

Telecommuting From the Slopes: Roam at Winter Park, Colorado

Roam at Winter Park, Colorado, hopes to draw outdoor enthusiasts with its access to the Fraser River, skiing, open space and fiber-based broadband. **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** thanks Chip Besse, managing partner at the Fraser River Land Company, and CenturyLink for help gathering information for this profile.

By Sean Buckley / *Broadband Communities*

Roam, a 171-acre development in Winter Park, Colorado, is designed to appeal to avid skiers, bikers and hikers – and to telecommuters who need fiber-based broadband. In the COVID-19 era, the development is perfectly positioned to attract people defecting from cities who work from home and desire the outdoor space, fresh air and ample outdoor activities the mountain town offers.

Roam originally was a 10-acre family business with just a few tourist cabins, but it has a big expansion planned. “Historically, the property was more of a dude ranch,” says Chip Besse, managing partner at the Fraser River Land Company. “We got permission in March 2018 to build a 1,100-unit housing development, 80,000 square feet of commercial space and a 400-room hotel.”

Roam’s location in the Fraser River Valley is a dream for outdoor enthusiasts. It offers access to the Fraser River, the Winter Park Resort ski area, the Fraser River Bike Trail and the Arapaho National Forest. “The town is putting a paved access trail right through the middle of the property, which will connect to Winter Park’s ski area,” Besse says.

Residents will be drawn not only by the abundance of outdoor activities but also by the Fraser River Land Company’s dedication to preserving the environmental sustainability of the area. Environmentally friendly features will be built into Roam’s homes, which will feature layout and design elements specific to individual sites. An integral part of the Roam development is a focus on the protection and revitalization of the Fraser River and its wetlands.

Open space for residents is another major Roam amenity.

“As developers, we’re leaving 65 percent of the community for open space,” Besse says.

FILLING IN BROADBAND GAPS

Residents who purchase Roam homes will be able to access CenturyLink’s 1 Gbps fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) service. Besse says internet service where Roam is located historically was “spotty.”

One advantage was that CenturyLink already had a building on the property. The telco saw the opportunity to connect the homes in the development as another way to overcome broadband customer churn.

“Because it already has the fiber running through here, I told CenturyLink it should run a special 1 Gbps program, and we would incorporate [CenturyLink] into our development plans,” Besse says. “CenturyLink perked up and thought it could regain market share in the valley.”

CenturyLink had a plan to bring fiber into individual residences to guarantee faster internet than what other providers could offer. “It’s a flagship project for CenturyLink and for us,” Besse says.

The telco has struggled with broadband losses, particularly where it offers only low-speed DSL today. During the first quarter of 2020, CenturyLink lost 11,000 broadband subscribers. (It lost 71,000 customers who were on either 20 Mbps or 20 to 99 Mbps but added 60,000 subscribers who opted for speeds of 100 Mbps and higher.)

Jeff Storey, CEO of CenturyLink, said during the telco’s first-quarter earnings call that “as work from home began

to ramp up, we saw an immediate increase in new orders and requests for speed upgrades.”

Roam is just one of several areas where CenturyLink is expanding its FTTH footprint. For instance, it recently connected 14,000 homes and businesses in Boulder, Colorado, with fiber. In 2019, it expanded its fiber network to reach an estimated 300,000 additional homes and small businesses. CenturyLink lit FTTH service in parts of Spokane, Washington, and Tucson, Arizona. This year, CenturyLink will build out its fiber network to an additional 400,000 homes and small businesses in Denver; Omaha, Nebraska; Phoenix; Portland, Oregon; Salt Lake City; Spokane, Washington; and Springfield, Missouri.

“We want to invest in fiber where we can afford to do so, and wherever we invest in fiber, we grow and we drive penetration out,” Storey said.

ADDRESSING COVID-19 CONCERNS

Fiber-based broadband at Roam also will be a significant draw for residents who now work remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A necessity for such workers is the availability of reliable, fast broadband.

The Pew Research Center estimates that three-quarters of U.S. adults can access high-speed broadband internet service at home, up from just 1 percent in 2000. However, many rural areas and about 14 percent of households in urban areas still lack sufficient broadband access.

Regardless, Pew reports, the share of employees who work from home “may increase for good as workplaces adapt to the post-COVID-19 environment.”

Besse says that his firm is seeing more residents move into areas similar to the Roam location. “With COVID, we have seen a lot of people start pushing to move to the mountains and get out of the city,” he says. “These people want to work remotely, and this is a great place to do that.”

VITAL STATISTICS

Property Description: Property includes 171 acres in downtown



Residents who purchase Roam homes will be able to access CenturyLink’s 1 Gbps fiber-to-the-home service.

Winter Park. Approximately 65 percent of the land will be preserved for open space.

Demographics: Active recreationalists, primarily ages 35–65 with a household income of \$450,000.

The proximity of Winter Park to Denver is attractive to people who don’t want to contend with the congestion of Interstate 70 ski traffic. USA Today rated Winter Park the No. 1 ski resort in North America the last two years in a row.

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

~ Roam at Winter Park, Colorado ~

- New 171-acre development is a flagship project for CenturyLink and the developer.
- 1 Gbps service to each unit lets skiers, bikers and hikers telecommute from the mountains.
- CenturyLink ON access control service gives residents instant internet connections.

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH

Greenfield or retrofit? Greenfield

Number of units: When the buildout is complete, the development will have 1,100 housing units and 80,000 square feet of commercial space.

Style: Mix of mid-rise condos, townhomes, duplexes and single-family homes priced from \$550,000 to \$1.5 million

Time to deploy: The development will be completed over the next several years.

Date services will start being delivered: December 2020, when occupancy begins

SERVICES

Each builder of residential and commercial products at Roam will determine home technology solutions and wiring independently.

Services offered or planned on the network: Up to 1 Gbps fiber-based broadband services into each unit/home with CenturyLink ON. Residents will use the FTTH network service to access streaming video services of their choice. In addition, CenturyLink will offer VoIP or TDM-based voice and its CenturyLink ON access control service.

Do additional service providers operate separate broadband

networks on the same property?

No. CenturyLink is the only telecom provider installing in the development.

Is the point of contact for resident technical support the property manager, the service provider or a third party? CenturyLink is the contact for residential technical support, but a dedicated outside sales rep will answer questions and address concerns.

BUSINESS

Which parts of the network are owned by the service provider, and which parts are owned by the property owner? CenturyLink owns the entire fiber network up to the internal optical network terminal (ONT) in each home/unit.

Is there a marketing agreement with the property owner? Yes

If yes, is it exclusive or nonexclusive? It is an exclusive agreement.

How do the service provider and owner work together to market the services? A dedicated CenturyLink rep is assigned to train sales teams associated with different builders. Roam will market the services throughout the pre-sale process and will include service marketing in new owner packages sent to buyers upon closing.

Any evidence that the network will

help to attract residents, retain residents, increase property values, etc.: The Fraser River Land Company believes the communications infrastructure will attract more remote workers, remote executives, and buyers interested in making the transition to working remotely and require the infrastructure to support it. Broadband infrastructure supports progress for the town and aligns with the Fraser River Land Company's aim of marketing to potential residents who will make a positive, long-term impact on the town of Winter Park.

TECHNOLOGY

CenturyLink is deploying a GPON-based fiber-to-the-unit broadband architecture.

Where are ONTs placed? Media panels are placed in each unit/home.

Methods for running cables between buildings, vertically within buildings, and horizontally within buildings: This will be determined by independent builders/engineers as they plan for residential and commercial products.

LESSONS LEARNED

What was the biggest challenge? The biggest challenge so far was getting everything lined up and approved to develop the property.

What was the biggest success? The biggest success was establishing a connection with the town, which helped secure approvals. CenturyLink was essential to that process.

What should other owners consider before they begin similar deployments? Get started well in advance of putting infrastructure in the ground. Starting the planning process a year in advance allows all agencies to be on the same page. ♦

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A map of the new Roam development in Winter Park, Colorado