



Via Email to: Rockville@RockvilleUtah.org

November 7, 2022

Vicki Bell, Rockville Town Clerk
Town of Rockville
43 East Main Street
Rockville, Utah 84763

Dear Ms. Bell:

Per our conversation last week, attached is the link and a copy of the article from the Salt Lake Tribune regarding the issue of employee housing for Springdale, Utah. I've included a text document in the event you are unable to open the link. Please forward a copy of the correspondence and attachments to the Mayor, Town Council, and Planning Commission as well as reading the letter into the minutes of the next Town Council and Planning Commission meetings.

As noted in the article and our discussion, Springdale, city has hired Tracy Dutson to oversee finding solutions for employee housing. My concern with the entire employee housing issue is that Rockville is not being involved in the discussion. In many instances, Rockville has been the de facto overflow employee housing for many Springdale and National Park Service employees.

I respectfully request that Rockville officials make overtures to the Springdale, town council and mayor and insist that they are part of the discussion in regards to finding a solution to this ever-growing problem.

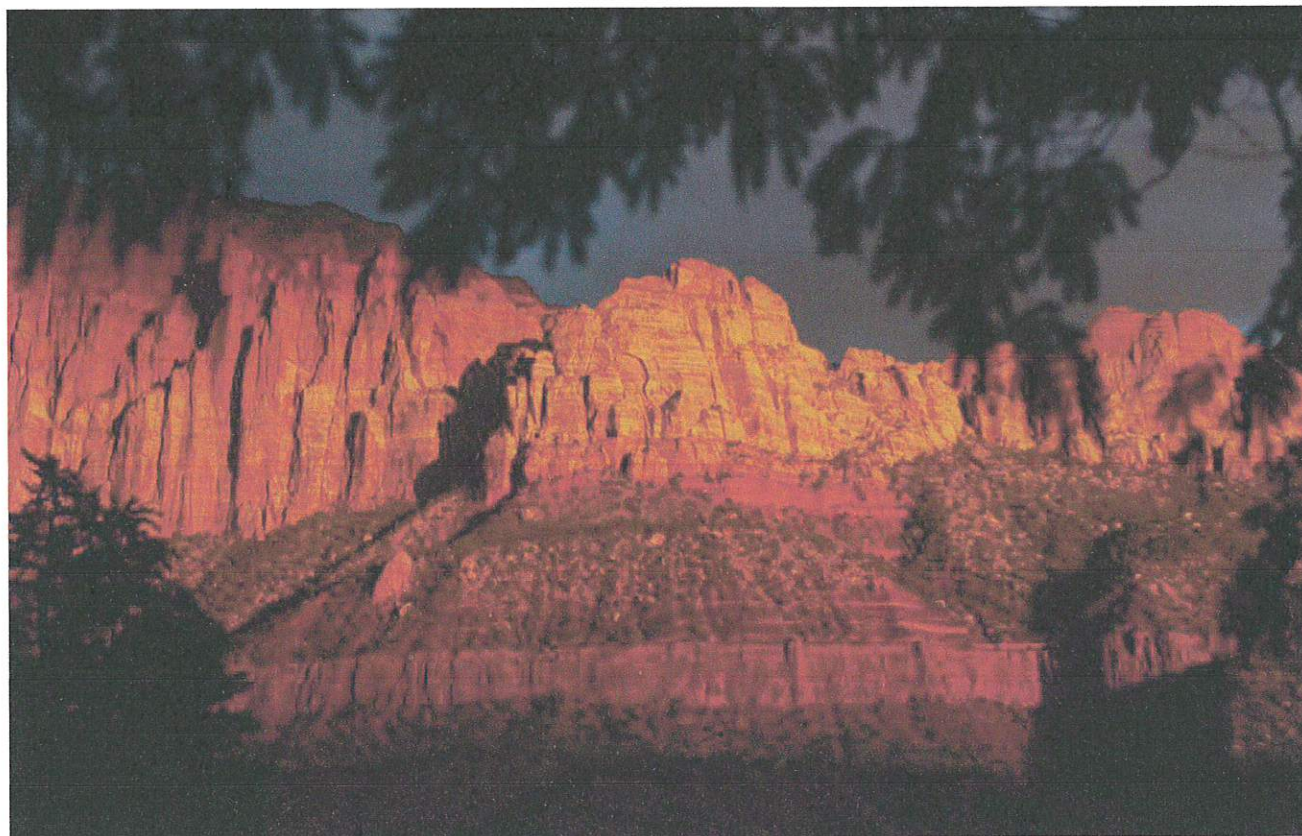
Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely | Jan Fasselin

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Fasselin".

Housing not available or affordable for many Springdale workers

Businesses and workers struggle as nightly rentals and soaring housing prices hit locals.



Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune The sun sets on peaks overlooking Springdale, Thursday, October 10, 2013, as the state and federal governments were working out the details of a deal to reopen Zion and the other national parks in Utah as the government shutdown continues. A National Park Service report shows Utah's efforts to open nine units during the federal government shutdown paid off with visitors spending \$10 for every \$1 the state spent for the opening.

By Mark Eddington | Sep. 19, 2022, 6:00 a.m.

Editor's note • This story is available to Salt Lake Tribune subscribers only. Thank



million tourists each year, but the small southwest Utah town is increasingly unwelcoming to workers who staff the hotels, restaurants and stores.

There's simply no room at the inn or just about anywhere else for many employees who work in Springdale. Many have little or no prospects of ever finding or affording a home or even an apartment or room in the town.

Like so many of the [estimated roughly 1,100 workers](#) who flood the tourist town each day, Sarah Rutz has to live elsewhere. The mother of two lives in Hurricane, where she pays \$2,200 a month to share a home. She commutes 22 miles to Springdale, where she divides her time between working as a sales clerk at Switchback Trading, a server at Jack's Sports Grill, a bartender at Black Walnut Catering and cleaning houses in her spare time.

"I work 70 hours a week," said Rutz, who moved to southern Utah from Indiana 16 years ago. "I'm basically living to work instead of working to live. I'm working just to pay my rent."

Rutz's situation is not unique.

According to a [housing study](#) conducted for the town by Zions Bank Public Finance, there is not enough land to supply more affordable housing, and what little land is available, especially in the town's commercial sector, is too expensive — between \$400,000 to \$1 million or more for a lot, business owners attest — to make developing houses economically feasible.

"You could come here with a whole bunch of money in your pocket and you would still have a hard time finding a place," said Springdale Mayor Barbara Bruno. "So it's really a problem. Our businesses are understaffed, and Zion National Park is very understaffed. They have offered employees jobs, or they have had prospective employees who

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Further exacerbating the issue, many landlords of worker housing in Springdale have sold out to developers or converted their properties into Airbnbs or nightly rentals, further reducing the available housing supply for employees. Town officials enacted a temporary moratorium on further short-term rentals earlier this year, but that ban expired last month.

Holly Holt, manager of Oscar's Cafe, says 18 of her employees are forced to commute to work from St. George or even more distant communities.

"One of my employees who has lived here for more than two decades is having to move because the owner just sold the property he lives in. And he rented it for 21 years straight," Holt said. "Airbnbs have just destroyed our climate up here because you can make more money renting your house for three or four days than you can renting it to somebody for a month."

As difficult as it is to provide more housing for workers, Springdale leaders are determined to make the attempt. They recently formed a housing committee made up of the mayor, Councilwoman Lisa Zumpft, Planning Commissioners Tom Kenaston and Pat Campbell, Community Development Director Tom Dansie and Town Manager Rick Wixom. They also hired an affordable housing coordinator, former Rockville Mayor Tracy Dutson, to help them explore ways to alleviate the housing crunch.

One possible option would be to create a workforce housing overlay zoning in residential zones, which would incentivize developers by granting them permission to build housing or rental properties at higher densities. A certain percentage of the properties,

Bruno explained, would be restricted by deed to employees of Springdale businesses or Zion National Park.

That's where Dutson's expertise comes into play. A longtime expert in affordable

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attach to low-income housing.

"People can start freaking out, because they think, 'Oh, my gosh, we're going to have low-income people here,' " Dutson said. "They don't realize that the people living there would be the police officers, the teachers and the people who work in Springdale and care about the community. It's always a hard fight, to get people to understand that these are people who want to be in the community and are not going to cause issues."

Currently, city planners are studying the overlay zone proposal. Before proceeding, Bruno said, the housing commission is being tasked with ensuring there are enough people to ensure the viability of such a project.

"Anecdotally," the mayor said, "you could say of course people want to live and work here. But we only have an elementary school here. We don't have a middle school or high school in Springdale. So some people would probably opt to live in Hurricane Valley where the schools are and commute to Springdale for work."

While the town studies the issue, some business owners have already taken action. Jonathan Zambella, owner of the outfitter business Zion Guru, has bought two homes in nearby Rockville and rents a home in Springdale to house 12 of his employees, who pay him reduced rent.

Stewart Ferber, owner of the La Quinta Inn and Suites in Springdale, Marriott Fairfield in nearby Virgin, and other properties is providing housing and utilities free of charge to about half of his 90 workers.

"Employees are the most important part of your business," Ferber said. "Without them, you're sunk. So my philosophy is if I can supply somebody with housing and not charge them, that ... was going to be big for them, and it has worked out that way. I have employees who have worked for me for 27 years."

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