

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**ALTA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**  
**Wednesday, November 19, 2025, 3:00 PM**  
Alta Community Center, 10351 E. Highway 210, Alta, Utah

**ALTA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING – 3:00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Jon Nepstad, Chair  
Jeff Niermeyer, Vice-Chair (joined at 3:07 - virtual)  
Paul Moxley  
Maren Askins  
David Abraham  
Roger Bourke, Town of Alta Mayor

**STAFF PRESENT:** Chris Cawley, Town Manager  
Molly Austin, Assistant Town Manager  
Polly McLean, Town Attorney

**ALSO PRESENT:** John Guldner, Cottonwood Lands Advisory (virtual)  
Andrina Hougham, Shallow Shaft Property Owner  
Jay Springer, Shallow Shaft Attorney  
Hans Hoffman, Shallow Shaft Architect

**NOT PRESENT:**

**1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

Planning Commission Chair Jon Nepstad opened the November 19, 2025 meeting at 3:01 PM.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

No comments received.

**3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 22, 2025 MEETING**

Planning Commissioner Maren Askins moved to approve the minutes from the October 22, 2025 Planning Commission meeting. Planning Commissioner David Abraham seconded. All were in favor, and the minutes were approved.

**4. PRESENTATION and DISCUSSION: SHALLOW SHAFT PROPOSED ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT**

Chris Cawley described that while the Shallow Shaft ("the Applicant") presented at planning commission meetings over the past few years, they have now submitted a complete application that has initiated formal proceedings for a proposed code amendment. Another key difference from prior meetings is the actual text amendment itself, which has a new approach to the lot coverage requirements the Applicant proposes to amend as well as the introduction of a new allowable use that would only apply to Base Facility Zone (BFZ) Zone C. Cawley noted that there are some nonconformities that currently exist on the property and it is likely some of those nonconformities would still exist with the proposed development concept, but he encouraged the commission to focus on the actual ordinance changes that are proposed. Cawley clarified that there is no action on the agenda today, as a public hearing would need to occur prior to any final action. The role of the Planning Commission would be to offer a recommendation (either positive, negative, or neutral) to the Town Council, which has final authority to approve a land use regulation amendment.

Andrina Hougham introduced herself as owner of the Shallow Shaft property and introduced Jay Springer as their legal counsel and Hans Hoffman, the project architect. To start, Hougham gave a high-level overview of how we came to this meeting today. Hougham explained that the text amendment presented today is based on feedback previously received from the commission. Hougham reviewed that the Shallow Shaft has been under their ownership for 39 years and has provided ongoing support for local organizations. The Shallow Shaft restaurant closed in 2020 coinciding with the covid pandemic and has yet to reopen. During the closure, ownership explored the idea of a new use for their building and representatives first attended a public meeting in April of 2024 to present their concept to tear down the restaurant and rebuild a small lodging facility, emphasizing their desire to meet all code requirements. Feedback from that initial meeting was incorporated into their following presentation in March of 2025 as well as what is being presented today. Based on that feedback, the new proposal includes employee housing, a coffee shop, a reduced room count, adjustments to the parking area based on Utah Department of Transportation input, and a snow melt management solution. Hougham summarized that the main discussion points from the previous meeting were the culvert management and the consideration of hotel rooms that include kitchens, with the latter being a sticking point that was unable to be resolved in previous meetings. Since March 2025, representatives of the Shallow Shaft have met with Alta Ski Lifts general manager, Mike Maughan, placed a GRAMA request for building plans and permits for other Alta hotel properties (to better understand how other Alta hotels have come to have guest rooms with kitchens), met with Alta Town Council members, and had ongoing discussions with Town Manager, Chris Cawley. As an outcome of those actions, the Shallow Shaft has submitted a formal request for a rezone and/or text amendment. The goal of the proposal was to allow rooms with kitchens that can be rented on a nightly basis in Zone C of the BFZ.

Hougham gave an overview of the BFZ, noting that it is composed of 3 distinct Zones: Zone A includes the Snowpine Lodge, Rustler Lodge, and Alta Lodge; Zone B includes the Goldminer's Daughter Lodge and Alta Peruvian Lodge; and Zone C includes the Shallow Shaft and Photohaus.

Hougham then provided a review of the proposal:

### 1. Lot width area

Town of Alta Code 10-6D-8 prohibits construction of any building, structure, or improvements on lots with an area of less than 1 net developable acre, a slope that exceeds 30%, or on a lot with a width of less than 100 feet.

The proposed text amendment to 10-6D-8 would distinguish Zone C of the BFZ from Zones A and B, and create a stipulation that “any lot or parcel in Zone C that existed as a separate legal lot or parcel prior to January 1, 2025, and has not been subdivided or otherwise modified since that date, shall be deemed to meet the minimum lot area and width requirements of this Code, despite net developable area being less than one acre, for purposes of any development application.”

### 2. New Permitted Use: Boutique Hotel

Town of Alta Code 10-6D-4 outlines current permitted and prohibited uses in the BFZ. The proposed text amendment would allow for an additional permitted use explicitly in Zone C only of a “boutique hotel” and “living quarters for persons employed on the premises of any Main Use”.

### 3. New Definition: Boutique Hotel

Town of Alta Code 10-1-6 provides definitions of terms in Title 10. The proposed amendment would add a new definition: “Boutique Hotel: A small, independently operated lodging facility located only within Zone C of the BFZ, containing no more than eight (8) guest-rooms, including any on-site worker housing units as may be required by Alta Code. A Boutique Hotel shall be separately owned and independent from any larger resort, hotel, or lodging facility. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in Alta Code, guest-rooms in a Boutique Hotel may include in-room or shared kitchens and kitchenettes for guest use.”

Hougham explained that the intent is to only apply the above definition to Zone C and acknowledged that the proposed language may not be perfect.

To start the discussion, Cawley clarified that he has not told the Applicant what to do but rather offered the suggestion to limit their proposal to Zone C as applying it to the entire BFZ would result in a more significant change. It is ultimately up to the Planning Commission and Town Council to decide if, how, and where a zoning change is applied. Cawley also noted that “Boutique Hotel” could cause some confusion as all the major lodging properties in Alta could be considered a boutique hotel.

Moxley asked what amenities constitute a kitchen. Hougham offered that a refrigerator, stove, dishwashers, etc. would distinguish a kitchen from a kitchenette, which typically includes a mini fridge and microwave. Springer added that both the proposed new use and new definition are limited to Zone C, to make the intent explicit to limit this new use to Zone C only to anyone who may be reviewing the code in the future.

Nepstad inquired why we would need a new definition when a hotel is already a permitted use. McLean stated that current code definitions prohibit kitchens in hotels because a kitchen converts a hotel room into a “dwelling”, and the purpose statement clarifies that dwellings are not allowed in the BFZ. The new definition is required to allow for hotel room that have kitchens, if the commission supports the concept. McLean asked the commission to consider whether this amendment would open the door to other properties in the BFZ to include kitchens in hotel rooms. McLean stated that another topic that came up ahead of this meeting is that there is a long, complicated history with land ownership in the BFZ, with most of the land originally being owned by the United States Forest Service (USFS). The context and timeline of when the land was transferred and when the zone was created is important for the commission to understand and consider, as that process did result in creating some nonconformities.

Nepstad noted that the use of the term “Boutique” is somewhat arbitrary, and Cawley agreed, stating that a more ideal term and/or definition can be created if the Town wishes to allow the use. Cawley noted that the prohibition of residential uses in the BFZ has been a fundamental principle of Town of Alta land use planning and regulations.

Hoffman noted that the Building Code allows for kitchens in hotels. McLean clarified that Alta Town code defines a dwelling as a living space with a kitchen – and dwellings are not allowed in this zone.

David Abraham agreed that a text amendment is the right path forward towards recommending something of this nature. He then described some favorable elements of the proposal, such as the mixed-use nature of the project, on-site parking, the inclusion of workforce housing, and commercial use of limited size. Abraham said he appreciates the nature of the proposal and how it fits into the vision for “downtown Alta”. He suggested there is a benefit to the community to a new use that is not single-family residential but questioned if the proposed coffee shop is enough of a trade-off for allowing the proposed new uses.

Maren Askins reiterated the benefit of the coffee shop and employee housing. However, she stated that she is struggling with the idea of allowing a new use for one business only when there are other established businesses in the area that may also want to add kitchens to their hotel rooms, but they are restricted from doing so. Askins asked if it would be problematic to have a definition that is so specific to this one building in our code, noting that the building design isn’t yet finalized and could change. McLean stated that this scenario is different than spot zoning because it is a subzone that includes two buildings. She continued that any new definition has to be tailored to what the commission thinks is correct for that area – noting that the changes would apply to the Photohaus building as well. McLean stated that the allowable number of guest rooms is based on net developable acreage. McLean also mentioned that employee housing is required under the current code, so it is redundant to include it in the definition.

McLean summarized that there are two major asks in the proposal:

1. Change the code related to lot size and lot width requirements, allowing the building to no longer be non-conforming and allow them to expand their footprint (clarifying that current code would allow them to rebuild with an increase of up to 250 square feet).

## 2. New use allowance.

Hougham stated current zoning allows for lot coverage of 65% of the lot area (updated from 25% previously), but that is a moot point in their case because their lot is less than one acre. Hougham stated that the allowable expansion of 250 square feet equates to a 6% increase for the Shallow Shaft compared to a 160% increase allowed elsewhere in the BFZ when the coverage requirements increased from 25% to 65%.

Jeff Niermeyer stated his appreciation for the application, noting the thought that went into it to try to find a desirable solution for both the Applicant and the Town. Niermeyer expressed concern about the precedent it may set in terms of fairness and equity to the other lodges that may want to make similar changes. Niermeyer shared that he reviewed the Town Council meeting review of the Shrontz Estate, leaving him with the impression that the Town Council is considering a wider update to the general plan that may result in different allowable uses in the future. Niermeyer questioned if would be appropriate to wait on this discussion until it can be incorporated into a broader discussion of a general plan update.

Paul Moxley stated that he tends to be more interested in the big picture than a detail-oriented person. Moxley shared that he is impressed with the proposal and the concept of more hot beds in Alta as well as a coffee shop as community benefits. Moxley stated he is in support of the other lodges adding sinks and microwaves to their hotel rooms, noting it is quite commonplace in hotels and could be a draw for tourism.

The conversation turned to other Alta hotels that advertise guest rooms with kitchens. Cawley clarified that hotel rooms with kitchens are not allowed, sharing that some of the examples were permitted as employee dwellings and others may have been altered without a building permit. Cawley reiterated that the Town is now aware of these instances as a result of this process.

Mayor Bourke shared that, generally, Alta has had traditional lodges. He noted that this proposal could add another option that doesn't exist yet in the central area of Town and it may be attractive to future visitors.

Jon Nepstad stated that the definition of a "kitchen" is a grey area versus what is an expected amenity of a hotel room (coffee pot, sink, and perhaps a mini fridge). When considering the bigger picture, Nepstad stated he is drawn to section 4.3 of the general plan which supports activating the center of Alta by encouraging commercial activity that is accessible to the community and has been keeping that in mind as a metric in consideration of this proposal. Bourke stated that compared to the current status of the building, the proposal is desirable, whereas Askins suggested the comparison be made to the previous use of the building as a public restaurant.

Cawley noted that Nepstad has always been a strong proponent of this provision of the general plan, stating that it is the most significant and recent general planning update. While it is relatively recent, Cawley noted it is 12 years old and highlighted the importance of evaluating the relevance of the commercial core plan, considering changes to the ski industry and visitation

in Little Cottonwood Canyon. Nepstad reiterated his preference for activating the commercial core.

Askins asked a clarifying question regarding the proposed text amendment to 10-6D-8 which defines lot area, width, and slope requirements. She asked if Zone C should be included in Section A, to clarify that the proposed exception would only apply to the lots referenced in section B. Springer offered to provide an alternate version of the language at the next meeting to address this concern and make the exception clearer. McLean stated that she had contemplated additional edits to the language, but didn't want to get into too much detail yet before having some direction from the commission. She stated that the intent of the meeting today was to gauge the temperature of the commission and explained that the Applicant has a right to a public hearing. After a public hearing, the commission could make recommendations to send to the Town Council for consideration, noting that there is still opportunity to refine the language.

Cawley summarized the discussion by highlighting the question of whether or not to require commercial use, acknowledging the intent with the "boutique hotel" definition (although he stated some discomfort with the concept), and the need to carefully consider the prohibition of residential uses as it appears elsewhere in the code, specifically in the "purpose" section which may have to be updated if it is something the commission and the Town Council decide to allow. Cawley continued to discuss the history of the properties in the Base Facilities Zone, noting that 7 of the 8 parcels were originally property of the USFS until approximately 1985. Cawley expressed his interest in seeing massing renderings of what could be built on these lots if the minimum lot area and width requirements are amended.

McLean stated that staff has not seen a clear site plan that correctly addresses the culvert issue nor is there a clear understanding of how much net developable acreage there is on the site. She cautioned against approving the zoning changes only to deny a future building permit application for other non-compliance issues.

Nepstad asked if there is any knowledge of guests booking a room in any of the Alta lodges for an extended stay of 3-4 months. Askins stated that at the Alta Lodge, it is rare and very difficult to arrange a stay for more than 30 days. Moxley noted that he believes there is a guest at the Peruvian Lodge who often stays for the entire season.

Hougham inquired about how the land ownership history is relevant to this application. Cawley explained that it is the circumstances surrounding the ownership of most of the parcels zoned Base Facilities is unique; the land was private in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was obtained by or donated to the US Forest Service in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was then divested by the Forest Service in the 1980s. McLean shared that when looking at this request from an equity and fairness standpoint, it is beneficial to see what exists for the other properties that are in the BFZ, noting that different standards were in place prior to the creation of the BFZ. McLean continued that she felt it was interesting to understand and contemplate the context of the bigger picture, although it is not required that the commission do so.

Abraham acknowledged that zoning requirements are rigid, equating zoning to a square peg that must fit in a square hole, and encouraged the commission to think about how to create zoning

requirements that will allow commercial activation in the zone. Askins shared that there are lots of options for businesses that fit the current zoning. Hougham stated that hotels are already a permitted use.

For next steps, the commission asked that the Applicant provide new massing renderings to illustrate how close the buildings (both Shallow Shaft and Photohaus) could get to each other and to the road ahead of the next meeting. The idea of how a General Plan update might affect the timing of this application was discussed, but Cawley noted that the earliest a General Plan update project could get started is next July, and is likely to be a lengthy process, so it was determined to move forward sooner rather than later.

McLean stated that the Applicant has the right to have a public hearing or action in a timely manner. Cawley acknowledged that the discussion today was productive and proposed a future meeting with deeper discussion on some of the topics raised today and perhaps a closer look at the language in the proposed text amendments. Nepstad summarized that the plan is to have the Applicant back in December with additional information, but not likely a public hearing or action, but to plan for that step in January seems reasonable. The Applicant said they are ready for a hearing in December.

#### **5. PRESENTATION and DISCUSSION: PRIORITIES for FUTURE TOWN OF ALTA GENERAL PLAN UPDATE**

Cawley introduced the topic of a General Plan update. Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) offers a grant program called Transportation and Land Use Connection (TLC). Cawley shared that we have used 3 of these grants in the last 11 years. These grants can fund general plan updates, code updates, and small area planning. Applications are due for the upcoming funding cycle on December 11. Cawley emphasized that a general plan update is no small feat, and would be a big undertaking for the commission, staff, council, community and all stakeholders. Cawley reviewed that a general plan is a guiding document for land use regulations and should include:

- A land use element
- A transportation and traffic circulation element (challenging for Alta as we don't own roads)
- A moderate-income housing element (Alta is exempt due to our classification as a town).
- A water use and prevention element (Alta is exempt due to our classification as a town).

Cawley reviewed the role of the planning commission in a general plan update and noted that our general plan was last comprehensively updated in 2005. The Utah Land Use Development and Management Act ("LUDMA") was also overhauled around that time. The most recent update to the Town of Alta general plan occurred in 2013 to adopt Section 4.3 "Town Center Commercial."

Cawley then summarized what has changed since our general plan update in 2005, noting the growth of the Salt Lake Valley, ski industry consolidation and pass products, the great recession, covid pandemic, increased visitation, Little Cottonwood Canyon transportation studies, and growth in Town of Alta budgets and scope of services. In other contexts, Alta has remained very much the same in terms of population, Alta Ski Area ownership, the scale of the business

community, land ownership patterns in Alta, annual snowfall totals, and no major change in transportation.

Moxley asked if there has been any change in skier visitation, and Cawley stated that there has been a definite increase since covid. Moxley then inquired about what percentage of skiers have an Ikon pass, but Cawley did not have that information. Bourke noted that Mike Maughan gave an update at a recent Town Council meeting. An increase in traffic congestion was also discussed, noting that Snowbird has had a significant impact on that trend, including in the summer months with the expansion of Oktoberfest.

Cawley reiterated the necessity of a general plan update and the desire to pursue this grant opportunity to hire consultants to assist in the process. The grant application deadline is approaching, and we will have to narrow down what elements of the general plan to focus on.

Nepstad asked what is needed from the commission, and Cawley stated a general show of support is all that is needed today and a letter of support would certainly help the application process. Nepstad then asked what the funding expectation is. Cawley shared that exact costs are unknown, but consultant fees tend to be expensive, and we are looking at a 6-figure ask in terms of total funding, a small portion of which the Town would match. He continued that we could also consider a broader update to the Town Code, which could be an additional cost.

Abraham noted that the vision statement should be considered, as well as transportation, although most transportation decisions are outside of our control. He also noted intent to focus on the commercial core element. Cawley commented that other topics to consider are watershed protection and open space protection, noting the recent proposal to develop a large piece of vacant land.

Niermeyer suggested we make sure public engagement is highlighted in the application process as that can support a grant application. He also stated that our water contracts need to be revisited as we consider watershed protection. To conclude, McLean stated that as a result of this discussion, there is a clear indication of support from the commission in proceeding with the grant funding for a general plan update.

## **6. NEW BUSINESS**

No new business

## **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 17 and expected agenda topics are follow-up from the Shallow Shaft Applicants and potential update on the General Plan update project. The potential for skiing around with Alta Ski Area General Manager was discussed for 1:30 PM on December 17. Cawley noted that it is tentative based on skiing conditions and noted that two commissioners are unavailable to participate. Bourke suggested the ski around is



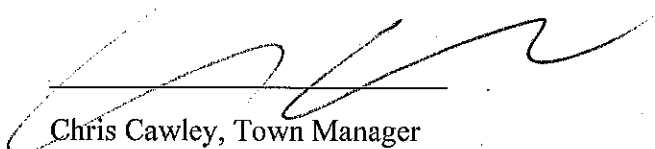
deferred until later in the spring when there is more snow and more commissioner availability to participate.

**8. MOTION TO ADJOURN**

Planning Commission member Moxley motioned to adjourn the meeting. Planning Commission member Askins seconded the motion, and the motion was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.

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Minutes Approved on *December 17, 2025*



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Chris Cawley, Town Manager

