

AGENDA ITEM # IX.

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Wilf Sommerkorn's take on the latest in Utah land use politics and law:

SO WHAT'S THE PLAN?

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At the start of the new year, as we also await the start of the legislative session, a couple of interesting things to be aware of.

As noted in recent postings, there's been a lot of state-level action on housing and land use issues. We've had the [legislative priorities from the Unified Economic Opportunity Commission](#), the [Performance Audit of Utah Housing Policy](#) by the legislative audit subcommittee, and the announcement by the Governor of his housing priorities and [budget recommendations](#), including the appointment of a [Senior Advisor for Housing Strategy and Innovation](#).

The housing audit makes the recommendation that state officials should be more proactive in development statewide housing policies. The Senior Housing advisor, former state representative and former Ogden Valley planning commissioner Steve Waldrip, however, was recently quoted in a [Moab Times-Independent story](#) saying that the way to perhaps accomplish this is to have the Associations of Government (AOGs) take a more up-front role.

Waldrip, the former state representative, wants Utah to explore empowering regional government bodies to develop housing policy. He said those entities could liaise between municipalities and the state, employing a more holistic view on housing challenges while still giving local governments a voice.

"Otherwise," Waldrip said, "what happens is you get a law rammed down the throats of the local governments, and they immediately start looking for loopholes."

Kind of what I've been pointing out in previous postings about what's happening on zoning reform around the country.

The idea of viewing things from the perspective of the AOGs makes some sense, as each area of the state has some peculiar issues and characteristics, most obviously the more rural areas have a whole different set of problems than do the more urban counties.

This is apparent and emphasized in the recently released report from Envision Utah on [BEST PRACTICES FOR HOUSING ATTAINABILITY](#).

The report gives 7 recommendations for the state and regional associations of governments along with 6 recommendations for local governments:

1. *Education the public about the need for more housing*
2. *Develop materials for training local government officials about what they can do to promote housing affordability and how to address concerns.*
3. *Assist communities with transportation infrastructure to soften community opposition to more housing.*
4. *Analyze and address non-zoning barriers to condominium development to promote ownership opportunities.*
5. *Consider state-level financial assistance for structured parking in centers and transit-oriented developments.*
6. *Standardize plan review and inspection for offsite construction.*
7. *Conduct a more in-depth analysis of available land and water to understand where growth can and should go and whether planning is adequate.*

We are only two weeks away from the start of the legislative session, and there are still plenty of ideas about how to deal with housing affordability floating around. Some of these ideas are being drafted into bills, others not yet. It's going require careful attention to what pops out and what the bills say as the session moves along. Stay tuned.



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Wilf Sommerkorn retired as the Director of Regional Planning and Transportation for Salt Lake County in 2019, where he served from 2014.

Prior to that, he was Salt Lake City Planning Director from 2008 to 2014, and Director of the Davis County Community & Economic Development Department for 14 years prior to that. He was a planner in various positions with that Department from 1981.

Wilf has also served as the Community Development Director for Centerville City, and as an adjunct professor of urban planning at the University of Utah, where he taught a class in The Politics of Planning, something every planner should know!

Wilf has served as Legislative Chair for the Utah Chapter of the American Planning Association since 1990, where he has had a role in writing the state codes regarding land use. He was President of the APA Utah Chapter from 1986 to 1988.

Wilf holds a BS in Physical Geography and Geology from the University of Utah, and an MS in Urban Planning from the University of Tennessee.

Wilf now works with the non-profit Utah Land Use Institute as Deputy Executive Director, and also does planning consulting work through his firm, Sommerkorn Consulting. He is currently serving on the Kaysville City Planning Commission.