

A bill aiming to bring workforce housing to Dowd Junction heads to the Governor's desk

Once signed into law, the bill will enable underutilized state-owned land across Colorado to be turned into affordable housing

News [FOLLOW NEWS](#) | Apr 27, 2023



Ali Longwell [FOLLOW](#)
alongwell@vaildaily.com



Once signed into law, Senate Bill 1 will promote the development of affordable housing on underutilized state-owned land. This Dowd Junction parcel — currently utilized by CDOT — served as both the inspiration and proof of concept for the bill.

Ali Longwell/Vail Daily archive

A bill aiming to bring more affordable housing to the state — including to a parcel in Dowd Junction — will now make its way to the governor's desk after passing the House on Wednesday, April 26.

"I'm absolutely thrilled that my priority bill of the year, SB23-001, has now passed both the House and Senate with bipartisan support," said Sen. Dylan Roberts, one of the primary sponsors of the bill. "We introduced this bill because we know that communities here in Eagle County and across the state want to take on new developments to meet our affordable housing needs but are often burdened by a lack of affordable, buildable land."

The bill was the [first to be introduced](#) in the Senate this year and was sponsored by Roberts. A 3.5-acre parcel in Dowd Junction

“Colorado mountain towns are becoming increasingly difficult to afford for educators, construction workers, and everyone in between,” said Rep. Meghan Lukens, in an April 26 press release. “Land costs make up a large portion of the cost of housing, and this bill will make it easier to build housing that Coloradans can afford on state-owned land, helping us retain our workforce and boosting local economies.”

Lukens — alongside Roberts, Sen. Rachel Zenzinger and Rep. Shannon Bird — was a sponsor of the bill.

Through the bill, this parcel — as well as other state-owned land across the state — will become available for public-private partnerships to build more affordable housing. The bill has two primary components.

The first is that it enables Colorado’s public-private partnership office to help broker partnerships on state-owned land between local governments, nonprofits and private developers to build affordable housing.

The second is that it allocates \$13 million from the state’s budget this year to help initiate projects of this nature, including \$2 million to get the Eagle County project started. It’s expected that this balance will be spent to move the trailers currently on the site, relocate the employees to another part of Eagle County, and get the land ready for workforce development.

“By granting access to underutilized state land for public-private partnerships, this bill will jumpstart several new projects, including the development of at least 80 housing units in Dowd Junction for our local working families and individuals,” Roberts said.

The Dowd Junction site has long been identified as a potential community housing site, largely due to its location, which is in close proximity to Vail, Avon and Minturn. Preliminary studies of the land identified that the site has the potential to develop 80 two-bedroom units of 800 square feet each, according to the fact sheet on the bill.

Russ Forrest, Vail’s Town Manager, said that while the site’s potential is still to be determined there’s some hope that its impact could be similar to that of Miller Ranch in Edwards.

“We’ve been looking for what’s another Miller Ranch-type of project that could provide significant housing, different types of housing to support housing for the valley as a whole; and this is a land opportunity that could be similar in terms of impact as Miller Ranch,” Forrest said.

Earlier this year, the State Land Board, Eagle County, the towns of Vail, Minturn and Avon, the metro districts of EagleVail, Traer Creek and The Village, as well as the EMD Limited Liability Company [signed a memorandum of understanding](#) to begin a cooperative planning effort on the site.

With this understanding, the parties began working together with the State Land Board, which is assuming the costs for the conceptual design and planning including site evaluation, utility evaluation, evaluation of potential deed restrictions, and much more.

So far — aside from other earlier meetings leading up to the bill with the State Land Board, CDOT, the Governor’s office, and local municipalities — the planning had a “kickoff meeting,” Forrest said. He added that the meeting merely gave a background on the State Land Board, its ability to be a partner as well as some initial discussions about the site itself.

“I’m very excited about the opportunity to continue to move forward on this project from a town of Vail standpoint,” Forrest said. “One of our strategic goals is to move forward with the housing projects in the town of Vail that we’ve been talking about and working on, but also to find another regional housing project and partnership with our partners in the county, and this certainly addressed that strategic need.”

However, “there’s still a lot of work in front of us,” Forrest acknowledged.

“I know that once this bill becomes law, it will impact the lives of many,” Roberts said. “I’m so grateful for all the leaders within Eagle County in particular who I’ve been working on this with for years that helped bring this to fruition.”