

**MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL WASATCH COMMISSION (“CWC”) BUDGET/ FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ELECTRONICALLY ON MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2021, AT 3:00 P.M.**

**Present:**  Chair Jeff Silvestrini, Mayor Harris Sondak, Jan Striefel, Annalee Munsey, Will McCarvill, Robert Sampson, Pat Shea

**CWC Staff:** Executive Director Ralph Becker, Deputy Director Blake Perez, Office Administrator Kaye Mickelson

**Excused:** Councilor Jim Bradley, Communications Director Linsey Nielsen, Patrick Nelson, Carl Fisher, Helen Peters

* **Open Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting: Chair of the Committee, Mayor Jeff Silvestrini, Will Open the Meeting and Note the Letter of Determination.**

Chair Jeff Silvestrini called the meeting to order at approximately 3:03 p.m. He reported that he had been unable to attend the Central Wasatch Commission (“CWC”) Board Meeting on June 7, 2021. He asked CWC Staff to update him on any necessary information.

1. **Discussion/Direction: Funding Strategies Visitor Use Study. Visitor Use Study Strategies Document Dated June 10, 2021, is Attached to Assist with Potential Funding Strategies Conversation.**

Chair Silvestrini reported that the CWC Board supported a year-round Visitor Use Study with seasonal progress reports. He wondered if the seasonal progress reports would result in additional charges from Utah State University. Office Administrator, Kaye Mickelson explained that during the previous CWC Board Meeting, Dr. Jordan Smith from Utah State University stated that the costs would be consistent with the proposed budget for the broader study.

Mayor Sondak reported that following the last CWC Board Meeting, he had a conversation with Laura Briefer. She had communicated with Josh Van Jura from the Utah Department of Transportation (“UDOT”). Mr. Van Jura stated that even if the preferred transportation alternative is issued shortly, UDOT would still be interested in CWC feedback between the time the preferred alternative was issued and the time the final recommendation was made. As a result, Mayor Sondak felt there was a timing component to consider.

Mayor Sondak discussed the funding model. He appreciated all of the work done by CWC Staff to come up with a set of strategies. However, he felt there was one strategy that had not been considered. Mayor Sondak believed the study was too expensive and certain parts could be truncated. The physical and environmental data was important and he believed it would be beneficial. He noted that Table One included in the Utah State University Hybrid Model document looked useful but the on-site surveys and hypothetical future scenarios seemed expensive and less likely to yield valid and reliable results. Mayor Sondak did not support the social aspects of the study but strongly supported the physical and environmental aspects.

Additional concerns were shared by Mayor Sondak. He explained that the average person today would have a different attitude toward visitor use than the average person 25 years ago. The benchmark for crowding would continue to change as time goes on. He also noted that people were not good at forecasting their own attitudes and behaviors. Mayor Sondak commented that the on-site surveys are expensive and would cost tens of thousands of dollars. He previously shared concerns with Dr. Smith related to the summer salaries and the standard benefit rate for faculty at 46.5%. He also had not seen any real justification regarding why the mobile location data was needed for 2018-2021 and why that specific vendor was necessary.

Chair Silvestrini shared some of those concerns. He made note of a comment in the Zoom chatbox from Pat Shea. Mr. Shea believed that the hydrology and the relationship between the surface water and groundwater would be one of the most important aspects that would come out of the Visitor Use Study. He considered botany and biology to be equally important. Once that data is obtained, there would be a better way to contour the map for use capacity.

Chair Silvestrini wondered if there was a way to have further communication with Utah State University. He felt it would be beneficial to have assurances related to the mobile location data. Chair Silvestrini commented that some of the data, in terms of where people were visiting, might be valuable in terms of evaluating transportation alternatives. For instance, it could provide information about whether whistle stops would be needed in certain locations. Mayor Sondak wondered how detailed that type of information needed to be.

Will McCarvill shared concerns related to the social aspect of the study. He reported that the Visitor Use Study Working Group wanted to protect the resource. He noted that it was important to protect the canyons from being loved to death. Mr. McCarvill believed it would be beneficial to have further discussions about what would be done with the social data in terms of environmental protection. Additionally, the hybrid model seemed to be lacking details about how often reports would be given. He felt that needed to be fleshed out. Mr. McCarvill commented that public information and outreach would also be needed as the Visitor Use Study continued.

Chair Silvestrini agreed that reports are important. They would allow the CWC to stay up to date with Visitor Use Study progress. The reports would also allow for any necessary course correction. Discussions were had about samples for the Visitor Use Study. Chair Silvestrini felt that the study should sample people that use the resource and not just those who are involved in interest groups. Mayor Sondak noted that a question related to sampling strategies had been answered during a previous conversation. Having a representative sample of people that lived in Salt Lake County or a representative sample of people who regularly used the canyons would be a much more expensive undertaking.

Annalee Munsey was interested in the ecological and physical indicators more than the social indicators. She felt it was important to understand how many people could be in the canyon before it impacts water quality, wildlife, or habitat. Ms. Munsey addressed an earlier comment made by Mayor Sondak about Utah State University fees. She reported that Utah State University did water checks for Salt Lake City and Sandy City and charged the same 46.5% for benefits. Interns were significantly less and Ms. Munsey suggested that more interns could be used for the Visitor Use Study as a way to reduce costs. Discussions were had about Utah State University personnel costs.

Jan Striefel believed there was an interest in understanding what level of visitation triggered degradation of the environment. She worried that the maximum number of visitors would be permitted once that information was obtained. Ms. Striefel noted that the maximum number may be higher than what a recreationist would want to experience in the environment. There needed to be an interaction between the environment and social engagement with the landscape.

Mayor Sondak explained that there could be differences with what each recreationist wanted in terms of visitation numbers. For instance, one hiker may not want to see anyone else on a trail while another hiker may prefer to see a group of people on the trail. Environmental degradation was a clear way to determine visitation levels while recreationist perspectives were subjective. Ms. Striefel commented that the environment is the most important aspect to consider. However, she did not want to leave the human aspect out of the equation. There needed to be a way to include people and provide them with a range of experiences.

Chair Silvestrini noted that it is difficult to determine the validity of the subjective. Visitor capacity from a recreationist perspective could change based on what someone was used to or even based on their personal preferences. He felt there were questions about how much the social aspect should be studied and what kind of conclusions the data would be able to provide since there were so many variables to consider.

Mr. McCarvill believed that understanding the capacity of the canyons would help guide decisions. For instance, what capital investments would be needed to suit the maximum use and where those capital investments would be located. Additionally, understanding capacity could help guide the Mountain Transportation System (“MTS”) process. The Wasatch Mountains would only become more heavily used as time passed. Knowing the capacity would allow certain decisions to be made earlier on. As a result, entities could take a proactive approach as opposed to a reactive approach. Mr. McCarvill viewed the Visitor Use Study as an investment in the future.

Mayor Sondak reported that the Utah State University Hybrid Model document had three outcomes listed for ecological, physical, and social indicators. He felt it would be beneficial to have a small group conversation with Dr. Smith to go through those outcomes and share additional concerns. Chair Silvestrini agreed that another conversation would provide clarity. They would also be able to determine whether Dr. Smith was willing to modify the Visitor Use Study. However, Chair Silvestrini explained that it was important not to shift too far away from the original proposal.

Ms. Mickelson reminded members of the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee that the CWC Board had expressed a desire to move ahead with the Visitor Use Study. She added that Dr. Smith was waiting to put the team together in order to begin work on the study in July. She wondered whether the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee should look more into the different funding sources and strategies. Chair Silvestrini asked for more information about the funding strategies.

Strategy 2 was discussed. Ms. Mickelson explained that an appropriation of $95,000 was received from the State Legislature for a portion of the study. Approximately $34,000 of that would be put towards phase one and the remaining $61,000 would be applied to phase two. During the 2021-2022 budget building process, $50,000 had been returned to reserves. However, it would be possible to pull that money back from reserves and add the remaining funds from the appropriation for a total of $111,000 for phase two. Ms. Mickelson explained that additional funds would still be needed. They could be requested from Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, and other entities.

Ms. Mickelson reported that Carl Fisher indicated that Save Our Canyons would be willing to go to the Board and ask for a contribution. Additionally, the CWC could draw the remainder from reserves. The latter would deplete the reserves down to the operational level that the investment fund policy called for the CWC to maintain. She noted that it was important for the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee to start thinking about potential funding options.

Discussions were had about the request for proposal (“RFP”) and what it said about the social aspects of the Visitor Use Study. Mayor Sondak did not believe the money was being spent properly when it came to the social side of the study. Chair Silvestrini noted that the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee had received direction from the CWC Board to look into a hybrid study. He felt that the next step was to have the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee and the Visitor Use Study Working Group meet with Dr. Smith to discuss areas of concern. He added that the Committee needed to be mindful of what was stated in the RFP. It may be beneficial to review that before speaking to Dr. Smith further. Chair Silvestrini explained that from a public procurement perspective, it was important that the project did not change too much.

Ms. Mickelson wondered whether the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee was going to make a decision on a strategy for funding during the current meeting. Chair Silvestrini explained that they could not make a decision about funding until they knew exactly what was going to be funded. Ms. Mickelson commented that another meeting could be scheduled with Dr. Smith and a social scientist team member. She hoped the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee would be able to determine a funding strategy following that conversation. Chair Silvestrini agreed with that course of action. He hoped the Committee would be able to make a recommendation to the Commission before the next CWC Board Meeting.

Executive Director, Ralph Becker, noted that visitor capacity was a priority. However, he had also heard a lot of comments related to the overall visitor experience. The environmental impact was critical, but many felt that visitor experience was also important to consider. He noted that there were a lot of changes taking place in the canyons due to increased visitation during the pandemic. Mr. Becker reported that there was a standard for a portion of the Wasatch that had been put in place by Congressional Mandate through the Utah Wilderness Act. That expressed a desire for the physical carrying capacity and also for the visitor experience. He did not want to dimmish the importance of trying to protect the visitor experience in certain areas within the Wasatch.

Committee Members discussed dates for a future meeting. It was determined that continued discussions would take place on June 23, 2021, at 3:00 p.m. Members of the Visitor Use Working Group would be invited as well as the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee.

* **CLOSE BUDGET FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING**

1. **Chair Jeff Silvestrini will Close the Committee Meeting as Chair of the Budget Finance Committee of the Central Wasatch Commission.**

The Central Wasatch Commission Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting adjourned at approximately 4:03 p.m.

***I hereby certify that the foregoing represents a true, accurate, and complete record of the Central Wasatch Commission Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting held Monday, June 14, 2021.***

Teri Forbes

Teri Forbes

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Minutes Secretary

Minutes Approved: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_