

# Some Thoughts on War & Peace As Rita and I Vacation in Eastern Europe

As I write this on Monday evening, Rita and I are midway through our cruise of the Danube River from the Black Sea to Vienna. On Saturday we had a home visit at a village in Croatia. Our host family's home was largely destroyed during the Serbo-Croatian war of the early 1990s, but they rebuilt it with help from the government. During that conflict they had to evacuate to another country. I remember those years well and can't imagine what our life would have been like if it had included such fear, dislocation and destruction.

We already feel blessed to live in the Denver area, spared from the

tornados, hurricanes, floods, mudslides, earthquakes (and more) afflicting fellow Americans, but being bombed and having to rebuild entire cities — that's another matter entirely. Our guide told us that 91% of the buildings in the city where our ship docked were destroyed during World War II. Many buildings still show damage from that war.

And we can't forget that a few hundred miles to the east of where we are, whole cities, including homes, hospitals and schools continue to be destroyed by Russian artillery.

Yes, we lucked out being born in America and choosing to relocate to Colorado. But we can't forget the

suffering of those — in America *and* elsewhere — who have suffered and continue to suffer.

As baby boomers, Rita and I are only a few years shy of being old enough to have lived through World War II. We didn't witness it in real time, and we were raised to believe that such killing and devastation was only something that occurred before our time. But we have seen too much conventional warfare elsewhere and should realize that America is indeed exceptional for having been spared the experience of warfare at home since our Civil War.

Last week we spent a day in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and the former capital of Yugoslavia. Located strategically at the confluence of two rivers, it has been fought over through the centuries so often that it has been destroyed and rebuilt 40 times, according to guide books. Although it holds the prize in that regard, other European cities were destroyed by war multiple times. Can you imagine *your* city and *your* life including such a history?

If you, like me, had thought that the cycle of wartime destruction and rebuilding had been broken, you and I need only look at what Vladimir Putin is doing *right now* in Ukraine, leveling multiple cities and towns, committing verifiable war crimes by

targeting apartment buildings, hospitals, churches and schools.

*But shouldn't war itself be considered a war crime?* We'd like to believe that Putin is the last world leader to justify in his own mind the bombing and destruction of another nation's cities.

The creation of the European Union and the expansion of NATO gives us hope that European countries, at least, will not go to war with each other ever again.

Meanwhile, with the increased political division in our own country and the use of "civil war" language on the far right, should we worry that those millions of assault weapons in Americans' personal arsenals might someday be used against fellow citizens perceived as enemies? Even posing that question would have been unthinkable a decade ago, but now it's a valid and recurring topic of serious discussion.

I wish more Americans would come to Eastern Europe, or at least Western Europe, to meet people who have *in their lifetime* experienced warfare at home. We have seen similar devastation from tornados in America, but imagine if those same scenes of devastation had been created by us Americans in a prolonged war against each other?

*Please, let that not be our future!*

## Preparing for the Biennial Property Tax Appeal Process

Nobody likes taxes, but our Colorado property tax system is, in my opinion, among the fairest in the nation, so as we brace ourselves for the "Notice of Valuation" we'll receive from our county assessor next month, I thought it useful to describe how it works and why I believe it to be relatively fair.

A 2022 post on the website Investopedia.com ranked Colorado as having the 5th "best" (i.e., lowest) property tax in the nation, behind Hawaii, Alabama, Louisiana and Wyoming. It calculated that the state's "effective property tax rate" was 0.51% of a home's valuation. Hawaii was lowest at 0.31% and New Jersey was highest at 2.31%.

However, that statewide average does not include the impact of **metropolitan tax districts**, which can nearly double the tax rate on a given home. (This is a huge scandal which is only recently beginning to get the attention of legislators, who could, if they wanted, rein in metro tax district abuses.)

Putting aside that scandal for a moment, let me describe how property taxes are calculated in Colorado, as mandated by Colorado's constitution.

The essence of the system is to have the county assessor determine the fair market value — that is, what every property could have sold for based on what comparable homes sold for — on June 30th of every *even numbered* year. That means that the valuation you receive in the mail next month will be what the county assessor, guided by software, estimates your home *might have sold for* on June 30, 2022.

That's an unfortunate date this time around, because June 2022 may well have marked the peak of the Covid-19 era run-up of home prices in Colorado and nationwide.

**An important note:** Although the *valuation* date is June 30th of last

year, it applies to what your house *looked like* on January 1st of *this* tax year. That made a big difference for victims of the Marshall Fire, because their home was worth next to nothing on Jan. 1, 2022, so the tax bill they received *this year* which covered 2022 should have been only for the value of the land, not a repeat of their 2021 tax bill. If the fire had not destroyed their home on Dec. 30, 2021, the valuation of it from June 30, 2020, would have applied to property taxes for both 2021 and 2022.

Getting back to the process, once the valuation on your home is finalized *following any appeal you might make*, your tax for this year and next will be determined by applying your home's mill levy to the *assessed* valuation, which is 6.765% of your home's *full* valuation.

I'll use an example a home with a *full valuation* of \$1,000,000. First of all, that figure is reduced by \$15,000 under a law passed last year, so the assessment rate is applied to \$985,000. It would have an *assessed* value of \$66,635, so if your mill levy is 100, then your tax bill would be \$6,663.50. (It's called a *mill* levy from the Latin word for thousand, so the levy is applied to every *thousand* dollars of assessed value. Thus, 100 x 66.635 = \$6,663.50.)

Keep in mind when you appeal your valuation that every \$10,000 in reduced valuation is worth \$676.50 in reduced *assessed* valuation. At a mill levy of 100, a full value reduction of that amount reduces your tax bill by only \$67.65. That may not be worth arguing for, but a reduction of \$100,000 would be worth \$676.50. And if you're in a metropolitan tax district with a high mill levy, it's worth even more. Expect more on this topic from me in the coming weeks.



## Price Reduced on Golden Home with Views



This solar-powered home at **359 Canyon Point Circle** was a model home for the Village at Mountain Ridge, the subdivision west of Highway 93 backing to the Mt. Galbraith Park. (There's a trailhead to the park's 5 miles of hiking trails within the subdivision.) The seller has made many improvements to the home since buying it in 2002, including total renovation of the gourmet kitchen and master bathroom, plus adding 11.5 kW of solar panels, which meet all the electrical needs of the home. The main-floor deck was also completely rebuilt with composite decking, metal railings and a breakfast bar for enjoying the sunrises over South Table Mountain and the City of Golden, which are visible even from the walk-out basement. A walking path near this home allows children to walk safely to Mitchell Elementary School via a pedestrian bridge that crosses the highway. To appreciate all the features of this 4,106-sq.ft. home, take the narrated video tour at [www.MountainRidgeHome.com](http://www.MountainRidgeHome.com), then call your agent or a Golden Real Estate agent (below) to see it!



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