Manager Profile

Interview by Jon Stavney

Debra Figueroa, Glenwood Springs City Manager

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I always have a hard time finding the managers’ office in this building since there are no signs on the main floor. It is tucked back in the far corner on the third floor like a bat cave. Do you think whoever put the office here wanted to be left alone? I think they wanted this expansive view of the Colorado River and the Flat Tops.

How long have you been City Manager for Glenwood Springs? I just had my two-year anniversary.

Congratulations.

What was your previous experience? I was assistant Borough Manager for Carlisle, PA and was mainly focused on redevelopment in that role. In Sarasota FL, I was Community Development Director and then Assistant to the City Manager.

What is your home town? St. Augustine Florida

What was your intended profession after college? I studied political science and wanted to join the United Nations. I wanted to end world hunger.

What is the best thing about living in Glenwood Springs? The People here are good-natured and optimistic. You don’t get a lot of that on the East Coast, or in Salem Oregon where I was briefly. Glenwood has to be one of the nicest places in the entire country.

What are the Council priorities and how are they communicated? The 2018 Priorities are written but we are still working off of the 2017 document because it hasn’t been adopted. Top priorities are to reconstruct south Midland Ave, replace the 27th street bridge, continue 7th street redevelopment. We also need to start planning to replace streets. We have 43 centerline miles and 103.5 lane miles. A pavement asset assessment through a third party noted that more than half our lane miles are “failed.” Other than that, I inherited a list of 60 items without notation or priority, so we have begun giving them narratives, prioritizing and tracking them. I plan to start a cycle of such an exercise every two years with a new council within a couple months of an election.

Is there a staffer you wish you could clone? Yes, many. My entire senior management team from city engineer, parks & rec director, public works director who is retiring. We would get more done, and be able to do more of what we recently did by moving our finance director to a COO position. We are quite a small city and I am lucky to have such a talented staff.
Why are you in public service and why do you stay? I like helping people and I can do that a lot more effectively at a local level. Some of the projects I am proudest of in my career were reaching out and helping people through the system and making their lives better. There was an elderly woman in Sarasota whose home was close to falling into the creek. It was a county and city storm water issue and we navigated the situation and saved her house. Stuff like that I can do again and again. I am proud of making a drive through town a better experience for people.

And you sure have in Glenwood with the Grand Avenue Bridge and related projects.

If you had a million dollar gift, what would Glenwood do with it? I would like to see more money for quality of life items. We are OK with most major infrastructure, but our parks have not been improved for 20 years or more. But really, the next phase of the 7th Street Project is to turn it into a festival street. It began with beautification, a sidewalk project on restaurant row and it has been so successful in 2 years that it seems obvious. The entire project is to go from the train station to the confluence.

What are regional issues you see? Well thanks to NWCCOG broadband has an exciting solution. We are hopeful. Housing. Economic development, how do we diversify without stealing businesses. RAFTA is proposing a new tax which if it does not pass will pose serious challenges to their operations. We will all have to work together to solve that, and we have a history of up-valley/down-valley fighting through RAFTA that is not healthy.

Speaking of Economic Development it seems like you can’t talk about it the same way on one end of the valley as the other and that is a shame. Politically, it is a long ways from Aspen to Rifle. And Glenwood is right in the middle. We have some council dynamics that reflect that politics have reached us all the way from Washington D.C. These are not partisan issues we have, but people are more comfortable within their own bubble.

What are the best and worst things about being a city manager? The best is working with senior staff to solve issues for our residents. The worst is probably when there is no good answer. I like fixing things.

Patience! When you see what needs to be done and others don’t yet, have more patience, and patience for different opinions. I would have saved myself a lot of grief.

Interview