

## County set to buy Basalt townhome for worker housing

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ASPEN — More than four years after Pitkin County government announced it had money to devote to worker housing and was looking for ways to spend it, county commissioners may be ready to pull the trigger on a purchase.

The county has placed an Elk Run townhome in Basalt under contract for \$342,000; commissioners will take up the purchase on Wednesday. A public hearing is scheduled Oct. 24.

The county now has more than \$10 million in accumulated funds earmarked for worker housing, but commissioners have been stymied on how best to spend the money. A year after the intention to acquire housing was made public in the spring of 2009, commissioners gathered at a board retreat in Redstone to discuss the reasons for their inaction on a list of some 30 to 40 potential investments.

More recently, commissioners held a three-hour discussion last spring to review current demand for worker housing and at what income levels, and to prioritize the spending of the housing funds. They agreed county government isn't going to develop housing; if new housing is to be constructed, it will be through a partnership with another public or private entity.

They also decided to retain a real estate broker to help analyze opportunities from Basalt to Aspen; broker Sally Shiekman-Miller ultimately got the nod to work with the county.

Since then, a trio of county officials working with Shiekman-Miller have been looking at real estate in the upper valley to get a sense of what's available. The work led to the contract for the Elk Run unit, according to Brian Pettet, director of public works and one of the threesome assigned to housing acquisition. Also involved are Jon Peacock, county manager, and John Redmond, finance director.

A second housing purchase is a topic of discussion for commissioners when they meet in executive session Tuesday.

The Elk Run unit is a 3-bedroom, 3.5-bathroom townhome. Whether it will be a rental unit, or sold to a qualified worker, has yet to be determined, as is whether it will be made available to the general workforce or reserved for a county government employee, Pettet said. Commissioners previously agreed to spend half of the county's money on housing for government needs and half on housing that would be made available to the county's working populace in general.

"We don't have a lot of housing for our own employees. Trying to attract people has been a struggle," Pettet said.

County officials are looking for units that can fulfill both the county's needs and the community's needs, he said.

"We've looked at a lot of properties," Pettet added.

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