents." An affordable housing-friendly federal government would pass these measures alongside legislation that would ban states from preempting the aforementioned policies, such as was done in Montana. One should not forget that the affordable housing issue transcends housing. PAD development has the potential to yield a broad range of social benefits. They enhance community cohesion, reduce residential alienation and precarity, build solidarity,

spur diverse economic activity, create good jobs, free up community resources, avoid families from being saddled with debt allowing them to cover their other critical expenses and save money, and "the community wealth and assets that residents create together translate to rights and resources that individual residents each can access, benefit from and often pass down to future generations" (ibid).

These proposals are called unrealistic by detractors because they so fundamentally challenge the economic arrangement and mode of housing allocation that has become hegemonic since the neoliberal turn. The policies are also challenged more explicitly on budgetary grounds. But private owner-occupied housing is already highly subsidized. "Owner-occupied housing should be considered the core public housing sector, constituting a major part of the "hidden welfare state—fiscal policies that primarily benefit middle and higher classes" (Aalbers 2016). These subsidies take the form of mortgage interest deduction benefits which amounted to $68.1 billion in 2017 and which overwhelmingly line the pockets of the wealthiest homeowners. The mortgage interest deduction program far outweighs the housing voucher program for renters and the Low Income Tax Credit for affordable housing development in terms of size and effect (Schuetz 2018). Just balancing the ratio of money that the federal government spends on housing subsidies, known as 'tenure-neutral housing policy,' would go a long way in improving conditions for renters, public housing, and PAD development.

But "housing problems are not the result of greed or dishonesty. They result from the structural logic of the current housing system" (Madden & Marcuse 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to move beyond the go-to strategy both locally in mountain towns and in federal housing policy of subsidizing for-profit real estate developers and homeowners in creating policies and actions to lower rents and build affordable units. Public and cooperatively owned housing must be prioritized, and the economic logic that prioritizes housing exchange value inflation over all other measures must be reversed. Furthermore, it is imperative that funding for public services be untied from property taxes in order to diminish the hold of the

real estate state's grasp. The near-total reliance on property tax revenue also "leads to incredible service disparities between neighboring municipalities, corresponding directly to racist housing and labor practices" (Stein 2019). This arrangement has led to dramatic disparities in urban centers, but also in mountain town communities.

Mountain Town Conclusions

Down valley communities often have inferior libraries, schools, transportation networks, and healthcare facilities than their resort neighbors, which makes the experience of working and living in these places even more viscerally unfair. Solutions to this dilemma include more state and federal dollars for underserved residents, but also a reworking of the tax code, giving municipalities more control over how capital is raised and spent. Stein (2019) suggests that banks can be heavily taxed for foreclosures. Luxury fees can be levied on "buyers of properties worth far more than the median rate," making them "less valuable for purchasers and therefore less likely to be produced." Similar taxes can be levied on non-primary residences, as discussed. And finally, pertaining specifically to the planning profession, municipalities "can tax away any increased revenue that landlords derive from public initiatives." Recognizing that it is the public sector and the workers in mountain towns that have done the work to make land valuable, because of the way these places have been constructed and maintained, the understanding should be that the profits are "socially produced and therefore no one individual's or corporation's to own. A steep tax could expropriate that value and thus prevent landowners from profiting excessively off the collective work of city making" (ibid).

These measures could dramatically democratize the landscape within mountain town communities and between them and other rural places. But achieving these wins will take an extraordinary political mobilization that far transcends the boundaries of mountain communities, since the origin of the housing crisis in mountain towns is wrapped up in the process of planetary urbanization and capital accumulation, and is not a result of local

market failures. Building political coalitions and solidarities within mountain towns and between the urban and rural underclass is a project that those interested in housing liberation, in realizing the right to housing, must embark on. Much has been written about organizing in cities but getting the ski bums and the service workers to show up takes different tactics.

On some level, it requires those factions to take on responsibility that they are traditionally unaccustomed with. As Auden Schendler—the sustainability director at Aspen Resorts and frequent contributor to Protect Our Winters and opinion columns—has opined, the "ski bum is central to any mountain town's survival. The value of the ski bum in society is a marker of a healthy Gini coefficient, and a diverse economy" (Hansman 2021). But, he says that, "if we want to save the ski bum, and the dug-in lifestyle that comes with it, we have to change the idea of what the ski bum is." On some level, ski bumming is "anti-citizenship…but if you're intentionally disengaging, that means you have to accept that people who *do* engage get power, and make choices that impact others." Ski bums have to show up, he says in conclusion, "otherwise it's going to be a town full of mega mansions and the same economic divides and one-percent power that's wreaking havoc across the country." While this analysis ignores the structural factors that have disempowered ski bums and service workers, the sentiment that on some level it is on these communities to self-organize to win power holds true. Given the extreme labor shortages in mountain towns, it is not a far stretch to imagine a resort worker and tenant unions from taking root and winning many concessions that they could not win in a more diverse economy. Moreover, as Protect Our Winters has identified, simply voting in local elections could really drive the needle. After all, the examples of what happened in Crested Butte during the COVID-19 Pandemic's shutdowns and the elite pushback against mildly progressive proposals could have been countered if there was more bottom-up support and reinforcement for those policies.

In conclusion, this paper has traced how mountain towns have been swept up in the process of planetary urbanization. While other rural places serve as nodes of sites for extraction and metabolic reproduction, mountain towns by my definition are used to store the winners of our unequal economic system's accumulated capital. A myriad of problems have emerged from this highly unequal landscape, as place is coopted, access is limited, and the working classes are subjugated. Where this extreme inequality and uneven capital distribution make themselves felt most acutely is in the allocation of housing. Mountain town governments have attempted to rectify the crisis of housing through a variety of means, but all have come up short because they fail to address the fundamental orientation of housing within the economy and the place claims of the ultra-wealthy. A new strategy that seeks to decommodify and make common housing is in order. Federal and local social-democratic policies that treat housing as a right are required. Furthermore, political coalitions must be constructed to build solidarity within mountain town communities to win concessions and to shift the logic of housing from that of an asset class that bundles up an immense amount of political power to a collaborative process of becoming, reasserting place claims in the process. The microcosm of the mountain town sheds light on the way that property, class, and place interact under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism. Analyzing the way that mountain towns have developed and how they may be made more democratic sheds light on the broader process of planetary urbanization and the liberatory nodes within that process.

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