

The Battlement Mesa Service Association

“Battlement Mesa, Colorado: Are we a City?”

By Keith Lammey, President, Battlement Mesa Service Association

Have you noticed that when the media refers to Garfield County’s cities and towns, Battlement Mesa is never included? The only exception that I can think of is the Garfield County, Colorado website where Battlement Mesa is listed under the “Our Towns” tab with an additional notation that Battlement Mesa is “unincorporated.” Since Battlement Mesa’s population is greater than several of the towns in Garfield County, it seems unfair to be excluded from these lists simply due to our unincorporated status.

Webster’s Dictionary defines a city as “an inhabited place of greater size, population, or importance than a town or a village” and a town as “a cluster or aggregation of houses recognized as a distinct place with a place name; a compactly settled area as distinguished from surrounding rural territory.”

Most people would agree that Battlement Mesa is “a cluster or aggregation of houses,” that it is “recognized as a distinct place with a place name” and that it is “a compactly settled area as distinguished from the surrounding rural territory.” Nevertheless, Battlement Mesa rarely, if ever, is included as a Garfield County town or city.

Apparently the media believes that a community isn’t a city or town unless it is incorporated. In fairness to the incorporation criteria argument, I should explain that Webster’s Dictionary also indicates that, in the U.S., being governed under a charter granted by the state can be criteria to determine if a community is a city. Nevertheless, Webster’s doesn’t state that only incorporated communities are cities.

In many ways Battlement Mesa looks and functions like a conventional city. Like most cities, we have apartments, houses, streets, a city center, schools, a fire department, centralized water and sewer services and a city government. The primary difference between Battlement Mesa and most cities is our source of funding. Unlike a conventional city, Battlement Mesa’s funding is provided by homeowner assessments in lieu of tax revenues. And when you think about it, there isn’t much difference between homeowner association (HOA) assessments and taxes except that taxation is a much more complex system for generating funding. In both cases, the citizens and businesses are the source of the funding.

Another major difference is that most cities have employees who provide a variety of services whereas Battlement Mesa doesn’t have employees. Instead, Battlement Mesa contracts with others to provide most of the city services or the services are provided by a special district or the county. And, remember, many cities have privatized some services. Privatization simply means that contractors are used to provide these services. Also, Garfield County provides more services to Battlement Mesa than it does to incorporated communities.

Perhaps it doesn’t matter whether or not Battlement Mesa is referred to as a city and whether or not it is included on published lists of Garfield County cities and towns. Probably what matters most is how we perceive ourselves. I believe that we will miss opportunities to improve our community and increase property values if we limit our city’s vision to “conventional HOA” functionality, rather than to think and act like a vibrant city. History has shown that the most successful communities are those that have a clear vision, a mission that supports that vision and a proactive and detailed plan to achieve their vision.

Battlement Mesa is a unique community. These unique features are both strengths and weaknesses. It is critical that we identify the factors that make us unique and to determine which factors are positive and which are negative. As

a community, we need to develop a strategy to promote and market our strengths and to overcome our weaknesses. To achieve this vision, Battlement Mesa must think and act like a city rather than “just an HOA.”

The road to a vibrant, successful community is filled with pot holes but if we unite as a community and focus on those things that we agree on rather than those that divide us, we will be successful. I invite you to join me in this endeavor. The truth is we're in this together. We will either be successful together or we'll fail together. Let's find our common ground and move forward.