

Step up to save the Genevieve block

Today we share with you an unprecedented opportunity to define and demonstrate our community's character and culture in the very heart of downtown Jackson.

We heard and shared your concerns about the threatened loss of the property commonly known as the Genevieve, or Van Vleck, block. That property continues to have entitlements that put it at risk of a total redevelopment into a hotel that would encompass the entire block.

However, we now have a chance to change that outcome. A local family, in partnership with the Jackson Hole Land Trust, has the block under contract for purchase. The sole objective: Give residents an opportunity to save the block.

But it is not a sure thing, and our window of time is short because the contract expires in August. To make saving the current character of the block a reality, each one of us must engage and become involved in this opportunity.

The block embodies the character of Jackson in an exceptional way. It was developed early in the town's history and, through stewardship of previous and current owners, has remarkably stayed intact, providing a unique cultural landscape with a story that spans more than a century.

Animated by bustling local businesses, the block has become a community hub, offering a relaxed setting right down the street from Town Square and blending a community green space shaded by mature trees, historic structures and commercial opportunities for local entrepreneurs. At a time when many locals feel that the growth of tourism is suffocating the things we love most about town, the block is a refreshing reminder of why so many of us choose to live here.

And yet the block's future remains in flux. As a community we must all step up — now — to save the block as we know it today.

When a dense hotel development was imminent last fall, our community united in opposition to the plan and articulated a desire to see the cultural landscape of the block remain intact. Strong in spirit, that initial effort lacked a mechanism for permanent preservation. Thanks to the community's action, now we have that mechanism.

The project partners have developed a plan that reflects the priorities outlined by the community and preserves the cherished aspects of the block with limited development that makes the plan economically feasible.

The plan sets the stage for historic preservation of the three most-beloved structures — the buildings housing Cafe Genevieve, Persephone and Healthy Being Juicery — as well as perpetual conservation of the green spaces between those buildings and through much of the block. The preservation of the historic structures provides space for thriving small-scale local businesses, like the ones there now, creating a community space for locals and visitors. The plan also includes a modified rezone of the block in order to consolidate limited development into the smallest footprint possible.

We believe this solution represents a great opportunity, and we are excited by the potential to identify additional support from the community that could further enhance this plan.

Project representatives will present these plans and the rezone proposal at a neighborhood meeting at 4 p.m. April 26 at the Genevieve/Van Vleck block at 135 E. Broadway. We encourage everyone in town to come out to learn more and find out how you can engage with and support this project. If you are away, reach out to any of us listed here to learn how to participate.

Given the direction the block was headed six months ago, this moment presents a remarkable opportunity to mobilize and manifest our values.

Complete commercial redevelopment is not inevitable, but we need to act now and act effectively to ensure the personality of the place does not dissolve forever. We need to fundraise for the historical structures and greenspace, identify investors for the limited development components and support the town's consideration of the rezone modification.

Every supportive voice and every last dollar are crucial to making this concept come to life. The block sustains us; now we need to sustain it. It is time to show up April 26 at — and for — the block.

The undersigned nonprofits and boards support this approach to saving the block. We hope you will join us in this effort.

Laurie Andrews is president of the Jackson Hole Land Trust. Morgan Jaouen is executive director of the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum. Ryan Nourai is a Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance field organizer, and Skye Schell is the Alliance's executive director. Katherine Wonson is president of the Teton County Historic Preservation Board. Guest Shots are solely the opinion of their authors.

GUEST SHOT

Laurie Andrews,
Morgan Jaouen,
Ryan Nourai,
Skye Schell and
Katherine Wonson

Enough with relying on luck on pass

There is a survey out now to try to gauge what things might be done to keep Teton Pass more organized for all users. Please take the time to do the survey, no matter what you do on the pass.

Teton Pass has a wild range of snow (400 to 800 inches a year), a lot of vehicles (10,000 to 12,000 a day) and a lot of recreational use (well over 100,000 backcountry runs per season). That mix is complicated because 60% to 70% of the backcountry use from the turnout at the top of the pass is on the north side of the road. That means users cross the road to start and finish their runs. About 40% of those users have dogs, and 30% choose to ski or ride runs that could impact the road and travelers below if they slid.

Just a small bit of recent history: Glory Bowl and Twin Slides were not skied often in avalanche conditions in the late 1970s and early '80s. In the mid-1980s a relatively small number of people skied them. Nowadays users of varying ability and avalanche awareness levels ski those slopes often. In lengthy discussions and work with Wyoming Department of Transportation avalanche technicians, it was agreed that luck is the significant factor in why there haven't been more slides, because just about every year since the increase in use skiers and riders have triggered slides that have affected the road and, sometimes, travelers.

In many cases the reason these slides did not cause fatalities was also luck, which is not a good operating policy.

We need to look at some possible actions. Closing Twin and Glory to public access in the winter would have some effect, but there will always be people who push the boundaries and "duck the ropes," making that tough to enforce. Closing access to the north side of the road would have the same general problem, with more access points to patrol.

Even if WYDOT went a step further and didn't plow the turnout at the top of the pass, some people would sneak onto those slopes. But not plowing would limit use and most likely encourage users to become organized on using the pass safely. Another possible solution that has been suggested and discussed is to install snowsheds over the road at the base of the Twin and Glory slide paths. Snowsheds would eliminate most of the danger problems to travelers on the pass. Some add-

ed benefits: more reliable conditions, because the pass would remain open to travelers, and the fact that travel in conditions that tend to cause avalanches would not necessarily be as dangerous.

There are other avalanche paths that affect the road, just not as often. It's possible that because Twin or Glory wouldn't be so much of an issue, more effort could be devoted to those areas. Snowsheds would help, because if traffic stopped due to a slide or accident, vehicles wouldn't be parked under dangerous slide paths for an extended time. That also could maintain access and reduce the impact of skier-triggered slides.

Another option is for skiers and riders to stay out of Twin or Glory on their own. That is the most affordable solution, but because of use patterns it is tough to imagine it being successful. The scary thing is that until some of these other options are implemented, it's what we have to focus on. Basically, users would need to make decisions based more on responsibility, not personal agendas.

In that vein, think about slides that close Teton Pass for one day and all the money involved. Some simple math here: Estimates are that 4,000 workers a day travel the pass. If each commuter works eight hours at \$25 an hour, that's \$800,000 per day that is lost to those workers. Then you have all kinds of other factors: lost productivity, complicated travel and family plans ... Suffice to say, it's messed up.

Another issue with skier-triggered slides is that WYDOT, the sheriffs and the Highway Patrol are put to work unexpectedly and are taken away from projects they could be doing elsewhere. WYDOT personnel in particular already work their butts off to keep the pass open and have to clean up after our mistakes.

Let's say our luck runs out and we have a skier-triggered slide that kills an innocent traveler on the road below. Who answers the question about why?

It's time to fix some stuff before this happens; enough with the luck.

Jay Pistono works as the Teton Pass ambassador, a post jointly funded by Friends of Pathways, the Bridger-Teton National Forest and several outdoor shops. Opinions expressed are solely the author's.

GUEST SHOT

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