



Stakeholders Council Recommendation to the CWC Board

MEMO

To: Central Wasatch Commission

CC: CWC Staff

From: Stakeholders Council

Subject: Opposition to Solitude Resort Parking Expansion

Date: June 4, 2025

Dear Commissioners,

Roadside parking in Big Cottonwood Canyon (BCC) presents a series of challenges, and, as evidenced by broad participation in the Mountain Accord, there is shared interest among agencies, resorts, and the public in finding long-term solutions. As a proposed solution, Solitude Mountain Resort has suggested building a new 593-stall parking lot. Though we recognize their efforts, it is clear this proposal could worsen challenges in ways that are counter to the Mountain Accord's stated outcomes. Members of the CWC Stakeholders Council have identified several outcomes of building such a parking lot that are inconsistent with the goals of the Mountain Accord Charter and present concerns for the safety of canyon users.

Incompatibility with the Mountain Accord Charter:

- The proposed lot goes against the Mountain Accord's calls for alternatives that "dis-incentivize single-occupancy vehicle access to and in the Cottonwood Canyons" and that such options should be "regionally coordinated and integrated with transportation alternatives considered in the NEPA process" (§3.10.4).¹ Further, the Accord also asks NEPA processes to consider how parking needs can be reduced when considering transportation alternatives (§3.10.8).¹ Even if all of the Town of Brighton's 240 existing roadside spots between Willow Fork and Brighton Loop were removed, which is unlikely as they serve more than just Solitude guests, the new lot would still add at least 353 spaces, or cars, to the canyon. By increasing parking capacity before the Big Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Study is completed, the proposal undermines these agreed-upon strategies and sets a precedent that favors expanded vehicle infrastructure over transit-based solutions, exacerbating problems that the Mountain Accord sets out to solve.
- The project site is home to a stand of Quaking Aspen, a vital biodiversity resource. Aspen forests are second only to riparian zones in supporting plant and animal diversity and function as a keystone species across the Intermountain West. Their removal would degrade the ecological integrity of the site and diminish landscape-scale habitat connectivity.² Further, the project impacts lands owned by Salt Lake City Public Utilities for watershed protection. New impervious surfaces, additional road salt, and increased vehicle contaminants pose risks to water quality, in direct conflict with the Mountain Accord's objective *"To protect watersheds and ensure existing and future culinary water resources are reliable and of high*

quality. To preserve lands that provide critical terrestrial and aquatic habitats, corridors for wildlife, natural and scenic values, and recreational opportunities and to restore degraded lands.” (§2.1).¹

- Finally, the Mountain Accord states that development within the Cottonwood Canyons should “*reduce sprawl and preserve open space, sensitive environments, community character, and quality of life in the mountains*” (§2.4.1)¹ and “*seek plans, ordinances, and policies that support the land use intentions and intended outcomes... through cooperation with local land use authorities, environmental organizations, property owners, and other interested parties*” (2.4.5).¹ For the area this property lies within, the

Town of Brighton General Plan calls for “safe, environmentally conscious properties”.⁵ Further, the Town’s goals don’t include additional car capacity, rather preserving open space (NR1-O4)⁵, reducing congestion (LU2-O4)⁵, year-round transit (T1-O1)⁵, forest restoration (LLU1-O1)⁵, and encouraging development that reduces impacts on wildlife (T2-O4)⁵. The proposed project reflects a large-scale expansion inconsistent with the stated goals of both the Mountain Accord and the Town of Brighton General Plan.

Safety Concerns:

- The project area is located within a high-risk wildfire zone, as defined by the Utah Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal.³ The proposed lot would require the clear-cutting of approximately 14 acres of Quaking Aspen, recognized as natural firebreaks due to their high moisture content and low flammability.⁴
- While reducing roadside parking is a broadly supported goal for improving safety, the proposed parking lot introduces new hazards. On peak days, over 1,100 guests could be crossing SR-190 during morning and afternoon surges at a high-speed, low-visibility stretch of road. An unknown portion of these visitors would use a proposed pedestrian crossing, while others would be transported via shuttles crossing the highway. Both modes of crossing introduce safety risks and traffic conflicts—whether through concentrated pedestrian movement or additional vehicle merging and turning—ultimately increasing the likelihood of accidents and creating a new layer of congestion.

Alternative Considerations: A safer and more Mountain Accord-aligned approach would be for Solitude and other resorts to help fund shared public or private transit systems that transport guests directly from expanded valley park ‘n ride lots to resort bases. Further, enhancing existing carpool incentive programs through increased enforcement, offering better benefits, or developing shared ride platforms can help discourage single-occupancy vehicle use. Additionally, UTA and UDOT should implement service at or greater than pre-2022 service levels, running buses at least every 15 minutes during morning and afternoon rush periods. Operating at this service level does not require completion of a NEPA process, nor should it be limited by ongoing litigation in neighboring canyons. Further, any consideration of additional parking proposals in Big Cottonwood Canyon should be deferred until the canyon-wide transportation planning NEPA process is complete, ensuring that future solutions are holistic and consistent with regional goals.

Proposed Motion: The Stakeholder Council recommends that the Central Wasatch Commission Board take a public position opposing Solitude Mountain Resort’s proposed parking lot on Old Stage Road. The project, which raises significant safety and environmental concerns, is inconsistent with the Mountain Accord’s stated outcomes related to reducing single-occupancy vehicle use, preserving open space, protecting watershed and habitat integrity, and aligning development with local needs. The Council further recommends that the Board oppose any major parking infrastructure in Big Cottonwood Canyon until the completion of the Big Cottonwood Canyon NEPA process.



1. *Mountain Accord Charter*. <https://cwc.utah.gov/mountainaccord/>
2. Paul C. Rogers. *Biodiversity Within Aspen Forests*. Western Aspen Alliance, Utah State University, 2023. <https://qcnr.usu.edu/western-aspen-alliance/files/briefs/brief-7-biodiversity.pdf>
3. *Utah Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal*. Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. <https://wildfirerisk.utah.gov/>
4. Kevin Krasnow and Paul C. Rogers. *Aspen as Firebreaks at the Development Fringe*. Western Aspen Alliance, Utah State University, 2023. <https://qcnr.usu.edu/western-aspen-alliance/files/briefs/brief-9-firebreaks.pdf>
5. *Town of Brighton General Plan*. Greater Salt Lake Municipal Services District, 2022. <https://msd.utah.gov/365/Town-of-Brighton-General-Plan-2022>

-Presented to the Commissioners by the Chair and Co-Chair of the Stakeholders Council

This matter was brought to a vote on June 4, 2025 and votes are listed below.

Those in favor:

John Knoblock
Maura Hahnenberger
Adam Lenkowski
Mark Baer
Mike Marker
Meaghan McKasy
Sally Kaiser
Doug Tolman
Roger Borgenicht
John Adams
Del Draper
Kelly Boardman
Barbara Cameron
Sarah Bennett

Dennis Goreham

Brenden Catt
Danny Richardson
Kim Doyle

Those opposed:

None

Those in abstention:

None

Absent:

Caitlin Curry
Dan Zalles
Ed Marshall
Ella Abelli-Amen
Hilary Arens
Ian Reddell
Jonny Vasic
Kurt Hegmann
Morgan Mingle
Olivia Juarez
Pat Shea
Patrick Morrison
Tom Diegel