

**MINUTES**  
**ALTA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**  
**Tuesday, April 27, 2021, 3:00 PM**

*\*Meeting held virtually*

Alta Community Center, 10351 E. Highway 210, Alta, Utah

**PRESENT:** John Nepstad, Chair  
Roger Bourke, Vice Chair  
Rob Voye  
Jeff Niermeyer  
David Abraham  
Mayor Harris Sondak (ex officio)

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

**OTHERS:** Jerrett Pelletier, Ennead Architects; Don Weinreich, Ennead Architects (via phone)

**1. INTRODUCTION, DETERMINATION LETTER READING, AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR.**

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. He opened the meeting by stating the following:

*The Planning Commission Chair hereby determines that conducting a meeting at an anchor location presents a substantial risk to the health and safety of those who may be present at the anchor location pursuant to Utah Code Section 52-4-207(4), and [Alta] Resolution 2020-R-12. The facts upon which this determination is based include:*

- *The percent and number of positive COVID19 cases in Utah has been significantly higher since May 27th, 2020.*
- *The seven-day average for cases on April 20th, 2021 is 375 with 24% of the State's cases in Salt Lake County.*
- *As of April 20th, 2021, there have been 2,174 deaths reported in Utah due to COVID19.*

*Therefore, this meeting will not have a physical anchor location. All attendees will conduct remotely. Attendees may join the webinar by registering for the meeting through the town website [www.townofalpa.com](http://www.townofalpa.com) or the meeting may be watched on YouTube.*

*This determination will expire in 30 days.*

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 13, 2020, PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING.**

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke noted that in the last paragraph before Section 4, his statements about the parking area from Flagstaff were misrepresented. He noted that he sent a correction to Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley in order to clarify his originally intended comment and intent. It was

proposed that Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke should make a comment at the next meeting to correct the statement and add it as an amendment to the draft minutes. Legal Counsel Polly Samuels noted that his comment could not be something new and had to reflect what he said.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke stated that what was written was not what had said nor meant, and clarified what his statement had been about parking issues from Rustler Lodge Lift. Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley commented that he had been provided a suggested edit, and in hindsight should have added it to the draft minutes and then recirculated it. He made a few more comments about the parking issue at that location.

It was relayed that the proposed sentence change located in the last paragraph of Section 3 would read as follows: “Roger Bourke noted that there were some issues with access to the parking area from the top of the Rustler Lodge chairlift.”

**MOTION:** Planning Commissioner Jeff Niermeyer moved to APPROVE the October 13, 2020 Planning Commission meeting minutes, with an amendment to the draft proposed by Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke to clarify his intent about a previously made statement. Planning Commissioner Rob Voyer seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Commission.

### **3. PRESENTATION OF THE ALTA COMMUNITY CENTER FEASIBILITY STUDY RESULTS BY JARRETT PELLETIER OF ENNEAD ARCHITECTS.**

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad asked about the virtual attendance for the virtual open house that was held the previous week to discuss the community center. It was communicated that they had almost 100 people in attendance.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad welcomed Jerrett Pelletier from Ennead Architects, who would be giving an abridged version of the open house presentation.

Jerrett Pelletier shared data in regards to the community center that had been gathered over the last six to eight months. He commented that the open house was helpful in portraying the entire picture of why they embarked on this process. They had a number of individuals, including the Mayor, who spoke about the need for the community center. He also noted that individuals from the firm had also spoken, and urged everyone to watch the video if they had not.

Jerrett Pelletier informed them that the complete feasibility study had been uploaded to the community center website. He commented that it provided a very holistic view of all of the data they had gathered. Jerrett Pelletier discussed the guiding principles that they had pulled together early on that acted somewhat as marching orders in terms of the aspirations for the center, which he briefly outlined. He noted that it was important that they captured Alta’s rich history in the vision for the center. He also mentioned that the center needed to be both financially and environmentally sustainable so it was neither a burden on the town or the natural surroundings.

Jerrett Pelletier provided a quick overview of the program. He outlined that they worked with the community and the advisory committee to create a program for the 22,000 square foot community. He reviewed that the heart of the community center was a central gathering lounge, surrounded by active programs that people could dart in and out of. He listed some of the programs, and also noted that they hoped to display historical artifacts in and around the building.

Jerrett Pelletier talked about the multi-purpose hall, which was one of the most highly desired features for the community center. It would be a place that the community could gather in as a whole, but could also be partitioned and programmed for other activities or as a conference center. The multi-purpose room was roughly 4,500 square feet. Jerrett Pelletier also mentioned that there would be spaces designed specifically for fitness and wellness, education programs, and a culinary teaching kitchen.

Jerrett Pelletier discussed the potential for the center to act as a replacement or permanent location for the Alta School. He talked about the synergies that could occur if that took place. He also noted that the space required for management and maintenance of the building had been accounted for, as well as a space for the non-for-profit offices.

Jerrett Pelletier explained that one of the big drivers for building design was how it would resist an avalanche if, when, and how often those may occur. He mentioned that they had worked with Stephen Clark and the Contour Group, who had provided a lot of analytical information as consultants for the town. The building site was in a high-pressure impact zone, which played a large role in determining the building structure needed to be able to resist a direct impact. Jerrett Pelletier discussed their research into the best way to address the construction of a building that had those needs.

Jerrett Pelletier showed the baseline, which happened when the building was designed to directly take the impact of an avalanche. He also mentioned how the design was a structure encased in a large structural wall of concrete. He noted that while that strategy was tried and true, it was also very expensive and environmentally impactful. He relayed the range of design ideas they had looked at as alternatives. He showed a scale that presented the cost per square feet process.

Members of the Planning Commission asked if they had also looked at wind velocities created by avalanche blasts. Jerrett Pelletier replied that they did, and noted that he was oversimplifying a little bit in the presentation.

Jerrett Pelletier expressed that they wanted to collect feedback on the different design ideas. He stated that the design presentations given in the fall were very well-attended and they received a lot of input. The two ideas that garnered the most attention were a lifted concept and an embedded concept, with the latter being what people gravitated towards the most. The community liked the idea of a community center embedded in the hill, and felt that the lifted design was polarizing and did not reflect the attitude of the natural landscape. He relayed that they had taken to heart the following quote and used it to guide their process: "The town's greatest strength is its natural setting, and the community center should respond and accentuate that."

Jerrett Pelletier outlined the steps they took as a result of that feedback to further research and develop an embedded option, and the determination of whether it met the needs of the community, town, and the environment. They created a design scheme that incorporated the aspects desired by the community. It was then developed alongside structural engineers followed by a cost estimate done by Big-D Construction, who was a critical member of their team.

Jerrett Pelletier explained that the cost estimate came at a surprisingly high premium as it was driven by the building structure required to withstand the impact of an avalanche. One of the contractors had given the analogy that the support girders necessary for the building design had to be sourced from a bridge fabricator versus a regular steel contractor in order to procure steel of the right size and magnitude. The contractors had also expressed concern in regards to the long-term maintenance that would be required for water damage because the building sat on a steep downward slope.

Jerrett Pelletier explained that they looked further into the embedded concept to better understand what it meant to get it in a reasonable budget set forth by the town in the RFQ, and whether or not it was possible to tighten and reduce it to fit in the established cost parameters. In doing so, they found that they would have to reduce roughly 15%, or a little over 3,000 square feet from the building. He clarified that the cost per square foot would not change, it would simply be a smaller building to stay within the cost parameters. They had also intended to lift the building up and provide enclosed parking underneath in order to meet the parking targets; however, in order to remain on budget, they would have to both reduce the footprint and eliminate the enclosed parking deck.

There was discussion about whether the Contour group had looked at mitigation strategies for the avalanche path itself. It was noted that the only off-site mitigation tactic currently in place was an avalanche fence at the top of the bypass road, which was explained to be complicated to put in place legally. Questions were raised as to whether other mitigation tactics could be used as a trade-off with some of the building structure in order to reduce cost. It was relayed that if they put something in place to divert the natural path of the avalanche and someone or something was hit, then they would be liable. It was stated that the group had looked into those options, but it was unlikely they would pan out.

Jerret Pelletier explained that after they had analyzed the significant costs required for the embedded concept, they went back to try and adjust the lifted concept because it addressed a lot of the structural issues that were raised with the embedded option. The lifted design had a lighter structure and lower carbon footprint, which meant that it could be built with more normative materials. The occupied part of the building would also have less exposure to snow and water, and the building would be pulled up out of the elements and set on pylons where it would be raised to a height that meant that the building would not be impacted by an avalanche.

Jerrett Pelletier discussed some of the considerations they had learned. The contractors educated them that they should always account for a certain amount of snow buildup at all times, and gave a conservative average estimate of ten feet. Other considerations were the flow, or pressure that came down the hillside in the form of snow and other debris, as well as the zone of the powder, which had a much higher estimate of about 30 or 35 feet. The greatest of the impact pressures were in the flow zone, but as they moved into the powder zone the impact pressures became more normative and manageable.

Jerrett Pelletier assured that they had tried to address the original concerns brought to them by the community about the lifted design. He noted that an added benefit to the lifted versus the embedded concept was that it allowed for more natural light and access to views from every space in the building. He summarized that the cost of the lifted concept was significantly lower than the embedded concept, and that they were able to get the entire 22,000 square feet in the provided budget.

Jerrett Pelletier discussed how they evolved the lifted design to better blend and respond with the landscape. The site was not a uniform slope, so they made the building more horizontal and followed the natural topography of the landscape. The benefits for this were that it pulled it off of the street, it created a roofline and profile that was reflective of the silhouette of the value, everything underneath was accessible for parking, every space had direct access to light and views. The lifted building idea was on a series of piers spaced at 65 feet apart, which was designed intentionally to accommodate the type and scale of debris that would likely come down the hill.

Jerrett Pelletier outlined that there would be an entry plaza space. There would be an outdoor space that they could hold events and gatherings, and the entry would be pulled off of the highway. This was where

people would have access to stairs or an elevator to enter the lifted building. He said that this design also made the plaza more accessible and usable as a trailhead, as well as a gathering and departure space for backcountry skiers.

Jerrett Pelletier stated that the idea of a lobby or lounge mentioned for the embedded concept was still the same for the lifted concept. Using the aid of a concept drawing, he walked through the general layout of the lifted design. A noted change from the embedded design was that they were able to include the Alta School facing west in the lifted design, which provided them views of the canyon to the west. The location of the school also provided the students with designated access points and restrooms. One of the primary changes from the original lifted design was the elimination of a roof terrace, which had presented quite a few design issues. Instead, they designed an outdoor porch that ran the length of the building, which had great views and easy access for maintenance. Glazing would only be done in strategic and modest ways in order to maintain the necessary stability against an avalanche and withstand a different level of impact. Jerrett Pelletier presented designs to show the Planning Commission what the interior of the space would look and feel like, as well as how, as well as how different materials and design techniques could be used to create a warm and inviting aesthetic and feeling. He mentioned that one of the things they had done was open the piers up to be less solid.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad asked if they had discussed a location for a covered bus pick-up, and expressed that one of the slides that had been shown looked like a perfect location. Mayor Harris Sondak noted that there had been talk about a mobility hub being located across the highway. He said that after the presentation the previous week, he had received a call from an individual who had brought forth an option for a gondola, and he was excited to have the top gondola station opposite of the building and a lower design that was complimentary to the building and across the street. Jerrett Pelletier stated that they had talked early on with UDOT, and from the perspective of busses they learned that the scale, magnitude, and size of a mobility hut necessary to service the frequency of busses and quantity of people would dwarf the community center.

Jerrett Pelletier wrapped up his presentation and briefly summarized and reiterated some of the features and benefits of the newer lifted concept design. He reminded them that the full study was available on the website.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke said that he had looked at the site that morning, and he was surprised that the slides were not the same as the ones presented the previous week or even today. He noted that one of the things that had struck him was that the cost numbers per square feet were quite different. Jerrett Pelletier explained that what they had initially done in the report was look at all of the different ideas and asked the contractors to help determine what they thought a reasonable cost per square foot was. He further clarified that those numbers were done as a rough estimate before they had done the full cost estimate, which was why they differed. It was noted that the biggest difference was in the embed versus the lift since they did not recognize at that point in time how much concrete would be needed.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke asked if anyone had seen this type of lift concept used specifically to avoid avalanches before. After subsequent discussion, he then referred to the design, and noted some concerns that there were areas that would fill up with snow before an avalanche, and would not actually be an open channel the way it was suggested in the design. He commented that the north side of any building in town had a lot of snow behind it, and it was not easy to remove.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke said that he was intrigued by the Contour group's style and ideas. However, he felt like they should get input from individuals who have a lot of experience with avalanches

in Alta and the surrounding area. He thought it would be worthwhile to have those individuals take a look at this.

It was noted that before this got too much further there would be a peer review process. Jerrett Pelletier confirmed. He explained that they were contracted for a feasibility study and its analysis, but there was a rigorous design process that would have to occur following any funding of the project. He communicated that they had it set at nine months, which was pretty tight. He assured them that there would need to be a lot more engineering, detail, and development on any concept they chose to move forward with.

Members of the Commission acknowledged that there were a lot of constraints on the site, and thanked Jerrett Pelletier for all the work they had done. It was noted that the efficiency of the lift concept as well as the disconnect it presented aesthetically, and thought that the spectacular architectural element was very cool. Jerrett Pelletier agreed with the assessment, and stated that if they moved forward with the lifted concept, they would have to design through the disconnect with consideration of the pedestrian experience.

Mayor Harris Sondak agreed that there was definitely a disconnect with the pedestrian experience, and outlined three benefits he saw with the lifted design. First was that it did not look out over the highway since one of the discouraging aspects of Alta was how prominent Highway 210 was, which was adjacent to the community center site. Second was that there was a lot of natural light which had a positive impact on mental health. Third was that it moved past the old-fashioned approach of digging a hole and using a lot of concrete to protect against avalanches. He noted that there was no question, however, that there would need to be a marketing campaign.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke made comments about skeleton constructions used for proposed buildings, and he felt that it would be very instructive to have something like that erected on the community center site to give everyone a sense of its size and visual impact.

Jerrett Pelletier informed them that the height from the road to the underside of the building was about 40 feet and to the top was about 60 feet. He relayed that building a large-scale model was one of the potential next steps they had discussed. Mayor Harris Sondak explained that he would propose to the Town Council that Ennead be contracted for the next step, which would be to build a model.

There was a brief discussion about potentially using a balloon to visually indicate the building height at the site.

It was noted that Ennead had technically completed the study months ago, and had gone above and beyond since then to redesign both the embedded and lifted concepts to improve the aesthetic and decrease the cost. There was also further discussion on avalanche impacts and risks, and why the lift became more attractive.

The Planning Commission talked about when the last time an avalanche had come down in the specific area where the community center site was located. It was noted that the information could be found in the avalanche study done by Alan Jones. There was then a brief discussion about the Planning Commission's role at this point.

**4. OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF TOWN LIGHTING AND FUTURE POSSIBLE DIRECTION OF DARK SKY INITIATIVES. DANIEL MENDOZA, DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH DARK SKIES MINOR PROGRAM.**

Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley explained that Daniel Mendoza was the Director of the Dark Sky Minor Program in the planning department of the University of Utah. Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley stated that they had done one assessment in November with use of a drone. They were only able to gather data on two sights before the drone crashed. On April 12th, 2021 they did handheld, on-the-ground assessments in nine different locations. Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley suggested that they move the discussion about the project to the next meeting since Daniel Mendoza was unable to stay for the entire meeting.

There was some brief discussion about the assessments done by the drone and on-ground.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke stated that some of the entities in town ran their outside lights whether they were open for business or not. He suggested that they consider an ordinance to reduce light usage outside of times when businesses were open, and with the exclusion of lights that were used for clear public safety purposes.

This item was tabled for the next meeting.

**5. DISCUSSION ON A PROPOSAL TO AMEND CHAPTER 13 OF THE TOWN'S LAND USE REGULATIONS TO ADD A DEFINITION OF A SKI AREA DIRECTIONAL SIGN TO SECTION 10-13-4 AND TO EXEMPT SKI AREA DIRECTIONAL SIGNS FROM THE PERMITTING PROCESS PER SECTION 10-13-6.**

John Guldner, Town Administrator, presented introductory information on the proposed amendment, and noted that it had been six months since they had met and dealt with amendments made to the whole ordinance package. He provided some background information on the Albion Basin Protection Overlay Zone, a part of the ordinance package which required a building permit and a larger setback from waterways. There were certain structures that customarily would get exemptions from the Forest Service and Salt Lake City Public Utilities/Health Department to not require a building permit. They had originally wanted the same exemption for their ski area operations applied for everything throughout the town, including private property, which was not something they were able to do.

John Guldner explained that the proposal they offered instead was to help the ski area amend the sign ordinance to eliminate their obligation to go through a permitting process. They would receive exemptions as long as everyone approved it and the Planning Commission was informed about it before any site preparation or actual construction occurred. John Guldner clarified that this would be an amendment to the sign ordinance with the caveat that it would not count for certain signs and locations. He informed them that they would be required to hold a public hearing, and said that the only decision they needed to make at the moment was when they wanted to schedule it.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad asked what the controls for the sign placements were to assure compliance or stop sign litter if they amended it now. John Guldner agreed with the concerns about quantity. He stated that there was nothing that addressed quantity yet, but it was a very good point. He expressed that they would further discuss compliance with quantity, size, and location. Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke commented that he was not ready to hold a public hearing at the next meeting if they still needed to have a discussion about compliance.

Legal Counsel Polly Samuels stated that public hearings should be viewed as informational so they could receive input from the community about this type of topic, and did not think that there was a downside to

that even if they were still in the process of discussing it. She suggested that input from the community might help focus the discussion and provide input on things they had not thought about.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad inquired if the Planning Commission felt informed enough to feel comfortable moving forward with a public hearing. Legal Counsel Polly Samuels explained that Don (no last name give) would provide for them any background or information that they may need. Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke also felt that they were not ready to hold a public hearing. He expressed concerns in regards to exemptions being given to one entity and not others, and was not sure that was a precedent that they wanted to establish.

John Guldner said that those were the exact discussions and considerations when they talked about potential exemptions in the Upper Albion Basin Protection Overlay Zone on Forest Service property only. He stated that exemptions could happen if the proposed exemption was approved by the Forest Service and any other relevant agencies.

Planning Commissioner Jeff Niermeyer agreed that they were not ready to engage the public yet on an issue he hadn't begun to have an understanding of all the nuances yet. Would appreciate having a more robust discussion at a regular Planning Commission meeting before a public hearing. Planning Commissioner David Abraham agreed that it was important to look into the existing sign ordinance. He also felt that they needed more primer and information before they moved forward. He expressed some confusion with John Gulden's comments about Forest Service ground versus private property, and wanted to receive clarification on that as well.

Planning Commissioner Rob Voye questioned if sign litter was really that much of an issue with the lift company. He expressed the opinion that the lift company would be amenable to keeping the signs down to a limited height and square footage. Planning Commissioner Rob Voye also agreed with Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke's statement about allowing exemptions for one entity and not others. Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad stated that they should table this item until the next meeting. He asked that they receive more preparation and information as they were not yet comfortable enough to move forward.

## **6. DISCUSSION ON ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND HOW IT MIGHT AFFECT FUTURE PLANNING AND OPERATIONS.**

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke advocated that first and foremost everyone should do their individual and collective parts to reduce the impacts of climate change, which was primarily focused on curtailing greenhouse gas emissions. He was pleased to see awareness, such as with Jerrett Pelletier's presentation, that showed these issues were being taken into account. He asserted that whatever was done individually, climate change and its effects were still steadily increasing. He mentioned Jim Hanson, an individual based in New York, who had released a number of forecasts about climate change impacts that ended up being dead on or even under projected.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke stated that they might collectively be able to slow the impacts a little bit, he expected that they would be overtaken by them in the near future. He expressed that they needed to determine what effects would be most impactful on Alta, and to think about how they would prepare. He felt it would at least change the business mix considerably, and listed some of the changes he had seen over the last twenty years alone, including the noticeable reduction of available days in the ski seasons.



Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke communicated the opinion that the next step should be to see presentations from experts in the field as to the expected changes to the local region over the next 30 years, as well as the effects more confined to Alta specifically. From there they could move on to an assessment of what the effects on the community would be, followed by considerations of how to respond. Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke suggested that they get a data dump along those lines at the next meeting and get started.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad seconded the idea, and noted that there was a meteorologist out of Utah State who would be a good person to ask. He thought it was beneficial to get a baseline of information and have presentations. Planning Commissioner Jeff Niermeyer mentioned Rob Gillies from Utah State and Court Strong from the University of Utah as potential speakers who had knowledge specific to the Wasatch area.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad commented that some of the surrounding areas would no longer be ski areas in the next 80 years. He also brought up the question about what the economic consequences would be in terms of visitation. There was the chance that the decline of surrounding areas would increase the concentration of visitors to Alta.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke stated that one of the other big changes would be in regards to the investments that had been made into infrastructure and buildings, as owners would want to see the return on those investments. He expressed that it was likely Alta would see a transition to a four-season model versus a winter model. John said that every resort community in the west had a four-season economic model with the exception of Alta, and that the visitation was in fact higher in the summer for a lot of surrounding locations.

Planning Commissioner Roger Bourke discussed a couple off-scale weather events that had taken place in the last three years, and stated that it was likely they would see an increase in the frequency and intensity of those types of extreme weather events.

Planning Commission Chair John Nepstad summarized that they would try to get a presentation for the next meeting, and he referred to some informative talks that were given a few years prior by the Unified Fire Authority. He stated that they should start at the macro level and see what fell into Alta's bucket of responsibilities.

## **7. NEW BUSINESS.**

No new business was brought forward.

## **8. MEETING SCHEDULE, DATE OF NEXT MEETING.**

The Planning Commissioners reviewed the agenda items that needed to be considered as they scheduled the next meetings. The next Planning Commission meeting was tentatively scheduled for June 22, 2021.

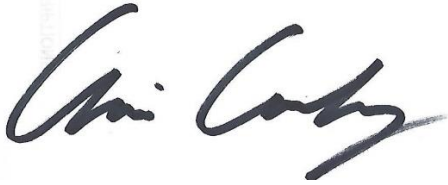
The Planning Commission briefly discussed both meeting in person if all participants were comfortable and health regulations allowed, as well as a potential change in meeting start times to 4:00 PM.

## **9. MOTION TO ADJOURN.**

Planning Commissioner Rob Voyer moved to adjourn the meeting. Planning Commissioner Dave Abraham seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent of the Commission.

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Minutes Approved on September 28, 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Cawley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. There is a faint vertical stamp to the left of the signature that reads "09/28/21".

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Chris Cawley, Assistant Town Administrator