

PARK CITY MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY NEWS INTERVIEW



LEARNING FROM OUR SISTER CITY

COURCHEVEL'S MAYOR & CITY MANAGER DISCUSS HOW OUR SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP ENRICHES BOTH TOWNS

*In 2014, Park City and Saint-Bon Courchevel—a town in the heart of Europe's largest ski resort—rekindled their relationship through Sister Cities International. Earlier this month, a six-member delegation from Courchevel visited Park City for a week. Philippe Mugnier, and Nicolas Feidt—Courchevel's mayor and city manager respectively—talked about their impressions of Park City and what the two towns can learn from each other.*

brainstorming ways to become more of a year-round economy. One thought, for example, has been to develop a free valet system or multi-ski slope pass for mountain biking.

**Park City Municipal Corporation:** Mayor Mugnier, what have been your impressions of Park City during this trip?

**Philippe Mugnier:** I have been so impressed by your town's hospitality—not just the city staff and council, but all of your citizens who have also reached out to host and welcome us. And your townsfolk are also so nice: everybody—including the resort staff—have such a nice attitude!

The topography of the ski areas is also different: the lines of sight and vistas are much more panoramic than in the Alps. Our mountains have more peaks and valleys, so the views are very different. Here you can look out for miles over the rolling hills; I feel like the mountains here are much less drastic (in a good way).

**PCMC:** What do you think Park City does well that you would like to replicate in Courchevel?

**Mugnier:** Your town has developed creative ways to extend tourism past the ski season. Summer can be a difficult season for Courchevel, so we have been

**PCMC:** You are a farmer by trade. Open space preservation—for agriculture, conservation, and recreation—is a driving issue in the greater Park City area. Do you have similar development pressures on your open space?

“WE HOPE TO EXPAND OUR RELATIONSHIP AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMS IN YEARS TO COME.”

**Mugnier:** Yes, farmland and open space preservation is very important in our region as well—in fact, for the entire country of France. We are constantly trying to revise our planning codes to strengthen preservation. Our region

is known for a specific cheese called Beaufort, a raw cow's milk cheese. This is an important tourism draw, as well as a key export, so having responsible development of farmland and pasture directly benefits our economy. We are very proud of our agricultural traditions, and want to maintain our heritage.

**PCMC:** How do you think our two cities can continue to develop our symbiotic relationship?

**Mugnier:** I think we all agree that our student exchange program is a mutually beneficial collaboration, and we're looking forward to strengthening and expanding it. Our students just love the experience: it really opens their eyes, and helps them learn English in a very natural setting. We would like to expand it, perhaps through a teacher-exchange program. And we could create a similar exchange program for the resorts'





staff and municipal offices in housing, transportation, and trails, so that each could learn the others' best practices.

**PCMC:** City Manager Feidt, Park City's government has designated three areas as "critical priorities." We are devoting considerable resources to improving transportation, housing, and energy reduction and efficiency. Are these also major issues for Courchevel?

**Nicolas Feidt:** Absolutely. Our economy, demographics, topography, and limited access routes are similar to Park City's, so we need to devote as much attention to these three issues as you do.

Let's take energy. We are lucky in one sense, in that our buildings have to comply with the national energy code, which is very strict. It requires heavy insulation, certain materials, and the like. This obviously makes it much easier to enforce.

Also, most of our capital projects, especially our buildings, use renewable energy. We recently built a large swimming pool that is heated and operated solely by wood pellets, a popular renewable fuel in Europe. Courchevel also renegotiated our energy contract last year with a national electricity producer, and we were able to structure it to be 100-percent renewable.

But we have some contradictory incentives, too, just like your community. We gnash our teeth over the mega-mansions, but they provide such a strong revenue stream that it is very difficult for to curtail the sizes because of the community amenities they support that would otherwise be unavailable to us.

**PCMC:** We certainly understand the contradictions. One of Park City's biggest energy challenges is the conveyance of water: we need to pump much of our water uphill, which is very energy-intensive. Is this a problem for you?

**Feidt:** Thankfully, no. We capture and store our water (including our reservoirs) uphill, which allows us to gravity-feed it to our residents. We also store our water for snow cannons, for example, uphill. We realized a long time ago that water was a key issue for the city, and we invested heavily to protect, process, and store it.

**PCMC:** What are your transportation challenges?

**Feidt:** Gridlock during the ski season is a huge issue. Like Park City, Courchevel has limited ingress and egress: there's only one road from the valley to the resorts, with no shortcuts or side roads. Our car traffic balloons from 500 cars per day during the off-season to 7000 for skier traffic.

One solution we have successfully deployed and look to expand is our airlift (gondola) system to transport not just skiers but employees and visitors up the mountain. We would like to build a series of different levels to link the valley to the old village and the old village to the resorts, eliminating the need to ever use a vehicle. We estimate that this could reduce car volume by one-third to one-half.

We also want to expand bus capacity. Right now our service is free but only operates during the ski season, so we want to increase our routes and use our skilift equipment to move people around. Park City's year-long bus system is certainly a great model for us to emulate.

**PCMC:** What policies have you put in place to address the lack of affordable housing?

**Feidt:** We are tackling this very aggressively and creatively at the municipal level. One-third of our housing is public: it is either city-owned housing (set aside for local employees) or subsidized. The city itself houses half of our employees because—like Park City—the cost of living is just too high for workers in the public sector. We also have dedicated housing stock for our seasonal workers: we have 400 apartments for resort employees that mostly sit empty during the summer.

We have two main programs to house residents. We can sell them land at an affordable price, on which they can build a house, or they can buy a flat from us at below-market rate. In either case, there are strict requirements for eligibility. These include the buyer's age, family situation, and the number of years they have lived and/or worked in the city. The city council awards each apartment after a strict evaluation process. We give a lot of weight to families with children, for example. Both programs have been extremely costly, and have come with a lot of legal issues, including charges of discrimination.





**PCMC:** Given this, if you had to do it all over again, would you?

**Feidt:** I was not city manager when the programs were first instituted, but, in answer to your questions, yes, I probably would. The headaches I could do without, but the outcomes have been what we want, including keeping families with children in the community.

We developed another program specifically geared at keeping senior citizens in town: we turned a decommissioned school into an 11-unit apartment building for elderly tenants. The residents live autonomously (they are not medically impaired), but they take part in a very robust activity schedule, including cooking classes that are held in the common kitchen, computer classes, dance, and local history conferences. This has been quite a success.

**PCMC:** That does sound like a rather innovative and successful program. Are there any last thoughts you would like to share with us?

**Feidt:** Only to say that we learned so much on our trip, and there is so much to envy. Your high school, for one, blew us away. The amenities—the auditorium, the playing fields—were so impressive. You have much to be grateful for, and we hope to expand our relationship and exchange programs in years to come.

*To learn more about Courchevel visit <http://www.mairie-courchevel.com/>.*

*To learn more about the Sister Cities International program, visit <http://www.sister-cities.org/>.*

