

MINUTES
ALTA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Tuesday, May 28, 2019, 3:00 PM
Alta Community Center, 10351 E. Highway 210, Alta, Utah

PRESENT: Roger Bourke, Vice Chair (via phone)
Rob Voyer
Jeff Niermeyer

STAFF PRESENT: John Guldner, Town Administrator
Chris Cawley, Assistant Town Administrator
Polly Samuels, Legal Counsel

OTHERS: Kyle Maynard

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Planning Commission Vice Chair Roger Bourke called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 26, 2019 PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING

Jeff Niermeyer made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 26, 2019, Alta Planning Commission meeting and public hearing, as amended. Rob Voyer seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent of the Commission.

3. PRESENTATION OF TOWN OF ALTA COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS PLAN AND POSSIBLE WILDFIRE-RELATED ORDINANCE UPDATES

Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley explained that the Planning Commission had a lengthy discussion during the last meeting about potential Planning Commission projects and priorities. With the Sugar Plum structure fire fresh on their minds, the Planning Commission expressed a desire to address the specific conditions that were responsible for the fire and other issues related to life safety. They also wanted to address community resilience and sustainability in general. Mr. Cawley had spoken to John Nepstad about the role that the Planning Commission could play in these topics. They felt that the Planning Commission could help staff to update the wildfire-related ordinances, and other ordinances for life safety.

Mr. Cawley explained that the State created a new program a few years ago wherein the State would bear the costs incurred in an initial attack for fire suppression if the local government met a few requirements. In order to obtain that benefit, the local government had to enter into a participation commitment agreement annually, and develop a Community Wildlife Preparedness Plan (CWPP) based on the approved template. There was a section of the plan that required the municipality to outline some projects that they want to implement to mitigate or prevent wildfires.

Mr. Cawley described that the Town could adopt all or parts of the Utah Wild and Urban Interface code into the Town of Alta Code. Mr. Guldner described that local changes to building code must go through a five-step legislative process in various code committees and eventually the state legislature. He noted that new construction and remodels would have to meet the code, but other uses would be grandfathered in.

There was a discussion regarding the removal of dead trees from wooded areas to reduce fire hazard.

Jeff Neirmeyer initiated a discussion regarding the ability for residents and businesses to clear the area around their property as defensible space against wildfire. The code didn't have a clear definition of "defensible space", so that's something that staff and the Planning Commission would discuss in the future. There were regulations in place that required the planting of five seedlings and five saplings for every mature tree removed; however, the code didn't specify where those trees needed to be planted. The Commission wanted to ensure that the code was enforceable. Mr. Cawley reported that in the fall of 2018, he'd toured most of Alta's developed neighborhoods with wildfire specialists from the State of Utah and Unified Fire Authority, and found that in most cases, properties are well-managed in terms of excess fire fuel.

Mr. Cawley said that the Town would also need to update the FEMA-required Hazard Mitigation Plan, which are required to be updated every five years. He confirmed that wildfire was one of the elements of that plan. They would also like to talk about evacuation planning.

Roger Bourke suggested that staff continue working on updating these codes and then have the Planning Commission review it at the next meeting. Jeff Neirmeyer agreed.

The discussion turned back to Utah Wild and Urban Interface code and if other communities had adopted it in its entirety. Legal Counsel Polly Samuels said that Park City had adopted it and then repealed it a short time later. She believed that they repealed the code because of their historic homes that couldn't be retrofitted with the required improvements.

Roger Bourke asked if there was an immediate threat. Mr. Cawley said that this depended on who was asked. Mr. Cawley described that while Alta may not be as at-risk to wildfire as some wildland-urban interface communities, if several risk factors aligned—factors including drought, high winds, and high recreation visitation, for instance—a catastrophic wildfire could affect Alta.

Staff briefly reported on the gas meters that were responsible for the Sugar Plum structure fire and how they were planning to mitigate similar risk in the future. The gas company would be coming up to look at the meters as soon as the snow cleared. The Commission asked about the Patsey Marley development and staff said that it was on hold. The Planning Commission instructed staff to continue to work on the code updates.

4. PRESENTATION OF PRELIMINARY DARK SKY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Cawley said that the community, Planning Commission, and Council had all showed interest in the Dark Sky program. If they decided to implement the program, they could do as much or as

little as they wanted. An assessment was conducted, but the conditions weren't ideal, as it was cloudy and there was a full moon. It would make sense to do another assessment in Alta on a night when they were busy. He was happy to report that the Town was very dark at night. He presented photographs that he took that night and spoke about each one. The Commission discussed specific areas in the Town, including several lodges.

Currently, the Town of Alta didn't have very much in the code regulating lighting. Developing a stand-alone lighting ordinance could provide better guidance to the town and to property owners. The Commission thought that some of the current issues could be resolved if they spoke with the lodge/property owners personally. Ordinances would help prevent future issues. The Commission agreed that it was time to establish a new lighting ordinance. They requested that staff do an inventory of what they do have in the code and then bring some proposals for a new code at the next meeting.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Commission meeting will be June 25, 2019.

Staff gave a brief update regarding the public hearing that was held by the Town Council for the zoning ordinance amendments.

6. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Rob Voyer moved to adjourn the meeting. Jeff Niermeyer seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent of the Commission.

Minutes Approved on _____, 2019.



Chris Cawley, Assistant Town Administrator