

PARK CITY MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY NEWS INTERVIEW



NAVIGATING THE WATERS OF PERMITS, REGULATION & ENFORCEMENT

CHIEF BUILDING OFFICIAL CHAD ROOT PROVIDES A STEADY HAND AT THE TILLER

Park City Municipal Corporation: *You are coming off a strong peak building season. (Total valuation for building construction surpassed \$100-million in August).*

Chad Root: Yes, this was probably our strongest year since 2007—the year the Montage was constructed and the year prior to the recession—and the numbers are consistent with the growth curve that we’ve been experiencing since 2008. We hired two additional building inspectors to help manage the workload, but I’m anticipating we will level off next year.

PCMC: *What was the complexion of the project mix?*

CR: We had a lot of larger remodels (tear-downs), and the lion’s share of construction has been residential. Next year I anticipate the mix will shift toward fewer, bigger projects.

PCMC: *Even though the high season has ended, your department remains busy year-round.*

CR: Yes, many cities’ building departments slow down come autumn, but Park City’s only real downtime is in February. At first snowfall, we’ve always get a wave of residential permit applications because people realize they need to start preparing their homes for Christmas. Then in December, permit applications for the Sundance Film Festival start coming in en masse.

PCMC: *Speaking of Sundance, several city departments have already started preparations for the film festival, as I’m sure yours has.*

CR: Absolutely. As we do every year, we’ve reviewed updated, and revised our policies and procedures for the event. This year we are assigning one of our building inspectors to do fire inspection for all official Sundance venues as well as tag-on venues, which will speed up that process. We are always trying to get out in front of things,

and we are also working hard to educate the parties that will be affected, so that they can plan ahead.

We will also be realigning Building Department staff for the period immediately before and during the festival. For the first time this year, we will be assigning fully fifty percent of Building Staff during these three weeks to Sundance-related activities and enforcement. We’ll be doing code enforcement during the day and nightly enforcement of nightclubs until 4:00 a.m.

This, of course, means a reduction of office staff during this time, which will diminish our permit-processing capabilities. But we are reaching out to the contractors in this regard and will encourage everyone to plan ahead during this busy time.

PCMC: *It sounds like the rule of thumb for Sundance is “Early is always better.”*

CR: Yes, permit applicants should understand that if they don’t apply early enough and their first application is denied, they may not have time to procure a liquor license for their event.

Hopefully this will spur people to action.

PCMC: *Many people don’t know just how big a responsibility code development and enforcement is for your department.*

CR: Yes, we take our role in protecting and enhancing life safety very seriously, and it’s one of the things I’m most proud of. In addition to fire- and building-code enforcement, we also oversee what could be called community-service codes, such as monitoring loud parties or excessive weeds. And, of course, we monitor business-license inspections and compliance with the land-management code. These services help maintain Park City’s high quality of life, and—as I like to say—make it easier for everyone to be a good neighbor.

PCMC: *Are you developing any major new codes?*

CR: Over the next several months we’ll be developing two new codes—both of which will directly protect health and

“WE ARE ALWAYS TRYING TO GET OUT IN FRONT OF THINGS”



safety. In addition, we'll be revising two existing codes to make them more effective.

The first major new code is a ban on wood-burning fireplaces for all new structures. Wood burning impacts air quality, which is a major concern statewide. There is currently a county-wide moratorium, and I would like the city to follow suit. Because we don't have a lot of industry in Park City, wood burning contributes a higher percentage of particulate matter than it does in the valley. And even though we are at a higher elevation, we don't have a lot of wind to clear the air on a regular basis.

PCMC: *How will the ban be structured and enforced?*

CR: We'll be taking a page from the playbook of other resort towns such as Telluride and enacting a market-driven solution. We are still fleshing out the details, but we may adopt something like a two-to-one swap. If you want to build a wood fireplace in your home, you will need to purchase two credits from existing owners with wood-burning fireplaces, who would then convert theirs to gas. As time goes by and fireplaces become scarcer, the price will go up.

PCMC: *What is the second major code you are developing?*

CR: Most people understand that Park City sits squarely in a wildland urban interface (WUI) and that this brings with it an inherent risk of wildfire. But a lot of folks don't know that most homes in forest areas burn because fire spreads across ground-level landscaping (as opposed to crown fires that spread across treetops). Maintaining defensible space is what will keep your home safe, and many insurance companies are actually starting to mandate this as part of their homeowners' insurance policies.

After Kurt Simister (Park City's Deputy Fire Marshal) and I attended a conference on wildfire mitigation, we decided to develop a code modeled on the ones presented there. We're working with Brian Cottam, Utah's state forester, to write the ordinance, and the Park City Fire District will be administering the program.

PCMC: *What's the framework of the code?*

CR: For new buildings we will develop guidelines for siting buildings, incorporating fire-resistant materials, and landscape design. But the real challenge is our existing building stock. In this case, we'll probably mandate that any time a permit for work is pulled owners will also need

to execute a wildfire-mitigation plan around their property. Of course, for the ordinance to be successful we will need to educate the members of our building community—especially the landscape architects and contractors—as well as our own Planning Department, which approves landscape plans. Our goal is to have 60 percent of buildings in compliance over the next ten years, and hopefully this will be enough to prevent fires from spreading too rapidly.

PCMC: *You mentioned that you are also revising two major existing ordinances.*

CR: Yes, after this past year, we realized two city codes weren't worded as effectively as they could be to protect safety and maintain quality of life. The first is extending the fireworks ban to be year-round with the exception of the days before and after four major holidays: Fourth of July, Miners Day, New Year's Day, and Chinese

New Year. Setting off fireworks is always a fire hazard, and doing so other than other than to celebrate these holidays can create quite a noise nuisance. It can also cause serious problems for dogs, people with sensitive hearing, and even veterans who may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Lastly, we will be revising the fire ban ordinance so that we can enact it immediately instead of going to City Council. This expediency is critical during an emergency such as excessively hot weather or a brush fire that has potential to spread to city limits.

It will also allow us to rescind any ban just as quickly if conditions change.

PCMC: *And how do you spend your time when you are not helping improve and protect Park City's built environment?*

CR: Outdoor recreation is a big part of my life and one of the main reasons I moved to Park City. I especially love to river fish and go whitewater rafting. My two boys—ages 11 and 14—are big water skiers (not to mention snow skiers), so you can usually find us out on the lake or on the slopes on the weekends.

For More Information:

Park City Building Department

Colorado Wildland Fire Conference:

www.wildfire-colorado.com/

Be Ready Park City (includes WUI maps):

www.bereadyparkcity.org/

