

Vote yes on 1A for a safer, more viable community

Greg Poschman and Kelly McNicholas Kury, Guest Commentary
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With four days to go until Election Day, we are writing to ask for your support in passing ballot question 1A on the Nov. 5 election ballot.

Our community has long struggled with the need for affordable housing for the workers who make our community function. We know that over 90% of our county public safety workers, including sheriff deputies, jail detention officers and dispatch staff who answer our 911 calls, live outside of Pitkin County. We also know that the hospital has 300 workers that they are trying to house and that almost 60% of our child care providers live outside of county lines.

Repeatedly, we hear from you that affordable housing is the top issue we should be working on, and one on which we are performing poorly. Therefore, we have spent several years crafting a thoughtful ballot measure to raise dedicated funding to tackle this problem. We have tailored the program to prioritize housing for our critical community service workers, and also to leverage development-neutral solutions.

Ballot issue 1A asks for a new and dedicated property mill levy to accomplish several goals. We are asking for voter support to prioritize housing for our most critical workers in the areas of emergency response, transit, road and bridge maintenance, physical and

mental health care, education and child care, through the construction, acquisition, preservation and operation of affordable housing.

“Why do we need this money? And how can we possibly ask for more tax dollars?” These are questions that we hear and which deserve to be answered honestly. The county has limited ways to raise revenues and has had to turn down opportunities to partner on housing. Pitkin County cannot ask voters for a real estate transfer tax, an excise tax on luxury goods, an employee head tax paid by businesses or a tax on specific properties. Without a dedicated housing fund, Pitkin County draws from its general fund to do housing projects. The general fund makes up 22% of the budget. The remainder of the budget is dedicated to other county purposes and cannot be used for housing. Within the general fund, housing dollars make up \$2.7 million. We additionally have a housing mitigation impact fee that we collect on new development. That fund generates less than \$1 million per year. While we have been able to leverage that money for some housing successes, housing is an expensive endeavor and these amounts are not sufficient to achieve our community’s housing goals.

Comparatively, Pitkin County has the second-lowest mill levy in the state and Colorado has the third-lowest property tax burden in the country. Pitkin County’s taxes into the general fund are additionally limited by state law to only increase by 5.5%. We know the recent tax increases were all driven by the explosion of the real estate market. The market also made our housing problems more extreme. Some saw their home value triple overnight – some saw their rent triple overnight. We believe the community wants us to act on housing and we hope our moderate increase of \$10 per month (\$120 per year) per million dollars of taxable value will be supported by a community that wants to see us do a better job of housing our deputies, snow plow drivers, health care workers and child care providers. We realize that our voters will need to assess whether an additional 1.5 mills to raise \$8.5 million per year to pay for housing provides meaningful value. We hope you agree that it does.

We believe our voters want to live in a community with our deputies, snow plow drivers and child care providers. Because right now, we don’t. The housing crisis has gotten

worse as real estate values have increased, and a property tax most closely connects the problem to the solution — equitably spreading the benefits of increased real estate values across the community.

We also realize that our community wants us to manage growth and protect our rural character. We agree, and we've added language in the ballot measure that ensures our board and future boards will deliver housing responsibly. This language states that we will prioritize "such housing in areas consistent with existing employment, services and facilities to protect rural character." Our goal is to create housing for those who are already serving our community and commuting long distances each day — it is not to accommodate growth. These workers are already supporting our community, and they are struggling greatly to find housing.

Our website, yeson1ahousing.com, explains the ballot measure further and answers some frequently asked questions. We appreciate your support for housing our critical service workers and hope you will help us to stop kicking the can down the road. Please vote yes on 1A.

Greg Poschman and Kelly McNicholas Kury are members of the Pitkin Board of County Commissioners.

