BOOM TOWN

AMENITY MIGRATION IN THE RURAL WEST
& THE RISE OF THE “ZOOM TOWN”

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**OCT. 29:**
Expectations: Current Outlooks on Amenity Migration in the Intermountain West

**NOV. 12:**
Adaptations: Community Perspectives on Amenity Migration

**NOV. 19:**
Transformations: A Tale of Two Towns: The Successful Communities Approach in Action in Gardiner and Deer Lodge, MT

**DEC. 3:**
Innovations: Community Peer Exchange

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GNARLY CHALLENGES: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN GATEWAY AND NATURAL AMENITY REGIONS

Danya Rumore, Ph.D.
GNAR Initiative Amenity Migration Series
October 15, 2020
ENVIRONMENTAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROGRAM

Promotes a culture of collaboration around complex environmental, natural resource, and public policy issues throughout the mountain west through:

• Capacity building
• Public education
• Collaborative process design and facilitation assistance
• Academic instruction
• Research and analysis

https://law.utah.edu/projects/edr/
Gateway and natural amenity region (GNAR)

A region that surrounds state or national parks, other major public lands, scenic rivers or lakes, or is otherwise rich in natural amenities.
Park City, UT
Two National Parks
One Destination

MOAB
Where Adventure Begins
Question for the audience:

What GNARs or GNAR communities do you spend time in or care about?

Please make sure your chat is going to all panelists and attendees for all questions.
4.5 million visitors in 2017
An opportunity for the Zion region...

...and a challenge
The mighty wa (Utah's nationa

Park Officials Fret Another Bustli

Glacier

Superintendent: Glacier Park crowds again in 2016

By DILLON TABISH // MAR 3, 2016 // OUTDOOR RECREATION // EXPLORE UTAH

Tiny Utah town’s stunning canyon draws thousands of hikers — and a potential federal buyer

By BRIAN MAFFLY AND NATE CARLISLE | The Salt Lake Tribune
First Published Jul 11 2016 08:00AM · Last Updated Jul 11 2016 03:26 pm

Outdoor recreation » As hiker traffic overwhelms tiny Kanarraville, BLM seeks to buy private land at canyon’s mouth.

(Sheev Griffin / The Salt Lake Tribune) Hikers climb a ladder made from a tree at the first falls of the Kanarraville Falls hike in Kanarraville Wednesday, July 6, 2016.

waiting to enter the popular park. The traffic backed up all the hundreds of cars lined both sides of the parking lot.

Kanarraville • This tiny Iron County town has a big problem that some rural Utah communities would kill for.

Thousands of visitors come here, drawn to an increasingly popular day hike to a slot canyon and waterfalls up Kanarra Creek. But other than a $10-a-car parking area, an RV park and kids' lemonade stands, Kanarraville lacks opportunities to tap these visitors' wallets. The trailhead is easily accessible off Interstate 15 south of Cedar City on Zion National Park's northern boundary. Yet there are no groceries, restaurants, gas stations or shops here.
Big city problems in small rural towns and regions...

and some unique challenges

• Affordability and availability of housing
• Traffic/congestion/parking
• Insufficient or overwhelmed infrastructure and public services
• Employee attraction/retention
• Environmental and natural amenity impacts
• Economic vulnerability and need for diversification
• Loss of community character
• Questions about the role of tourism and tourism marketing
• Reduced quality of visitor experience
• Climate change vulnerability/adaptation
• Unique social-cultural-political dynamics
• Challenging local-regional-state-federal relationships
2018 Study: Planning and development challenges in western GNAR communities

- How pervasive are these issues across the western GNAR communities?

- How are GNAR communities experiencing and dealing with these issues?
2018 Study: Planning and development challenges in western GNAR communities

- Database of western GNAR communities
- Interviews with public officials in 25 western GNAR communities
- Survey of public officials across all western GNAR communities
What defines a GNAR community?

- Small town
  - 150-25,000 people
- Proximity to natural amenities
  - Within 10 miles of a national park, state park, national forest, lake, scenic river, etc.,
- Not in an urbanized area
  - Further than 15 miles from an urbanized area by road
GNAR community database

- 1,522 GNAR communities
  - 821 incorporated cities
  - 701 Census designated places
- 30.6% of Mountain West communities
- 61.1% of “small” Mountain West communities
Interviews with public officials in a range of GNAR communities

- 30 public officials (planners, town managers, mayors, etc.) in 25 GNAR communities
- Communities were selected to represent diversity of:
  - States
  - Populations
  - Levels of development
  - Amenity types
- 2 individuals representing regional organizations working with GNAR communities
Survey was sent out to 1,278 GNAR community public officials
• Completed by 333 public officials in 264 communities
  – Average population of represented communities was 4,895

As of 2018, these communities:
• Were growing (8.2% average growth rate between 2013-2018)
• Had an average per capita income of $27,206
  – Rural west average was $26,141
• Had an average rent of $880
  – Rural west average was $789
• Were seeing higher than the national average rates of housing unit and rental unit growth
• Were becoming more popular places to visit:
  – 82% of respondents said the number of tourists visiting their communities increased in the last 10 years
  – 42% said this increase was substantial
Important community characteristics

- Well maintained city infrastructure (i.e. roads, bridges, and utilities)
- A small town feel
- Maintaining community character/identity
- Livable wages
- Housing affordability
- Access to open space/public land
- Quiet neighborhoods
- A vibrant downtown or main street
- A diversity of housing options
- Open Space Preservation
- Healthy wildlife habitat
- Good urban design/community aesthetics
- Diverse transportation options

Percentage of Respondents

- Important for the entire community
- Important for more than half of the community
- Important for less than half of the community
- Not important
Questions for the audience:

How important is a small-town feel for the GNAR communities you’re familiar with?
Key community challenges

- Too much tourism
- Environmental degradation
- Crowding/overuse in recreational areas
- Population growth
- Traffic/congestion
- Parking related issues
- Change in community character
- Lack of resources and revenue
- Income inequality
- Climate related risks
- Income inequality
- Housing affordability
- Average wages relative to cost of living

Percentage of Respondents

Not at all problematic
Slightly problematic
Moderately problematic
Very problematic
Extremely problematic
Questions for the audience:

What are a few key challenges in the GNAR communities you are familiar with?
Housing

- 82.7% of survey respondents said that housing affordability is moderately to extremely problematic for their community
  - 32.7% said it is extremely problematic

- 26 interviewees representing 24 of the 25 communities in our interviewee sample identified housing affordability as a key issue for their community

- 49% of survey respondents said their community is not doing enough to address housing affordability

- Only 8% said their community is definitely doing enough to address housing affordability
Observation tells us that:

• Certain issues seem to come to the fore as GNAR communities develop
  – Communities often quickly go from not being concerned about short-term rentals to being quite concerned, sometimes due to acute shortages of long-term rental stock
  – Tensions between residents and tourists seem to appear once tourism reaches a certain level – or if the community attracts certain kinds of tourists
  – Many of these communities experience tensions between “old timers” and “newcomers”

• Certain kinds of GNAR communities tend to have certain kinds of issues (and don’t have other issues)
  – Geographic constraints may exacerbate housing issues, but also tend to prevent concerns about sprawl
  – Transportation issues are a predominant concern in some, but not all, highly developed GNAR communities—e.g., Springdale and Moab, UT
Growth, tourism, and development

• 34% of survey respondents said that growth is moderately to extremely problematic for their community
  – In contrast, only 16% of respondents said that too much tourism is moderately to extremely problematic

• 30.7% said tensions between long-time residents and recent residents is a moderate to extreme issue
  – Less than 20% said tensions between residents and tourists is a moderate to extreme issue
Relationship between growth rate and reported severity of challenges
Growth appears to be **as much a or more threat** to community character and livability as increasing tourism.

However, **tourism development still presents challenges**.

- Again, 16% of survey respondents said that too much tourism was moderately to extremely problematic for their communities
- 4% said it is extremely problematic
“[Tourism] is a love/hate relationship. Everyone realizes to some degree that we’re reliant on it, but that doesn’t stop people from hating tourists. We don’t really have the infrastructure in place to deal with high-demand weekends, so in those times it feels like we’re being bombarded.”

“I think [tourism] is the double-edged sword. We need the tourism dollars, but at the same time, during the peak days, we do get complaints about the tourists. There’s the frustration with tourists who are renting out single-family homes as though they were hotels. That’s a new trend. There’s the frustration that they’re loud, obnoxious. They do what they want and it’s impacting the neighbors and other residents.”
A lot of GNAR communities say they don’t want to be like:

- Vail, Aspen, or Breckenridge, CO
- Jackson, WY
- Moab, UT

**Or to be:**

- “A tourist trap”
- A big city
  - Many say they want to maintain their “small town-ness”

**On the other hand, some are concerned about becoming:**

- “An abandoned small town”
Questions for the audience:

What are your reactions to these findings about growth, tourism, and development in GNAR communities?
A need for proactive planning, additional capacity, and planning support

Common themes from interviews:

- Importance of proactive planning
- Importance of planning at a regional scale
- Challenges associated with local resistance to planning and local political tensions
- Feeling overwhelmed and/or in need of additional resources and capacity
  - 40% of respondents said lack of resources or revenue is very or extremely problematic for their community
    - Another 30% said it is moderately problematic
    - “We don’t have the staff capacity to deal with major crises.”
“We’re in this big growth period, but we didn’t have design guidelines in place.... From a municipal standpoint, we need to get ahead of the curve so we can prepare for what’s coming, but we need the time and staff and resources in order to do that.”

“The way that the city is trying to be forward-thinking in planning isn’t really welcome. [County] residents and commissioners are significantly more conservative than city residents, not just in a partisan political sense but in their attitude toward any change at all.”
Help wanted!

GNAR communities want assistance with their planning, development, and sustainability issues

- Strong interest in:
  - Model ordinances
  - White papers on key topics
  - Case studies and lessons learned
  - Best practice guidelines for GNAR communities
  - Help with charrettes and design workshops
  - Models for regional collaboration
  - Information about different funding options
  - Forums (in person, webinars, etc.) for peer-to-peer learning and sharing innovative ideas

- 95% say an online toolkit to support planning in GNAR communities would be helpful
Questions for the audience:

What are your reactions to these findings about proactive planning, additional capacity, and planning support?
Questions for the audience:

What tools, resources, and capacity do you think would be most helpful for GNAR communities to help them plan proactively and at a regional scale?
“Big city innovations in small towns” and learning from each other

GNAR communities are innovating and experimenting

- “Pop-up” intersection treatments and experimental traffic calming measures
- E-bike share programs
- Tiny house ordinances

And they want to learn from each other and share their lessons learned
Questions for the audience:

What innovative things have you seen GNAR communities try?

*Information on specific communities and efforts are welcome so we can follow up to get more information!*
Enter COVID-tastrophe...
WHY AN IDAHO SKI DESTINATION HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST COVID-19 INFECTION RATES IN THE NATION

By Michael Ames
April 3, 2020
“I immediately started sobbing,” says Ariel Atkins, expressing how she was overcome with emotion when she got the news that the coronavirus pandemic was forcing her family business to close.
Robert Gehrke: Utah towns near national parks want tourists to visit, but hope they do so responsibly

(Photo courtesy Zion National Park) In this photo posted to the Zion National Park Facebook page on March 26, 2020, hikers stand and walk along a trail in the park. Rangers have encouraged visitors to practice social distancing to reduce coronavirus infections.

Published: 2 days ago

By Robert Gehrke • Updated: 2 days ago
Zoom Towns: Why Your Last Vacation Getaway May Be Your Next Home

Irene S. Levine Contributor  
Travel
COVID-19 has illuminated GNAR community vulnerabilities

Public health vulnerabilities
• Transient populations
  – Residents
  – Second-home owners
  – Visitors
  – Workers
• Limited health care facilities and resources

Economic vulnerabilities
• Reliance on tourism and service industries
• Lack of economic diversification
...and maybe some opportunities?

Pressure to diversify economies

Influx of remote workers and amenity migrants

Planning for resilience
In every challenge there is an opportunity...and in every opportunity there is a challenge

Are GNAR communities ready for a major wave of amenity migration?

Is amenity migration the new “double-edged sword” and “love/hate relationship”?
Or even a Faustian bargain?

What can GNARs do to capitalize on the opportunities of amenity migration without losing the things that make them special?
Questions for the audience:

What key *challenges* do you think COVID-19 presents for GNAR communities?
Questions for the audience:

What key **opportunities** do you think COVID-19 presents for GNAR communities?
Questions for the audience:

What do you think GNAR communities need (or need to do) in order to effectively respond to COVID-19 related challenges and opportunities?
A hub connecting people and resources to help GNAR communities and the regions around them thrive and protect the things that make them special
Research
- What are the challenges?
- What are the opportunities?
- What are communities doing to prepare and respond? And what help do they need?

Education
- Getting students out working in GNAR communities, doing research, and developing tools
- Training for public officials and community members in GNAR communities

Capacity building
- On-the-ground planning, urban design, and collaboration assistance
- Online toolkit and related tool and resource development
- Connecting service providers and resources with communities
- Peer-to-peer learning forums (GNAR Network)
The GNAR Community Online Toolkit is designed to be a resource for planners, public officials, community members, consultants, and all others who are working in communities with access to significant natural amenities and recreation opportunities. This toolkit provides resources, case studies, model ordinances, and other tools to help GNAR communities plan for and respond to the unique planning, transportation, economic, community development, and sustainability challenges and opportunities they face. The toolkit is a living resource; it will grow and adapt in order to provide the most useful and up-to-date information possible.

Have ideas for topics we should address, thoughts about tools we should link to or develop, or suggestions for how to improve the toolkit? Let us know! Or even better: use the toolkit to share your case studies, resources, and lessons learned.

All tools and resources found in this Toolkit are reviewed by members of our Technical Advisory Committee – individuals working in or closely with GNAR communities. We’d like to thank all of our partners who have contributed their thoughts and feedback in order to make this a valuable resource.
The GNAR Network

The GNAR Network provides a forum where representatives of gateway communities can meet, share ideas, and identify immediate and high-priority needs that would allow them to make more informed decisions as they respond to the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact on the well-being of their residents and their local economies.

Join the GNAR Network Today!

Receive the latest research, resources, webinars, and networking opportunities with other GNAR Communities straight to your inbox.
Thanks to NITC for funding this research
Specialization in
SMALL & RESORT TOWN PLANNING

More info: http://plan.cap.utah.edu/
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