

MAYOR
HARRIS SONDAK

TOWN COUNCIL
CLIFF CURRY
ELISE MORGAN
MARGARET BOURKE
SHERIDAN DAVIS



TOWN OF ALTA
P.O. BOX 8016
ALTA, UTAH
84092-8016
(801) 363-5105 / 742-3522
FAX (801)742-1006
TTY 711

September 6, 2021

From: Mayor Harris Sondak

To: Alta Town Council

Re: Briefing memo on the main issues on the agenda for the September 8, 2021 Town Council work session and meeting

Because I cannot attend the upcoming town council meeting, I have taken the time to prepare this briefing memo. I address the main issues coming before the council at the meeting. Let this serve as my mayor's report for this meeting.

Business License Study

I think that the council should reject simple assertions of problems of validity and methodology with the recent Zions business license cost study. The town council should, I think, act consistently with the results of the study; it should not just back into or rationalize a desired outcome. Accounting operates by generally accepted principles and procedures and CPAs have rigorous professional responsibilities (see: <https://www.aicpa.org/research/standards/codeofconduct.html>). While there is some room for interpretation in accounting, accounting is more akin to archeology than to architecture – more discovery and less invention.

I don't think the town council can continue the status quo given that the Zions study is the best information we have about costs. The consultant – Zions – has clear expertise and a top-notch reputation. If I were seeking a base level business license in Alta, at this point, I would conclude that the old, higher price has no present basis other than the preferences of the individuals who comprise the town council, and I would claim that the town is violating Utah law against charging me more than the costs of administering the license. Furthermore, as a tax payer in Alta I would object strenuously to repeating the study and wasting funds that amount to 1/3 of the business license revenues on that repeat study.

I support Option A in the staff report because I think it strikes a fair balance given the costs created by the various entities as determined by Zions while taking note of sales tax generation and other benefits businesses bring to the town. Option B strikes me as a rather large and sudden increase, especially because police calls vary from year to year so big changes are not likely to achieve desirable levels of reliability. I asked Jen to develop Option C as another possible approach that charges no entity more than it has been paying, but it fails to meet the budget the town council previously adopted. The council should note that any arrangement that yields less than the revenues they included in the approved 2022 budget will require an adjustment in that budget and thus implies additional subsidy of costs of providing services to businesses from some other revenue source.

Overall, this issue is small and does not involve a lot of money, either to the town or to the businesses that are involved, and is not worth dwelling on further, it seems to me. I urge the town council to make a decision and spend its energy on other more important issues at hand, as I have directed the staff to do so.

Capital Projects Plan

Thanks to our careful planning and management, conservative budgeting, and ski seasons that have led to ample sales tax revenues, the town has the opportunity as well as the need to allocate funds to capital expenses. It is important to note that, again this year, more than is usual, our revenues for the upcoming ski season are uncertain. Like last year, we face this problem because of the pandemic. So, while we have to allocate money to capital projects so as not have too much cash in our general fund, unspent capital projects funds could be used for operations if the need were to arise. (This is especially pertinent for the money being earmarked – not spent – for a new community center.)

Here are my comments on the particular items:

- Items 1 – 8, which are for our Marshals Office and basic communications and IT capabilities, are not really discretionary. We need to proceed with these projects, in a number of cases because of state or other mandates.
- Items 9, 10, and 14 are matters of workplace safety. Employees have incurred risks and have experienced injury in clearing the roof of the community center. I think we have moral obligations, if not also liability risks, that require us to act.
- Items 11 – 13, 15, 17 - 19 are somewhat discretionary in the sense that they can be (further) postponed. However, delay is likely unwise and pound foolish. If we want a useable paved parking area, to be able to continue working without interruption, to preserve an historical structure, and to maintain our community center and office, these projects should go forward. We should not scrimp on maintenance; remember the Surfside Condo!
- Item 16 will allow continued remote participation and viewing of town council meetings even after we resume meeting in person. We should provide this service, which has become quite popular in the last year and a half.
- Item 20 is a) facilitating the possibility moving forward on an often-expressed desire in our community and b) basically a place to park the rest of the money.

Implementation of Permit Parking

Parking appears three times on the agenda, once in the work session and twice in the meeting itself.

I'll discuss agenda item 5 (Ordinance 2021-O-7) first. We need an ordinance so that the Town of Alta can initiate and legally operate a permit parking system. As you will notice, the ordinance leaves much unspecified; that structure is intentional. The ordinance creates a framework but does not indicate fees, numbers of permits, allocation rules or methods, etc. Once we have the ordinance in place, we then can proceed to discuss the specifics. That's where item #6 comes in – the presentation from the consultants.

During the work session, I request that the town council members start by assuming what the consultants

will demonstrate in their subsequent presentation – that demand for parking space for both daytime use and overnight parking currently exceeds supply, which is constrained by the physical number of spaces in Alta outside ASL’s Special Use Permit. Then I ask the council to decide the extent to which they want the number of permits and other policies to be subject to council decision or to a decision by the mayor. In particular, please consider if you like this provision in the draft Ordinance:

6.3.6. Parking Permit Issuance

1) The number of permits available and the manner for allocating permits will be approved by the mayor

If the council does not like this provision, the appropriate amendments to the draft ordinance should be adopted during the regular meeting. (I am sure that both I and future mayors will be happy to share the blame for whatever system the town adopts with the town council, but time is short so if the council wants to reserve this decision for itself, it will have to come to its conclusion at the October meeting.) Fees, by the way, must be voted on by the council (parking fees will come up in a subsequent meeting and are not included currently in agenda item 12).

Opposing the Olympics in LCC

I hope that the idea behind agenda item 9 is not at all controversial. The reason to bring this issue to the town council now is because of the UDOT DEIS and the pending decision by UDOT. In my comments I submitted to UDOT on the DEIS, I wrote:

“[I]t was clear to all parties during planning for the 2002 Winter Olympics that no events should be held in Little Cottonwood Canyon. I cannot support any proposal that increases the likelihood that events would be held in the Canyon if the Olympics return to Utah unless definite and fully reliable prohibitions against holding events there are included in the proposal. Despite current sentiment against holding events in the Canyon, given climate change it is likely that lower elevation resorts soon may not remain viable venues for competitive winter sports and pressure to hold events in Little Cottonwood Canyon may be intense.”

I think we are at serious risk that LCC will be a venue despite current denials. Snowbasin’s base elevation is 6,391 feet with a summit elevation of 9,350. They had to use every inch of the elevation for the downhill race (in fact they had to increase their vertical drop by extending their lifts right up to the ridgeline to make the course fit). You can refrigerate a bobsled track, but not a downhill or Super G course so given climate change trends organizers may well be looking for an alternative venue for those events. The only high elevation ski area in Utah that has enough vertical for a downhill race is Snowbird. I think a gondola exacerbates this risk and as part of an Olympics plan could lead to an aerial connection to Park City because it will provide another means (and direction) for egress.

I persuaded Salt Lake County mayor Jenny Wilson to oppose Olympics in LCC, too. She was quoted in the SL Tribune as saying (<https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2021/09/01/sl-county-city-reject/>):

“I oppose any Olympic events up the canyon,” said Wilson, who serves on Utah’s Olympic bid committee. “I do think it’s good to ask UDOT to put it in, as Mayor Sondak suggests, as a line in the sand. We should not hold Olympic events up this canyon.”

Let’s get ahead of this problem and say no, early, right now. We will let UDOT and the public know that we do not want the Olympic rings on Mt. Superior!