



Aspen Councilman Romero to join Hickenlooper's team

He'll step down from City Council

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RICK CARROLL

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ASPEN — Aspen City Councilman Dwayne Romero, also the president of Related Snowmass, is stepping down from his elected seat to head the state of Colorado's Office of Economic Development and International Trade.

Romero's appointment as the office's executive director, made by Gov. John Hickenlooper, was announced Wednesday. Romero said he plans to keep Aspen his home, where he lives with his wife Margaret and three daughters.

The effects will be felt locally. Romero said he plans to tender his resignation from City Council between mid- and late February. He said he'll stay on board with Related Snowmass — a division of New York-based Related Cos., the developer of the resort's Base Village — but in a reduced, part-time capacity, most likely as a consultant.

Romero's exit from the top post at Related Snowmass coincides with the Feb. 23-scheduled foreclosure auction of Base Village, which currently is in receivership. He said the development's financial picture did not play a role in his decision to apply for the state job.

Meanwhile, his vacancy on City Council will have to be filled within 30 days of his last day in office, according to Sally Spaulding, community relations officer for the city. The remaining four council members — Mayor Mick Ireland, Derek Johnson, Steve Skadron and Torre — will select Romero's replacement from a pool of applicants for the job.

A one-term councilman chosen by Aspen voters in 2007, Romero was up for re-election in May, meaning whomever replaces him will be up for re-election as well. Three City Council seats are for the taking in May, as both Ireland and Skadron's terms expire, as well.

Romero recently said publicly that he would not seek re-election to City Council but was considering a bid for the mayor's seat. Widely held as a pro-development councilman, Romero and the liberal Ireland have had a hot-cold relationship over the years, often squabbling over development proposals but finding common ground on less polarizing issues.

Romero said he spoke to Ireland about the appointment Wednesday. Ireland could not be reached for comment.

A West Point graduate who earned his MBA from Harvard Business School, Romero, 45, moved to the Roaring Fork Valley in 1997 to head the Hines development of the Base Village at Aspen Highlands. He has made Aspen his home for the last seven years.

Romero, who has no political affiliation, said he applied for the job in the middle of November, shortly after Hickenlooper, a Democrat and former Denver mayor, won the gubernatorial race. The job became even more enticing when he was told he could commute from Aspen but continue to live here, he said.

"The governor has actively sought out a cabinet and team that truly reflects all four corners of the state," Romero said, adding that "we did not want to leave the valley. We did not want to leave Aspen. I'll have a flexible work schedule accommodated by the governor, which is a credit to what he's trying to achieve."

He said he'll commute to Denver once a week, leaving Sunday evenings or Monday mornings, returning Thursdays. He'll also maintain an office for his state post in Snowmass Village.

Hickenlooper, in a prepared statement, said Romero has the experience to help build the state's economy.

"Dwayne Romero knows how to create jobs and lead organizations," Hickenlooper said. "He helped stabilize and build successful businesses in the Colorado mountains, most recently in Snowmass Village. Dwayne has the necessary leadership training and business management experiences to promote economic development in Colorado and beyond its borders."

The Colorado's Office of Economic Development and International Trade, as described by Wednesday's news release, "aims to create a positive atmosphere for economic development through financial and technical assistance provided in support of local and regional economic development activities throughout the State of Colorado. Its programs, offices, and services include business retention and relocation services, a bioscience and emerging industries program, business finance programs, the Colorado Tourism Office, Colorado Creative Industries, the Colorado International Trade Office, the Colorado Small Business Development Centers, minority and women-owned business services, small business programs, and economic research."

Romero said his chief priority is fairly clear: create jobs, attract new business to the state and stabilize the economy.

"Frankly, I take this with great honor to help and map the effort (of the economy), which is at the center stage of the strategic initiative of the administration," he said. "This obviously is going to take everyone."

rcarroll@aspen-times.com

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