

**Alta Planning Commission Public Hearing and Regular Meeting Summary
Community Center/Library, 10361 E. Hwy 210, Alta, Utah
December 15th, 2014, 4PM**

IN ATTENDANCE:

Planning Commissioners: Joan DeGiorgio (chair), Jan Striefel, Rob Voye, Jon Nepstad, Roger Bourke
Mayor Tom Pollard (ex officio)

Town of Alta staff: John Guldner, Chris Cawley, Liz Schulte (counsel)

Members of the public: Marcus Dippo, Adam Long representing Snowpine Lodge, Mark Haik, Onno Wieringa, Jen Clancy, Dave Eichel, and Ryan the videographer

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Jan Striefel opened the meeting in Planning Commission Chair **Joan Degiorgio's** brief absence.

0:00:30-UPDATE ON RECENT EVENTS, STAFF

John Guldner reported on ordinances passed at the December 11th, 2014 Alta Town Council meeting, including ordinance 2014-O-4, *An ordinance amending certain sections of Title 10, Chapter 4: Planning Commission of the Town Code that address the composition of the Planning Commission, its number, quorum requirements and voting*, and Ordinance 2014-O-5: *An ordinance amending certain sections of Title 10, Chapter 6, Article D: Base Facilities Zone of the Town Code with respect to height, coverage, yard regulations and adding sections addressing physical building step-backs and mechanical screening provisions to the Base Facilities Zone*. **John** discussed the possible departure of a current Planning Commission member and stated that the Town of Alta (the Town) will be looking for a replacement Planning Commission member with a background in architecture or landscape architecture.

Chris Cawley described the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) Local Planning Resource Program, through which the Town will apply for funding to pursue local planning projects.

00:07:20-APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 20th, 2014 AND THE NOVEMBER 17th, 2014 PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS

Roger Bourke recommended that the minutes from November include materials presented by Logan Simpson Design at the November meeting. **Jan** asked staff whether there was an update on that project was available, and **Chris** described that the timeline for the project had been exceeded due to the need to further refine concepts presented at the November meeting and clarify presentation of future drafts.

Jan asked for a motion to accept minutes from the October 20th, 2014 Planning Commission meeting; **Rob Voye** made a motion, **Roger** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried. **Roger** moved to accept the minutes from the November 17th, 2014 Planning Commission meeting subject to the inclusion of materials presented at that meeting being included in the record. **Rob** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

00:09:40-DISCUSSION WITH POSSIBLE ACTION ON PROPOSED RIDGELINE PROTECTION ORDINANCE

John stated that the concept of a "keyhole" being allowed in certain areas relative to possible new chairlift development had been discouraged in previous meetings. **John** described language allowing penetration of ridgelines if an applicant can prove there is no other alternative and describing conditions

which must be met, and observed that nearly all ridgeline areas in the Town of Alta are zoned “FR,” meaning that applicants would need to seek a conditional use, bringing any such ridgeline development before the Planning Commission. **John** described the removal of the Catherine’s Pass trailhead viewpoint from the ordinance. **Roger** opined that he is not sure removing viewpoints from consideration was a good idea, given the extraordinary scenic quality of Alta. **Rob Voye** asked what the designated viewpoints are, and **John** stated that currently the preferred viewpoints are the parking area along SR-210 near the Alta Lodge; the beginning of the Albion Basin Summer Road; and a location near the second switchback on the Albion Basin Summer Road. **John** also described that anything existing would be considered a non-conforming use, and stated that additions to any structure considered to be non-conforming would require review by the Planning Commission. **Jan** asked whether the interruption of a ridgeline view by the appearance of a structure is what this ordinance is intended to prevent, or if it is disruption of the natural ridgeline environment *by development on a ridgeline*—for instance, the removal of trees or reshaping of earth resulting from construction of a structure in such a location. **John** stated that protection of ridgeline views was the purpose of this ordinance. **Jon Nepstad** opined that this ordinance should avoid creating exemptions for certain types of construction, requiring proposals to be considered as conditional uses.

Roger reiterated his position that a fourth viewpoint, preferably from a location higher in elevation than those currently under consideration, should be included.

Onno Wieringa opined that it was important to remember that Alta is a ski area, and that certain common structures at ski areas—ski lifts, utilities, etc.—work best when they extend to the top of a given ridgeline. **Onno** observed that facilities can be designed to blend in with the natural environment.

Mark Haik observed that it could become important to clarify exactly where Town of Alta and Salt Lake County boundaries officially exist along ridgeline areas, as neighboring counties could approve development that would affect our ridgeline views. **John Guldner** offered the example of a lift terminal proposed to be constructed on the ridgeline above Grizzly Gulch by Solitude Mountain Resort in Big Cottonwood Canyon; in that case, Solitude would have had to survey property and municipal boundaries in order to proceed.

Jon Nepstad stated his support of the general intent and current language of this proposed ordinance, but stated he was unsure whether this ordinance would address a long-standing issue, or if it is in response to certain anticipated developments. Several commission members agreed that the ordinance could meet both of those goals.

Roger suggested that the ordinance include the Catherine’s Pass trailhead as a fourth viewpoint. **Rob** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried. The Planning Commission agreed to hold a public hearing on this proposed ordinance at their next regular meeting.

00:37:36-DISCUSSION WITH POSSIBLE ACTION ON AMENDING THE BASE FACILITIES ZONE ORDINANCE TO ALLOW CONDOMINIUMS

Joan opined that the bigger questions remaining are the issue of condominiums requiring more water system source capacity, and the question of whether requiring lodge owners to pursue a “ratio” of condominiums to hotel rooms within lodge renovation projects would meet community goals. **Joan** observed that the community is interested in seeing an “upgraded” Alta, and that allowing lodge owners

to build condominiums could provide lodge owners an opportunity for more affordable financing. **Joan** also paraphrased **Jan's** suggestion that all of these issues were secondary to the question of whether condominiums are desirable in the Town of Alta commercial core or not. **Jan** reiterated that lodge renovations including condominiums should not result in a net loss of guest rooms.

Jon Nepstad suggested the Planning Commission needs to revisit the Town of Alta General Plan vision statement and ask whether condominiums will help activate and vitalize the Town of Alta commercial core, and stated he doubts condominiums are the solution to this goal.

Rob stated that he agreed with the prohibition of condominiums from the Base Facilities Zone in 2008 but added that the "financing argument" could be valid. **Roger** suggested that the Planning Commission could benefit from learning from an outside expert on the financial realities of hotel ownership and renovation. **Jon** observed that ownership of property in the mountains of Utah is changing rapidly and that perhaps future owners of various properties in Alta might have better financial resources, which could preclude the need to build condominiums as a financing mechanism. **Jan** asked whether a review process for condominium projects could involve a financial review of some kind. **Liz Schulte** stated she had not seen ordinances requiring an assessment of whether condominiums are required for a project to be financially feasible, and that she was unsure whether such a requirement would be legal.

Jan observed there will need to be a specific condominium ordinance.

Several Planning Commission members turned to the question of whether condominiums were an appropriate use of the Town's remaining water system source capacity. **Mayor Pollard** opined it was not certain that the Town's water restrictions will ever expand significantly.

Jan observed that in general, the Planning Commission does not seem comfortable with allowing condominiums in the Base Facilities Zone.

Marcus Dippo stated that the Alta Lodge has engaged an architect to investigate possibilities for adding condominiums to the property, and will consider ways in which condominiums could improve the Alta Lodge's financial resources. **Marcus** observed that the status quo in Alta is changing, and that some aspects of Mountain Accord could change the outlook of local Alta business in major ways. **Marcus** also stated that the Alta Lodge is not able to self-finance major improvements, and that financial markets do not look favorably on businesses that are only profitable during certain times of the year.

Adam Long, representing the Snowpine Lodge, observed that the Snowpine does not intend to completely "condominiumize" their property, and that the Snowpine is ready to move forward with significant improvements.

Onno observed that the Mayor's planning efforts are intended to help the Town envision what is needed in order to assure Alta continues to be economically viable in the future. **Onno** stated that simply focusing only on the question of whether hotel rooms or condominiums will provide the Town more revenue may be secondary to the question of what it will take to make Alta more attractive to more people.

Marcus asked whether a development on the scale of the Solitude base village would be amenable to the Planning Commission. **Rob** stated that he strongly disliked the feel, scale, and contents of the Solitude base village. **Mayor Pollard** opined that the Solitude base village feels very similar to other large ski area villages throughout the United States, and observed that what differentiates Alta from other American ski resorts is that it is not simply a real estate development.

Mark Haik suggested that some Town of Alta property values have declined of late, and stated that the Town does not need to be a real estate development, but that it should allow real estate property owners to develop. **Mark** stated that the State of Utah is interested in seeing the Cottonwood Canyon ski areas developed into a “higher end” ski resort community, and that this will expedite Mountain Accord. **Mark** also observed that if a “village” of some kind is planned in Alta, it needs to include residential uses in order to be viable.

Jon Nepstad observed that perhaps a redevelopment area would be a functional option for planning a viable future economic reality in Alta.

Joan summarized elements of the condominium conversation:

- should the planning commission wait until Mountain Accord is further along?
- water is important but it is secondary to the question of whether condominiums would help revitalize Alta.
- a separate condominium ordinance will be required to address this issue
- requiring a ratio of condominiums to hotel rooms may not achieve the community benefit that has been discussed as a “*quid pro quo*”

Roger opined again that an ordinance ought to honor present constraints including land ownership and water system source capacity.

Mark Haik observed that a previous planning effort produced certain recommendations, including the need for a way-finding signage and pedestrian connectivity, and observed that action on those recommendations had not been taken. **Mark** recommended that any development in the Town of Alta planned for the future prioritize walkability.

John Guldner suggested that the question of whether condominiums would allow lodges to acquire better financing was not complicated, and that a redevelopment area would not be appropriate in Alta.

Jan opined that perhaps the Planning Commission was at the “yes, but...” stage on the subject of condominiums, and observed that the commission needed to clarify the extent to which it could include “exactions” for community benefit in a condominium ordinance. **Jan** reflected that in her career as a planner, she has found that communities don’t understand the extent to which they can “demand excellence” from developers, and write those demands into their ordinances.

Joan stated that at the next meeting, the Planning Commission would discuss “conditioning” condominiums in the Base Facilities Zone—ratios, community benefit, “do-not-exceed...” etc. There will be a public hearing with possible action on the ridgeline ordinance as well.

01:25:20-DISCUSSION ON THE COMMISSION'S PRIORITIES AND FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE

Joan suggested that given the late hour, Planning Commission members could consider the priority list generated in 2014 and be prepared at the next meeting, scheduled for February 2nd, 2015, to discuss priorities. **John** mentioned that the Council had approved the change in Planning Commission membership from 7 to 5 members, and the process of selecting the next Planning Commission member was discussed, as **Jan** will be resigning from the Planning Commission at the end of December.

01:30:19-MOTION TO ADJOURN

Jan made a motion, **Rob** seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

The content of the 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 February 2nd, 2015

S/ Chris Cawley
Assistant Town Administrator

*Audio Recordings are available online at soundcloud.com/townofalta.