

MINUTES OF THE COTTONWOOD HEIGHTS CITY COUNCIL TOWN HALL MEETING HELD MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2019 AT 6:30 P.M. IN THE COTTONWOOD HEIGHTS COMMUNITY ROOM LOCATED AT 2277 EAST BENGAL BOULEVARD, COTTONWOOD HEIGHTS, UTAH

Members Present: Mayor Mike Peterson, Council Member Mike Shelton, Council Member Christine Mikell

Staff Present: City Manager Tim Tingey, Records Culture and Human Resources Director Paula Melgar, Police Chief Robby Russo, Master Sergeant Scott Ricks

Excused: Council Member Scott Bracken, Council Member Tali Bruce

CANYON TRAFFIC TOWN HALL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

Mayor Peterson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and welcomed those present. The intent of the meeting was to address traffic-related issues pertaining to Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon. The Mayor clarified that issues regarding the design of Wasatch Boulevard would not be addressed tonight. The following Monday through Wednesday evenings, consultants would be present to specifically discuss the design of Wasatch Boulevard. Tonight's discussion was intended to focus on traffic-related issues.

Representatives from the Central Wasatch Commission ("CWC") were present. Mayor Peterson stated that he is a member of the CWC, which represents 10 different entities charged with championing canyon and other issues. The Mayor's goal as the City's representative is to help make things happen. He pointed out that the information received tonight will be summarized and provided to other jurisdictions who have responsibility for various traffic-related issues.

City Manager, Tim Tingey, addressed interim measures to help address short-term issues related to traffic. He confirmed that other measures are being discussed to address long-term needs, however, they will not be addressed tonight. He reported that the Wasatch Boulevard Master Plan was adopted last year and is focused on long-term solutions. During last year's Legislative Session, there were several meetings with lobbyists to look at long-term solutions to get traffic off of Wasatch Boulevard. They worked with the Utah Department of Transportation ("UDOT") and other entities to secure \$13 million in funding to build a future parking structure near the gravel pit area. Several meetings have been held to discuss short-term solutions with the Utah Transit Authority ("UTA"), UDOT, the CWC, the Corporate Centers, and others.

Mr. Tingey reiterated that no decision has been made on the information presented tonight but staff was seeking input to report back to the entities. They first addressed policy issues related to short-term solutions. Mr. Tingey stated that there have been several conversations about snow tires on private vehicles as well as rental cars in the Wasatch Canyons. He noted that many vehicles do not have adequate snow tires, which contributes to gridlock in the Canyon. Mr. Tingey explained that the remaining policy issues include chain options, staging areas for buses, ski resort p.m. traffic control assistance, and the possibility of adjusting UTA's official Change Day, which is when they

transition from summer/spring to winter services and making sure they coincide with ski resort opening and closing dates. There is also an opportunity to sponsor additional transit services.

Mr. Tingey next addressed transportation issues. He explained that UTA is focusing on transportation issues relative to the consistency, frequency, and efficiency of bus service. One option was to eliminate the Bingham Junction Trax stop and consolidate it with another near Fort Union Boulevard. This will increase the number of one-way trips from 61 on weekdays and 65 on Saturdays to 79 trips and consolidate bus services. The cost is \$50,000 annually. Another option was to add additional services and minimize buses being driven without passengers. This will increase the number of one-way trips from 17 on weekdays and 23 weekends to 35 throughout the week. The estimated cost was \$100,000 annually.

Eliminating interior ski racks was another option considered by UTA that will increase the usability of buses and increase capacity. There was also discussion about implementing a heavy traffic bus police escort from Bengal Boulevard to Little Cottonwood Canyon and 3000 East. It would allow for faster cycle time but logistics would need to be addressed. The separation of buses and cars in upper Little Cottonwood Canyon would allow for faster cycle times by eliminating waiting in traffic. The logistics with this option would also need to be addressed. The consolidation of resort bus stops would result in faster cycle times by eliminating stops and navigating through resort bases. The elimination of the transit service to the Little Cottonwood Canyon Park and Ride Lot will focus on faster cycle times by eliminating stops and provide a parking lot reserved for carpools and ride-share vans. One of the major issues was delays as a result of poor circulation where buses are forced to turn left into the facility, which backs up traffic.

With respect to enforcement, increased enforcement could occur but would require funding. Discussion was ongoing between UDOT, the Unified Police Department, the Cottonwood Heights Police Department, and the ski areas. Funding for additional enforcement, enforcement of snow tire and chain regulations, and four-wheel drive elements was being investigated.

Road issues included the need for additional snow removal, traffic control vehicles, and Cottonwood Heights officers directing local residents in and out of neighborhoods onto Wasatch Boulevard. It is challenging on heavy snow days when resources are spread thin. With respect to communication issues, UDOT is considering hiring a full-time Canyons Communication person who would coordinate traffic issues. Communication would also be provided on digital boards relaying ride-sharing and transit info, signage, and apps for smartphones in the Valley and in the canyons. Relative to road traffic and flow improvements, they were looking to extend merge lanes, give buses priority, consider tolling options, and improvements to alleviate on-road parking in the winter.

Mayor Peterson opened the public hearing.

Jim Rock gave his address as 7430 South Wasatch Boulevard and stated that he lives in the Canyon Racquet Club Condominiums. He stated that there are several short-term rentals in their community and one of the impediments of using the bus is that they fill up. Mr. Rock owns a short-term rental and encourages his guests not to take the bus on weekends or snow days. On snow days more people want to go up the canyon and some do not have appropriate vehicles. He suggested more bus service be provided on busy days. Mr. Rock commented on increased traffic on Wasatch Boulevard and

was very involved in the Canyon Center development. When the additional height for the hotel was proposed hotel, staff reported that traffic had not increased on Wasatch Boulevard. He considered that to be a ridiculous statement. He suggested there be introspection on the part of the City and use one set of criteria. He was confident that all would agree that traffic has increased over the years. He suggested that planning and economic development functions within the City be split up as he considered them to be in conflict.

Dan Mills appreciated the understanding the Council and staff have with respect to the push and pull of various entities. He hoped for creative solutions from UTA to consider how they address high traffic days so that they are more prepared. He preferred to not turn the canyon roads into superhighways just because they are UDOT roads. He considered taking pressure off of I-15 to be a UDOT priority but perhaps not a City priority. Mr. Mills suggested they incentivize bus ridership and make riding the bus a better option. He also recommended that there be more buses put into service.

Ellen Birrell, a 35-year Cottonwood Heights resident, was present on behalf of 36 residents who were unable to be present. Their signatures were affixed to a petition. Ms. Birrell had a 20-year career working at Snowbird in Sales and Marketing. They studied the challenges of transportation thoroughly and while there have been some changes, she did not believe there was significantly more traffic on Wasatch Boulevard. It is a complex issue that is of interest to the community. In her neighborhood, they have held community meetings to discuss this issue. They came up with five actionable steps for the City Council to act on before the coming season. Ms. Birrell pointed out that there will be no changes to resort stops this season so her comments would be limited to the 2019-2020 ski season. She was pleased to know that buses will not be pulling in at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon's Park and Ride Lot but they will pull into Snowbird before they drop off the Alta skiers. That issue was addressed in their petition. After working at Snowbird, Ms. Birrell could attest to the fact that the resorts know when there is going to be a canyon closure. In their petition, they asked that the Cottonwood Heights Police Department do more in terms of traffic mitigation in concert with the Sandy Police Department and UFA to keep traffic along the two-mile strip of Wasatch Boulevard between Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons moving.

Ms. Birrell recently learned that all four resorts will be using an app system, that Snowbird started as a prototype, to incentivize skiers to carpool. She heard that UTA will increase its bus service as well during the ski season. The following were steps that the 36 constituents Ms. Birrell was representing feel are important and actionable to enact this ski season:

1. Enforce the No Idling Ordinance.
2. Resolve unsafe traffic congestion gridlock by having Cottonwood Heights City Police collaborate with Sandy Police Department and UPD to manage and direct gridlocked ski traffic off of Wasatch Boulevard to remote park and ride lots until the Canyon roads reopen or traffic movement is resumed.
3. "No Through Access" signage should be posted at all Wasatch Boulevard intersections that feed neighborhoods along the two-mile strip.

4. Cottonwood Heights was asked to have the Cottonwood Heights Police Department and other appointed agencies direct safe passage for ingress/egress of local residents.
5. Allow UTA to have direct bus service to each of the four resorts.

Stephen Bissett, a five-year resident, had not noticed significantly more traffic along Wasatch Boulevard with the exception of heavier traffic during the morning and evening commutes due to the 600 homes built near LaCaille. He questioned why UTA bus service was being increased throughout the week rather than just on weekends and snow days. Snow days need to be addressed in a manner that is flexible and responsive to solve many of the issues.

A comment was made about a way to form carpools along a route or at the resorts to limit the number of vehicles traveling up the canyon. It was believed that many would be willing to take extra people in their cars if they knew they would have preferred parking.

Mr. Tingey read an email received from LeAnn Walker, who was unable to be present. She suggested that the speed limit be reduced to 35 MPH in the residential section of Wasatch Boulevard. Heavy traffic makes getting in and out neighborhoods very dangerous. She also suggested they enforce the no-idling ordinance and prohibit on-street parking. She noted that the gate at the entrance of Little Cottonwood Canyon is locked every morning while avalanche work is being done, which creates a bottleneck.

Eric Lyman, a 27-year resident, stated that he has skied the canyons for 54 years. He was of the opinion that decisions being made are shortsighted. When he was young, he would catch rides up and down the canyon. Now he drives his pickup with no one else in the car. He stated that the idea of a carpool is attractive. He was disappointed that the use of a trail or rail system had not been addressed and seemed to be something that would be very successful.

Gary Pearson, a 35-year resident, suggested that Sandy City finish Highland Drive and open it up to help with traffic circulation.

Ily Murdock hoped to find a way to prevent people from going through the neighborhood and cutting the line.

Nicki Harris lives near LaCaille and she has problems getting her children to school on snow days. She hoped that issue could be addressed.

Hilary Barstow, a five-year resident, suggested that buses go up and down the Canyon and circle back and forth. A tram could potentially be another way to get cars off the road. She suggested the City work with the resorts to incentivize carpooling.

Lynn McAdams, a resident of Top of the World Drive, hoped to see more stoplights along Wasatch Boulevard to slow traffic and encourage people to stay off of their road.

Stan Rosenzweig, a 15-year resident, appreciated what was being done to address the problems that exist. He often goes up the canyon later in the day after many skiers have already left but has found

that the parking lot is full. He suggested that the parking area be completed and have buses go back and forth.

Bob Jacobs, a 43-year resident, liked the idea of using Uber or Lyft rather than driving a private vehicle up and trying to park.

It was suggested that use of the Shopko parking lot in Sandy be explored as an additional parking option.

Mayor Peterson appreciated the ideas expressed. He was impressed by how involved the ski resorts have been and reported that in early November, the CWC, who is very involved in this effort, will hold a retreat. At that time, they will set interim priorities that will help bring short-term solutions to fruition. He reported that Monday through Wednesday of the following week, consultants will apply the recommendations to a design. The City Council will be involved in the process as well. The Mayor gave UTA credit and stated that they have stepped forward with proposals for possible adjustments. The increased bus service was anticipated to cost about \$150,000 per year. UTA will absorb the majority of the cost in its existing budget. The CWC will provide \$60,000 to cover UTA's shortfall. Various other entities will also make contributions. They do not want to see a bevy of park and ride lots along Wasatch Boulevard, which will add to the congestion problem. The \$13 million that the Legislature allocated was for land acquisition at the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon to provide property to build a transportation hub. They have been working with UDOT to incentivize people to ride the bus rather than drive cars.

Mayor Peterson reported that Wasatch Boulevard is in Council Member Mikell's district and she has been heavily involved in this issue. Council Member Shelton and the entire Council had also been heavily involved.

Council Member Mikell appreciated the feedback received and stated that they have been working to find smaller areas where people can park. The struggle was finding large parking lots that are not in use on weekends. Many of the owners are not willing to relinquish liability and allow them to be used. She encouraged all to help find small parking areas in the community. Ellen Birrell was acquainted with a Snowbird employee who negotiated with a property owner to allow the Snowbird shuttle to use their parking lot. She understands there could be issues with the public using it as opposed to Snowbird employees, but she was willing to put them in contact.

Council Member Mickell stated that Mayor Peterson has been very involved and serves on the CWC Board. She asked if UTA was open to the possibility of changing bus schedules on short notice to help on busy snow or canyon closure days. Mayor Peterson stated that conceptually UTA has addressed the importance of being flexible and better utilizing buses. There has been more communication with UTA in the last six months than ever before. It was noted that last ski season the canyon was closed 30 days. He expected the situation to get worse before it gets better.

A question was raised as to whether consideration had been given to having a UTA leader present at the base of both canyons who can manage the situation on the ground.

A question was raised as to whether people are discouraged from parking along Fort Union Boulevard or at area retailers rather than the park and ride lot. Mayor Peterson stated that some of the entities who own parking lots have been approached but many have been opposed to being formally recognized as a park and ride lot. That was an effort they would continue to work on. It was clarified that there are other parking areas for those riding the bus. The potential of using Canyon School District parking lots on weekends was discussed.

CWC Executive Director, Ralph Becker reported that UTA and numerous other entities have been involved in a series of meetings about what can be done and how quickly action can be taken. This led to the bus service change. UTA would like to have more buses and increase service. They looked at their existing resources and how to increase the service with the buses that they have. Mr. Becker reported that it takes two years from the time a bus is ordered for it to be delivered and put into service. UTA is looking at how to improve the service going forward. They determined that in order to meet the demand with buses today, a bus would need to go up the canyon every 1½ minutes. Ultimately, more will be needed so other options were being studied. They do not want to make a decision today that will contradict what might be the best long-term solution.

Research was conducted on the monorail system at Disneyland and how that could help solve the problem in the canyons. It was determined to cost at least \$50 million on average per mile. Each train holds 360 people but costs \$10 million each.

Larry Larson asked about the potential to use the north end of the gravel pit for parking. Mayor Peterson stated that 22 acres of the northern parcel is being proposed for development but could be a future possibility.

There were no further public comments. Mayor Peterson closed the Town Hall Meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing represents a true, accurate and complete record of the Cottonwood Heights City Council Town Hall Meeting held Monday, October 7, 2019.

Teri Forbes

Teri Forbes
T Forbes Group
Minutes Secretary

Minutes Approved: November 5, 2019