

Alta Planning Commission Meeting Summary
Architectural Nexus Offices: 2505 East Parley's Way, Salt Lake City, Utah
July, 6th 2015, 11:30 AM

IN ATTENDANCE:

Planning Commissioners: Joan Degiorgio (chair), Jon Nepstad (vice-chair), Dave Abraham, Mayor Tom Pollard (ex-officio). **Excused:** Roger Bourke, Rob Voye.

Town of Alta staff: John Guldner, Chris Cawley.

Members of the public: Toby Levitt.

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Joan Degiorgio convened the meeting, and **Joan** and **John Guldner** described the most pertinent elements of the agreement (the "Accord") created by Mountain Accord that was scheduled to be finalized on July 13th.

4:33 ALTA PLANNING COMMISSION TO REVIEW MOUNTAIN ACCORD'S DRAFT AGREEMENT IN ORDER TO GIVE DIRECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MAYOR PRIOR TO THE MOUNTIAN ACCORD EXECUTIVE VOTE ON THE ACCORD SCHEDULED FOR JULY 13, 2015

Jon Nepstad preceded this discussion by asking planning commission members to disclose and describe possible conflicts of interest between service to the Alta Planning Commission and outside commitments. **Joan Degiorgio** stated that her service to the Alta Planning Commission is in a volunteer capacity. **Joan** acknowledged that she is employed by The Nature Conservancy, that she was recently appointed to the Mountain Accord Executive Committee, and that she was representing the Nature Conservancy in that position. **Jon Nepstad** stated that he has worked as a consultant on issues related to State Highway 210 for various agencies with jurisdiction in Little Cottonwood Canyon for many years. **Jon** stated that he served as a technical consultant for the transportation elements of Mountain Accord Phase 1, and that while his consulting firm is still under contract with Mountain Accord, it is uncertain whether his firm will remain under contract during Mountain Accord Phase 2. **Dave Abraham** stated that he has had no formal work-related engagement with Mountain Accord or with other Town of Alta-related issues. **Dave** acknowledged that he has attended several Mountain Accord information sessions and public meetings.

Joan asked the planning commission to discuss the proposed land exchange between Alta Ski Area (ASA) and the United States Forest Service (USFS). **Dave** described concern with language in Accord section 3.4.4 in which implications are made about future development in the Cottonwood Canyons, and suggested that development in Alta will always be controlled by Town of Alta zoning and other regulations. **Mayor Pollard** opined that the land exchange is the most controversial element of the Accord, and that it could alter the balance between Alta Ski Area and other interests in the Town of Alta. **Joan** opined that there could be an opportunity for the Town of Alta to achieve long-term goals such as planning a more walkable town center, and that the Town must be proactive rather than being defensive. **Joan, Mayor Pollard, and John Guldner** discussed the possibility of rezoning base area land prior to execution of the land exchange. **Joan** opined that Accord language regarding the land exchange should promote the Town of Alta's goals of connecting existing development, and providing a more walkable and welcoming town center.

Mayor Pollard observed that in negotiating language in the Accord, the Town of Alta has not been able to affect Alta Ski Area's conditions related to the land exchange. **Joan** acknowledged that the notion of one entity acquiring land in the Town's identified "commercial core" in exchange for land well outside that area may be broadly unpopular. **John Guldner** expressed concern that the Town of Alta could be sued for rezoning base area land currently zoned FR-50 for commercial uses. **Jon Nepstad** asked what the basis of such a lawsuit would be.

Jon opined that he has long been concerned that the Town of Alta has not created a concrete vision for its own future, and that despite the somewhat popular assumption that the Alta community would like to "activate" the commercial core and provide a more welcoming, year-round town center, he remains uncertain that this is in fact the will of the community. **Jon** observed that while the land exchange between ASA and USFS may strike some as a "sweetheart deal," for ASA to donate its land in Grizzly Gulch would be a very significant concession, and opined that ASA has likely carefully considered the extent to which a 100 room hotel and eight retail shops would in fact constitute a business opportunity relative to potential ski area expansion. **Jon** suggested that some sort of public-private partnership between the Town and ASA—such as a redevelopment authority—could be a way to combine resources and negotiate not only a shared vision but an implementation strategy. **Jon** recommended that the Town of Alta reconsider the possibility of creating a high-level plan for the base area.

Dave Abraham observed that while the Accord may appear to be a final decision of factors that will affect the Town of Alta, it actually represents issues which are still in negotiation and which will continue to be merely possible outcomes, perhaps for some time in the future. **Dave** observed that drinking water is not a zoning tool, and that the Town of Alta should consider its power to establish zoning to be the foremost constraint to development in Alta. **Dave** asked how the Town's positions as reflected in the Accord have been decided upon, and **Mayor Pollard** described the series of meetings the Town Council has held on the subject of the land exchange and stated that he has represented the Town Council's position more than his own personal positions on the land exchange.

Toby Levitt of Alta Lodge addressed the Planning Commission and opined that the assumption that Alta could potentially be a year-round business community may not be accurate. **Toby** opined that there are already businesses in place in Alta which do not generate enough commerce to remain open outside of the ski season. **Toby** opined that other elements of Mountain Accord will radically change Alta and provide a range of unfair advantages to Alta Ski Area. **Jon Nepstad** observed that Alta is about ten miles from a large metropolitan area and that it could become a year-round business community because of this proximity.

Joan Degiorgio described an effort to designate Albion Basin as a "Special Botanical Area," and observed that a town center development could provide summer visitors to Alta somewhere to go besides directly into Albion Basin, in which natural characteristics are at risk of degradation due to overuse.

Toby Levitt expressed concern that Mountain Accord's apparent focus on building a train will reduce the likelihood that resources will ever be available for better bus service, and that the high cost of building a train in Little Cottonwood Canyon will prevent such a project from moving forward. **Toby** opined that this would be tragic given how important it is to improve transportation in the canyon.

Joan Degiorgio summarized the planning commission's discussion, and highlighted two themes: that the planning commission feels the land exchange could facilitate enhancement of the center of the Town of Alta, and that some members of the planning commission are concerned about the quantity of land proposed to be exchanged into private ownership in the base area. **John Guldner** asked **Mayor Pollard** whether he sought any further input on Mountain Accord, and **Mayor Pollard** opined that the priority for the planning commission ought to be to create a plan for the commercial core. **Jon Nepstad** reiterated his uncertainty regarding Alta's intent to be more than a five month business community. **Mayor Pollard** observed that while at present, Alta is a five month business community, it is truly a twelve month community for residents, employees, and some guests, and opined that a town center development, with community facilities and limited retail, could provide enough additional commercial activity for businesses to remain open year-round.

1:06:20 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Joan Degiorgio recommended that the planning commission adhere to its August 3rd meeting schedule.

1:09:05 MOTION TO ADJOURN

Jon Nepstad made a motion to adjourn the planning commission meeting, **Dave Abraham** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

The content of these minutes is not intended, nor are they submitted, as a verbatim transcription of the meeting. These minutes are a general overview of what occurred at the meeting.

These minutes were passed and approved on November 2nd, 2015.

S/ Chris Cawley
Assistant Town Administrator

*Audio Recordings are available on <https://soundcloud.com/townofalta>.