

**Alta Planning Commission Meeting Summary
Our Lady of the Snows, Alta, Utah
September 12, 2016, 4PM**

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

Town of Alta staff: John Guldner, Chris Cawley.

Members of the public: Karen Travis, Marcus Dippo, Cliff Curry, Jen Clancy, Margaret Bourke, Allen Orr, Mark Haik, Jon Byrne, Tracy Kirkham, Tim Remkes, Sage Fitch, Maura Olivos, Jana Leinbach, Bill Nalli, and Adam Naisbitt.

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Planning Commission Chair **Joan Degiorgio** opened the meeting and described the meeting agenda.

00:01:30 UPDATE ON RECENT EVENTS, STAFF

John Guldner reported that the Town Council discussed the Commercial Core Plan, generally expressed support for the current draft of the plan, and discussed holding a joint meeting with the Planning Commission, at which the council and the commission could discuss the contents of the plan, the possibility of a general plan update, and take additional public feedback. **Joan Degiorgio** asked whether staff could prepare paper copies of the preferred alternative plan so that viewers could understand fine details and read the associated text. **Jon Nepstad** asked whether the consultant who'd developed the plan was able to perform additional work under their project budget. **Chris Cawley** indicated that the Town had received an extension of the contract between Landmark Design and Wasatch Front Regional Council in order for Landmark to continue work on the project through adoption. **Chris** described that he'd proposed holding a joint meeting and that the goal of such a meeting will be to preclude having numerous additional future meetings due to miscommunication, and indicated that if substantive changes to the plan arise from further deliberation, Landmark Design's contract will not cover additional services. **John Guldner** reported that the Town Council had passed a resolution supporting the Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area Act.

00:12:15 APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE AUGUST 1, 2016, PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING.

Joan Degiorgio asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 1, 2016 Alta Planning Commission meeting. **Rob Voyer** made a motion to approve the minutes, **Dave Abraham** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

00:12:45 AVALANCHE MITIGATION PLAN PRESENTATION-Bill Nalli, Director, Utah Department of Transportation Avalanche Safety

Bill Nalli introduced a presentation on a study of future Little Cottonwood Canyon Road avalanche mitigation concepts prepared earlier in 2016. The study essentially divides the canyon into different problem areas, and then analyzes and ranks various factors of those areas such as avalanche path characteristics including size, frequency of avalanches, and density of paths within the area; public uses of each area including transportation, commercial and residential development, and dispersed recreation. The study then evaluates high-level feasibility and suitability of various mitigation techniques

including the current standard of firing artillery into avalanche starting zones. The study makes summary recommendations for preferred mitigation techniques in each of the nine problem areas throughout the canyon, and prioritizes implementation of preferred techniques for each area. **Bill** summarized that the study proposes installing Gaz-Ex devices above the Town of Alta, above the Alta-Snowbird Bypass Road, and in the Hellgate Cliffs area, as well as Obell-x devices in the White Pine area, and remote avalanche detection technology throughout the canyon.

Bill Nalli described a more detailed analysis of alternative mitigation techniques for avalanche paths above the Town of Alta. Bill presented a graphic depicting flight paths between the Peruvian Ridge Howitzer and avalanche starting zones above the Town of Alta, most of which pass over occupied buildings. Bill described that the US Army, which controls the program through which UDOT uses artillery for civilian purposes, would prefer such “overhead fire” to be avoided, and indicated that overhead fire has been almost entirely eliminated above the Snowbird Village. Bill described that this additional study concluded that Gaz-Ex is the best option for conducting avalanche mitigation above the Town of Alta, and that various other mitigation techniques, including snow fences and skier compaction, would not be effective on the paths above the Town.

Joan Degiorgio asked about whether Gaz-Ex or Obellx are more effective. **Bill** described differences between the technologies, including the smaller size and lower installation footprint of Obellx exploders, which makes them more favorable in steep, rocky areas, and the more powerful explosion created by Gaz-Ex exploders.

Roger Bourke asked how a Gaz-Ex based avalanche mitigation program would affect Town of Alta Interlodge Travel restrictions. **Bill Nalli** described that Gaz-Ex would allow UDOT to conduct a mission on very short notice, without having to arrange for an artillery crew, which could allow missions to be conducted overnight, and perhaps more frequently. **Bill** surmised that this may lead to more frequent interlodge closures, but that these closures could potentially be very short in comparison to what is necessary under the current program.

John Byrne recommended that the Town should consider whether the study’s de-emphasis of passive mitigation techniques such as snow fencing or diversion berms. **Jon Nepstad**, who had worked on the study as a consultant, indicated that he made sure the sub-consultants responsible for the Town of Alta study gave passive mitigation techniques due consideration. **Jon** indicated that beyond some of the technical shortfalls of building snow fences and diversion berms, such techniques entail more significant visual impacts than Gaz-Ex and Obell-x installation.

01:01:57 NOXIOUS WEED PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Joan Degiorgio introduced Sage Fitch, Salt Lake County Noxious Weed Supervisor. **Sage** quoted the National Invasive Species Council definition of invasive species, which is that an invasive species is a plant that is not native, and which can cause economic or environmental harm. **Sage** described that more problematic invasive species spread aggressively, and that some are introduced as ornamental species. **Sage** reported that the State of Utah recently expanded its list of noxious species, which is divided into various levels of concern, and described that some particularly problematic species are spreading rapidly at the bases of the Wasatch Front Canyons. **Sage** described priority species to consider from Alta’s perspective, including Garlic Mustard, Yellow and Dalmatian Toadflax, Spotted Knapweed,

various Thistles species, Oxeye Daises, and Field Bindweed. **Sage** commended the Town for taking a progressive approach to invasive species management.

Sage introduced **Tim Remkes**, a botanist working with the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation (CCF). **Tim** described that he is responsible for invasive weed management activities in the Cottonwood Canyons and Millcreek Canyon. **Tim** stated that Alta is the highest priority area for regional invasive species management, and described extremely problematic species such as Poison Hemlock, Perennial Pepperweed, and Garlic Mustard. **Tim** described that the amount of vehicular and social traffic in the Cottonwood Canyons makes the spread of invasive species a difficult challenge to manage. **Jon Nepstad** asked whether Myrtle Spurge can thrive at higher elevations. **Sage** described a few instances in which spurge grew at upper elevations in Boulder, Colorado and near Logan, Myrtle Spurge is primarily confined to lower elevations in the Salt Lake Valley area.

Jen Clancy, Friends of Alta (FOA), described efforts to-date undertaken locally by FOA and the Alta Environmental Center (AEC). Alta's local invasive species program began formally in 2009. Jen stated that invasive species mitigation, which primarily involves manually pulling individual plants out of the ground, is extremely labor intensive, and described the GIS-based monitoring program administered by FOA and AEC. **Jen** stated that Utah organizations such as FOA and AEC follow best practices established by the North American Invasive Species Association.

Maura Olivos, AEC, opined that the program administered by FOA, AEC, and supporting organizations such as CFF, despite its strengths, is not sufficient to meet the growing problem of invasive species. **Maura** suggested that an education and awareness campaign be emphasized as the first step in taking a more progressive approach to invasive species management in Alta. **Maura** described best management practices developed by AEC in order to reduce impacts from Alta Ski Area operations, and opined that the Town will need to take a more active role in invasive species mitigation, particularly in the event that more development takes place on private land in the base area. **Sage Fitch** reminded the planning commission that even though various species might not be technically noxious or officially classified, their invasive characteristics can nevertheless be cause for aggressive management, and mentioned Yellow Sweet Clover as a species that is problematic in the canyons despite not being classified as noxious.

Rob Voyer recommended that the informational handouts provided to the Planning Commission during the meeting be made available to the Alta community. **Sage Fitch** added that her program's website is a valuable resource, which includes a noxious species guide, could be provided to Alta residents and business owners.

Roger Bourke opined that the magnitude of the problem exceeds the resources available to deal with the problem. **Roger** and **Maura** described that weed pulling events do not bring out large groups of people like other stewardship opportunities. **Jon Nepstad** recommended offering corporate sponsorship opportunities similar to the Adopt-A-Highway program. **Jana Leinbach**, South Zone Botanist on the Uintah Wasatch Cache National Forest, described community events at Sundance Ski Resort focused on locals and residents, and reminded the audience that simply pulling live plants out of the ground is only part of the solution and must be done according to best management practices.

Joan Degiorgio asked **Tracy Kirkham** of Salt Lake Public Utilities to comment. **Tracy** observed that ski area revegetation projects are a significant vector for the spread of invasive species, and that recreation users can spread invasive species by carrying seeds on their clothes into areas where invasive species have not yet proliferated. **Maura** agreed, stating that invasive species could be on the cusp of rapidly changing Alta's local ecology, which could affect water quality and Alta's economy. **Joan** opined that it may be time for an Alta community entity to take the lead in developing a more comprehensive plan for managing invasive species growth within Alta. **Joan** thanked the presenters for their time. **John Guldner** described soil importation and revegetation regulations the Town of Alta could adopt into its ordinances.

2:02:10 SUMMER ROAD COMMITTEE STATUS

Roger Bourke reported that the committee had only met briefly prior to the planning commission meeting, but that it had established the goal of developing a succinct problem statement.

2:03:10 NEW BUSINESS FROM THE COMMISSION

John Guldner described a project undertaken by Town Council member Cliff Curry to update Alta's zoning ordinance and building regulations. The project has focused on updating building height regulations, waterway setback regulations, and other definitional matters; it has also produced a conceptual Albion Basin Source Protection Zone ordinance.

1:46:28 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The October Planning Commission will be on October 3rd.

1:46:28 MOTION TO ADJOURN

Joan Degiorgio asked for a motion to adjourn the planning commission meeting. **Roger Bourke** made a motion to adjourn, **Jon Nepstad** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

The content of the minutes are not a verbatim transcription of the meeting. These minutes are a general overview of what occurred at the meeting.

These minutes were approved on October 3rd, 2016

S/ Chris Cawley
Assistant Town Administrator