NWCCOG Member Profile

Interview of Ryan Mahoney by Jon Stavney

Ryan Mahoney, Basalt Town Manager

**How long have you been in this job?** Twelve months as of June 2018.

**What were your previous roles?** My first job out of grad school was as a planner in Buena Vista. Within a year I was interim manager there for another 3 years. It was a steep learning curve. Then I was town manager in Dolores before coming here.

**What is your hometown?** I was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona and went to University of Arizona.

**You must be loving the heat in Colorado this summer?** I don’t live here for the heat.

**What was your intended profession after college?** Medical school. I took all the pre-med courses then lost interest, but biology piqued my interest in natural systems and I started seeing bad development as a system and thought to myself ‘what kind of job do you do to get into that?’ I took environmental studies, then I found Urban Planning and got a masters in that.

**What is the best thing about living in Basalt?** It is still a great place to raise a family compared to most of America, and there is still a measure of safety for my kids to run around without constant supervision and worry. There is lots for our 7 and 10-year old kids to do. That freedom is similar to when I grew up.

**What are the Basalt Town Council Priorities and how is that communicated?** We did a retreat when I started. I gathered information from staff about ongoing and desired projects. That coalesced into a task list for 2018. After starting in June, it was enough to budget by but it was a big list. We turned it into 12 top priorities and printed it on a large sheet in the council chambers though the task list was done in something of a vacuum with regard to a strategic framework. We will begin backing into that framework next. Having printed priorities is important, like when last week a council member talked to me about parking and I was able to say, “for this year we are maxed out on projects, we need to discuss that as an entire council to make it a priority.”

**Why are you in public service and why do you continue?** You are taking care of all those items in the system like public safety and quality of life that when done right are taken for granted. You also get to do fun projects, build new things. I’ve always gravitated to public works. We built a new shop in Dolores. I was able to be a part of downtown revitalization in both Buena Vista and Dolores. In Basalt, they have
done an outstanding job at maintaining roads and have a commitment to investing. We are putting $1 million into roads in 2018, which is pretty amazing for 42 lane miles. Yes, I am excited about infrastructure.

What prepared you best for the town manager role? Probably my Mom who was a teacher, because you have to be able to listen well and put your own ego aside in this job to represent the people, just like a teacher does.

How do you know what success looks like as a manager? If you are able to communicate well with Council and keep them more or less satisfied with having a direction and understanding of the flow of money and seeing that direction being fulfilled through accomplishments. Also through having a productive and satisfied staff.

Is there a staff position you wish you had? A project manager who could gather documents for procurement, deal with that side, then follow through with oversight on any capital improvement project. With a small staff in Basalt, for instance, on the park project the planning department is taking the lead while public works did all procurement for the road projects. The town engineer wrote the bid documents. I would want such a person not only do manage projects, but to bring experience to write a 5-year capital plan that was right sized for the organization with an understanding of staff capacity. What we had when I came in wasn’t accomplishable.

If you had a million dollar anonymous donation tomorrow, what would town do? We would start on the Basalt River Park on the Pan & Fork property. It is a focal point in the middle of downtown, at a crossroads and has been subject of extensive public process and scrutiny. The longer it stands unfinished, the more animosity builds. Seeing some finality to it would allow people to mentally move on. It would also allow us to engage community in events again. We have this tiny stage in a pocket park while Dillon is spending $1 million per year on entertainment.

What are the Regional challenges in the Roaring Fork Valley? Land Use. The fact that town is split in half between two counties with different approaches to land use makes it difficult to predict what ultimate build out looks like.

What are the best and worst things about being Town Manager? The Best—how dynamic it is. There is always something new every day. The Worst—how dynamic it is. There is always something new every day. It is always interesting. Right now, though, it is challenging to be in any form of government.

What advice would current manager Mahoney say to yourself when you were starting as a manager back in BV? Lots of communication, letting boards and staff know what is going on even when it seems like too much. Make sure you are embracing your staff. Acknowledge them, know names. Meet them. I had an employee thank me the other day and say he used to work at a place where he was never acknowledged.

Well thank you for your service and your time today.