



The Mountain Pact

Meet Mia Bretz--City Councilmember from Leavenworth, WA

The Mountain Pact works with over fifty mountain communities across eleven states in the West. We created the Community Highlight Project to interview elected officials who work with The Mountain Pact to learn more about their involvement and goals, while connecting communities across states with one another. Though our work is often one on one with local elected officials, our community is far-reaching and strong, and we hope these updates provide valuable insights and relatable stories.

Meet [Mia Bretz](#), City Council Member, Leavenworth, Washington

Though Mia isn't a Leavenworth local, she's called the small Bavarian themed town home since 2012. She moved from Seattle with her husband and kids to be near the mountains. She was just re-elected in November to serve her second four-year term on [Leavenworth's City Council](#). Her experience has been shaped by her two undergraduate degrees in land use planning and environmental economics.

Although she never intended to go into politics, her husband encouraged her to run believing she could be an important voice for Leavenworth's future. She says her campaigns have been dynamic and fun, even with three young kids at home! When she was first elected, Leavenworth's Council was very business-minded and she was inspired to run after learning that many of her friends, neighbors, and other fellow Leavenworth residents wanted to see Leavenworth move in a different direction. Residents she spoke with voiced that they wanted better communication from the city.



Leavenworth's Environmental Challenges

Leavenworth is surrounded by public lands that create the summer and winter recreation economy which is integral to the town's



financial security. Reliance on this outdoor recreation economy highlights the need for Leavenworth to focus on wildfire and drought issues. How a winter plays out is a large indicator of the issues the town will face related to fire and water in the spring, summer, and fall seasons. In recent years, winter snowpack has been hit or

miss depending on the weather patterns in the changing climate. Mia notes, "We used to have winters with snow up to the roof lines, now we are lucky if it's up to the windowsill." Importantly, snow in the winter is an indicator of the upcoming summer water supply which relies on snowmelt from the surrounding mountains. Mia admits, "A bad snow year is scary for Leavenworth; it is even worse for the apple, cherry, and pear producers downstream."

When snow levels are low, and water is scarce, fire becomes an extreme threat. Based on analysis by the [Forest Service](#) studying past fire history, wind, and the number of people that are vulnerable to wildfire impacts, Leavenworth was recently named the #1 place threatened by fire in the Pacific Northwest.

Involvement with The Mountain Pact

Mia's involvement with The Mountain Pact began when she was elected to the Leavenworth City Council in 2016. Since then, she has signed onto Mountain Pact letters relating to [fire](#), water, the [Antiquities Act](#), [Outdoor REC Act](#), and the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#).



Leavenworth is a diverse town with diverse perspectives and the City Council's views reflect this. Though the Council as a whole doesn't always see eye to eye with The Mountain Pact's objectives, Mia has found that when it comes to issues that affect the economy and livelihood of the town -- such as fire and water -- those will always receive broad support.

Mia makes it a priority to stay involved with The Mountain Pact because she wants to connect with other small mountain towns experiencing similar issues. She sees Leavenworth as a unique town in Washington as there are not many other small towns who also balance tourism with economic sustainability. It has been beneficial to engage with and learn about other communities across the West dealing with similar issues: weather, infrastructure, and work-life balance.

Leavenworth as a unique town

Leavenworth isn't just a haven for recreation; it is also a



Bavarian themed town. The Bavarian theme followed the logging era and remains significant to the town's identity today. Though the town has changed over time, the Bavarian theme remains connected to the surrounding mountains, and an appreciation for sustaining the environment remains rooted in this unique history.

Mia is proud of the town's surrounding beauty, "Leavenworth's location is so picturesque." It sits in a valley surrounded by gorgeous peaks. Visitors come from all over for world class rafting, climbing, and mountaineering. They also come for smaller adventures such as day hikes, biking, and tubing at the local ski hill. The area hosts plentiful mountain bike trails with large support from [The Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance](#). The local ski resort, [Stevens Pass](#), is just a 30 minute drive from town. Many of the town residents work at the resort in the winter, and like many ski towns, what happens at the ski area impacts the town.

With its diverse recreation opportunities, Mia admits the recreation options don't necessarily appeal to everyone. Many trails are steep and primitive, and the mountains require technical skills. But, she believes over time, the town can and will improve access allowing greater enjoyment for the average recreationist. Mia notes that Leavenworth and Washington have changed a lot over the past decade. The growth in Seattle is representative of the changes they have seen in their small town. Because of these changes, Mia has focused her time on City Council to communicate with the public to figure out what they want, while ensuring citizens that she is a part of the decision-making process. Mia and the Council want to prepare Leavenworth for the ebbs and flows of an unpredictable future. The town has done well economically, and now they want to prepare the town and protect its citizens by creating a buffer for issues such as climate change and fire.

Look for Community Highlights focused on introducing you to members of The Mountain Pact. If you are interested in being highlighted, please let us know by contacting Mountain Pact ED, Anna Peterson: anna@themountainpact.org.

Photo Credit: Mia Bretz, Jocelyn Leroux

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