MINUTES
ALTA TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
February 12, 2025, 4:00 PM
Alta Community Center, 10351 E. Highway 210, Alta, Utah

PRESENT:	Mayor Roger Bourke Councilmember Carolyn Anctil Councilmember John Byrne (attended virtual) Councilmember Elise Morgan Councilmember Dan Schilling (attended virtual)
STAFF PRESENT:	Chris Cawley, Town Manager Mike Morey, Town Marshal Jen Clancy, Town Clerk Molly Austin, Assistant Town Manager Brooke Boone, Deputy Town Clerk Craig Heimark, Treasurer
ALSO PRESENT:	Cameron Platt, Legal Counsel (attended virtually)
NOT PRESENT:	**N/A**

1. **CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER**

00:00:00

Mayor Bourke called the February 12, 2025 town council meeting to order.

2. **CITIZEN INPUT**

00:00:30

Sydney Smith, a student at the University of Utah and an intern at Canyon Guard, addressed the council regarding transportation issues in Little Cottonwood Canyon. Smith noted prior discussions from a year ago and reiterated concerns about protecting the canyon's ecosystem for future generations. Smith expressed opposition to the proposed gondola, stating it would not alleviate congestion or reduce road closures. While acknowledging that no current solution fully addresses road closures, Smith emphasized the importance of implementing common-sense measures advocated by Canyon Guard. Smith urged the Town of Alta to actively engage in the issue, highlighting the safety risks and daily inconveniences caused by congestion.

3. **ALTA COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT UPDATE, SARA GIBBS**

00:03:00

Sara Gibbs, Executive Director of Alta Community Enrichment (ACE), informed the council about ACE's intentions to purchase and operate Our Lady of the Snows Center. Gibbs reported the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City, which co-funded the building alongside community contributions, no longer wished to own or manage it. Gibbs added that ACE, which has used the space since 1996, has been in discussions with the diocese, the Forest Service, and legal advisors regarding the transition. Gibbs emphasized that ACE intended to maintain the building's function as a community space, making only minor changes while ensuring its continued availability for events and gatherings.

Gibbs outlined the financial approach, stating that ACE had secured a funder for the purchase and might in the future conduct capital campaigns for upgrades and staffing. The organization planned to eventually relocate its operations to the building while maintaining its current programming. Gibbs assured the council that ACE had discussed Sara's role as Executive Director and future succession planning, acknowledging concerns about leadership transitions, and affirmed that the organization was structured to continue beyond individual leadership changes.

Council members asked about the timeline, with Gibbs noting that the diocese aimed to conclude its involvement by May 31. Gibbs expressed a desire for a smooth transition while ensuring proper procedures were followed. Gibbs said discussions also addressed contingency plans should ACE dissolve, with Gibbs acknowledging the need for further planning on that matter. Byrne supported ACE's ownership, suggesting it would strengthen the organization's standing in relation to the town.

Gibbs concluded by stating that once the process was finalized, ACE planned to hold a community meeting for public input. Mayor Bourke made a lighthearted inquiry about future restroom paint colors, to which Gibbs responded that murals and artistic elements were being considered.

4. **ALTA SKI AREA UPDATE, MIKE MAUGHAN**

00:16:30

Mike Maughan from Alta Ski Area provided an update on the ski season, noting variable weather conditions, increased snowfall on weekends, and significant traffic congestion. Seven major red snake traffic incidents have occurred, three of which resulted in gridlock lasting over two hours. Maughan praised the efforts of UDOT and the Town of Alta in managing road conditions but emphasized that mainline closures during peak exit times were a primary cause of gridlock.

Maughan highlighted two main concerns: keeping the mainline open between 3:00 and 7:00 PM for traffic exiting Alta and addressing roadside parking at Snowbird, which has expanded due to vehicles parking at a 45 degree angle. Maughan suggested creating a third lane for Alta traffic to merge with snowbird at entry 1.

Maughan reported business at Alta Ski Area has declined, with visitation down about 8% compared to last year's record season. Parking reservations have fluctuated, with some days seeing unfilled spots despite full reservations. Increased bus usage has slowed transit, with buses traveling as low as 20 mph downhill on snowy days, creating traffic bottlenecks and prompting unsafe passing by other vehicles.

Maughan reported that the traction law proposal, backed by Representative Bennion, initially failed in the House but later passed upon reconsideration. It is now in the Senate, where Senator Cullimore is expected to support it.

Maughan expressed concerns about maintaining a productive relationship with UDOT, noting some adversarial tensions. He suggested that the Mayor meet periodically with UDOT leadership to foster cooperation.

Regarding the Forest Service, Maughan stated that efforts to eliminate roadside parking above Wildcat and to expand the Wildcat lot had been declined. The Forest Service cited its policy against adding parking in the forest, raising concerns about future restrictions on roadside parking throughout the canyon.

Finally, Maughan mentioned an incoming storm expected to bring 20-30 inches of snow, which could lead to additional traffic challenges. He reiterated his appreciation for the efforts of the Alta Marshal's Office in managing congestion and ensuring safety during peak traffic events.

Carolyn Anctil shared concerns about the 45-degree angle parking at Snowbird, which she found dangerous. Maughan stated that he had raised this with the Forest Service, which acknowledged it was not allowed. Anctil also described an incident on Saturday where unexpected snowfall caused unplowed roads and traction issues, with multiple vehicles struggling. Maughan explained that the storm was unanticipated, and plows had already left, leading to gridlock. He emphasized the need for more consistent traffic management, particularly keeping the main line open when possible while maintaining safety.

5. QUESTIONS REGARDING DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

00:34:10

Dan Schilling acknowledged and appreciated that UFA sent eight firefighters to assist with the Palisades incident and expressed gratitude that everyone returned safely.

6. APPROVAL OF JANUARY 8, 2025 ALTA TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES, JANUARY 9, 2025 COUNCIL RETREAT MEETING MINUTES, AND FEBRUARY STAFF AND FINANCE REPORTS

00:35:00

Mayor Bourke

MOTION: Elise Morgan motioned to approve the January 8, 2025 town council meeting minutes, and January 9, 2025 council retreat meeting minutes, and February staff and finance reports. Carolyn Anctil seconded.

VOTE: All were in favor. The January 8, 2025 town council meeting minutes, and January 9, 2025 council retreat meeting minutes, and February staff and finance reports were approved.

RESULT: APPROVED

7. **MAYORS REPORT**

00:36:00

Mayor Bourke reported on several key topics. They acknowledged the severe natural disasters in Southern California, noting that while he wasn't aware of anyone in the local community being directly affected, some had connections to those impacted. The Mayor expressed appreciation for UFA's deployment of firefighters to assist, recognizing their efforts in working 24-hour shifts. This event also highlighted the importance of preparedness for wildland-urban interface fires.

Regarding the SR 210 road meeting held on the 5th, the Mayor noted that the road functioned well for most of the month. Jake Brown of UDOT received recognition for implementing improvements that enhanced safety and usability, earning spontaneous applause. Brown also asserted that SR 210 is the best-managed and most challenging highway in the state.

The Mayor then addressed legislative matters, stating that they were closely monitoring bills that could affect the community. They highlighted the success of a traction law bill passing in the House and awaiting Senate approval. Additionally, Mayor Bourke mentioned the failure of a bill that would have made it easier to remove a mayor, expressing personal relief at its outcome.

In the astronomy report, the Mayor provided an update on the Europa Clipper mission, which is set to fly by Mars in two weeks. Mayor Bourke illustrated the precision required in its trajectory, comparing it to aiming a car at a distant target with only minimal steering adjustments along the way.

The next Town Council meeting was announced for Wednesday, March 12, at 4 p.m. MDT, with the Mayor noting that daylight would extend past the meeting's conclusion.

8. **REVIEW OF 2025 TOWN COUNCIL RETREAT**

00:42:25

Cawley provided a review of the January Town Council retreat, thanking participants for their time and reflected on its success. The retreat focused on assessing progress toward short- and medium-term goals set during the previous retreat, followed by a presentation and workshop on long-term budget planning and revenue options. The group also engaged in discussions on mission and values, though there was insufficient time for a standalone strategic planning session.

Cawley presented an updated version of the work plan, now including a "responsible party" and a "timeframe" column. Cawley noted positive progress in several areas: hiring a fifth deputy for the Alta Marshal's Office, advancing capital asset planning, and preparing reports to inform the upcoming budget cycle.

Key takeaways from the retreat's budget discussions included the council's desire for a long-term financial plan, with a preferred 30-year time horizon. Revenue options explored included adjusting the general fund cash buffer, property tax equalization between residential and commercial properties, implementing a transient room tax, and borrowing options such as bonds and low-interest government loans. Cawley noted that a state bill (HB 456) could increase the transient room tax by 1%, potentially impacting local taxation strategies.

Regarding mission and values, feedback from the retreat suggested that while the current draft was generally strong, it could be refined for clarity and uniqueness to better reflect the town's character.

Cawley acknowledged the lack of dedicated time at the retreat for strategic planning but emphasized that the council's retreat process itself has improved planning. Cawley proposed formalizing a work plan for adoption alongside the fiscal year 2026 budget, with guiding principles to structure ongoing decision-making. Additionally, Cawley suggested introducing long-term budgeting as a standing topic in budget committee meetings and possibly forming a separate committee for financial planning.

Looking ahead, Cawley suggested staff would refine the mission and values statement for council review in May. Cawley said an update to the general plan is tentatively slated to begin in 2026.

Council members reflected on the recent retreat, expressing appreciation for its value while noting that the strategic planning component was not completed. Morgan suggested holding a workshop in the spring or summer to focus on strategic planning, proposing that it could be a separate session outside regular council meetings. Cawley supported this idea, noting that summer might be a natural time to address it after budget-related tasks.

Anctil agreed that not completing the strategic planning was a missed opportunity. Morgan questioned whether a facilitator would be needed or if the council and staff could handle it internally. Cawley suggested first assessing progress on financial planning and capital projects before deciding if facilitation was necessary.

Morgan also brought up the General Plan update, suggesting it could be a key focus in the next retreat. Cawley proposed holding a joint meeting with the Planning Commission, noting that such meetings in the past had been reactive to specific issues rather than proactive planning sessions.

Byrne cautioned against setting too aggressive a timeline for processing information on water, sewer, and facilities studies, emphasizing the complexity of integrating funding and engineering considerations. Cawley acknowledged that managing infrastructure projects in-house is a new challenge for the town and that planning at a more tactical level would be necessary.

Schilling emphasized the importance of aligning strategic and financial planning for long-term success, advocating for dedicated meetings or committees to focus on integrating these efforts. He reiterated that marrying funding mechanisms with the strategic plan is essential for the town's progress.

9. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO ADOPT ORDINANCE 2025-O-1 TO ESTABLISH THE FY 2025/26 TOWN COUNCIL MEETING SCHEDULE

01:03:30

Byrne inquired whether the proposed schedule assumed that the town would not be conducting a truth in taxation process this year. Clancy clarified that the schedule does allow for truth in taxation. Clancy explained that the date for the public hearing still needs to be adopted by the county, but she has requested it as an option and while it's on the table, it remains up to the council to decide whether to proceed with it.

MOTION: Elise Morgan motioned to approve Ordinance 2025-O-1. Carolyn Anctil seconded.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Mayor Bourke – yes, Councilmember Byrne – yes, Councilmember Anctil – yes, Councilmember Morgan – yes, Councilmember Schilling – yes, Ordinance 2025-O-1 was unanimously approved.

RESULT: APPROVED

10. **BUDGET PROCESS UPDATE**

01:05:45

Clancy provided an update on the budget process, recalling that the council had adopted a budget committee and charter last year. The committee held a series of meetings, which she felt worked well. Clancy explained that this year's process would be similar, with the information-gathering phase currently underway. Clancy reported on meeting with department heads and reviewing vendor contracts to collect necessary data. Clancy and Cawley plan to organize the information into categories like wages, projects, and revenue options. The budget committee will help filter these ideas and update the Council along the way. Budget committee meetings are scheduled for March, April, and May.

11. **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO ADOPT A WAGE COMPARABLE ENTITY LIST**

01:07:30

Cawley highlighted progress made over the past couple of years to improve wages and retain employees. The town had commissioned a compensation benchmarking study with Mike Swallow's company, which revealed that the town had been paying below market rates for some positions. This information led to adjustments in the payroll. Cawley thanked the council for supporting the wage adjustments and emphasized the need for formal council approval in future budgeting to ensure competitive pay for retaining employees and attracting new ones. Cawley noted that while full-time positions have been easier to fill, part-time jobs, especially in Little Cottonwood Canyon, remain difficult to staff.

Cawley also explained the benchmarking tool used to compare compensation rates, which considers job descriptions, job value rankings, and comparable entities. The town used a list of similar employers, including those in Salt Lake County, local municipalities, and resort communities, to ensure a broad and fair comparison. Cawley detailed the reasoning behind the chosen comparables, noting that some unique roles, like dispatchers, needed special consideration because they are not commonly found in other police departments.

The discussion continued with a focus on compensation benchmarking and how the town compares to other municipalities and special districts. Elise Morgan raised the idea of potentially adding Brighton to the list of comparable entities, given its similarities to Alta in certain aspects. However, Chris Cawley explained that Brighton currently has minimal staff and relies on external contracts for certain functions, so it might not be the best comparison at this time.

John Byrne expressed concerns about approving the list without seeing the full context of the Swallow report, noting that the council was not provided with information on what entities were excluded from consideration. Byrne felt it was difficult to endorse such a narrow list without understanding the broader selection process. Anctil also raised concerns about the tax bases of the communities on the list, suggesting that this was an important factor in determining appropriate compensation.

Clancy offered that the list had been developed over the years, with input from the council, and that it was part of the compensation tool used to benchmark salaries. Cawley welcomed feedback and offered to consider additional entities if the council desired. Byrne suggested that the council approve a more general wage increase for the upcoming budget cycle while further refining the process and having a broader discussion on the compensation philosophy in the future.

Ultimately, the council expressed comfort moving forward with the budget process using the existing list for this cycle, with the understanding that more discussions would take place to refine the approach in the future.

RESULT: No action taken

12. **SUMMER 2025 TRANSFER TOW WATER LINE PROJECT**

01:27:30

Cawley provided an update on the water and sewer master plan, noting that engineers had developed a draft capital improvement plan. This included the updating of both water and sewer models, something previously lacking in the town. The engineers reviewed previous documents and recommendations, which resulted in a current focus on three water projects and two sewer projects.

For water, the projects include the Cross Tow water line, a new storage tank for fire flow, and a loop system near Hell Gate. For sewer, projects involve replacing the Gold Miner's Daughter Wildcat parking lot sewer line and a segment of sewer near Hell Gate. While these projects were detailed with budget estimates, Cawley emphasized that these figures are preliminary and subject to change, as feedback from the engineers' draft is still pending.

Cawley clarified that the primary focus of the current planning is to address existing deficiencies in fire flow, storage, and certain deteriorated components of the systems, rather than creating a long-term capital replacement strategy. Cawley mentioned that additional projects might be considered based on further reviews, including addressing potential future growth in areas like Emma Heights and West Grizzly, though these were not included in the first draft.

For the summer project, Cawley described plans for the Cross Tow water line project, which would run the length of the transfer tow, with construction coinciding with the ski area's planned utility work to reduce costs and disruption. This project aims to improve fire flow and system redundancy. The work will include the installation of a pressure-reducing vault and will involve collaboration with the ski area, which will handle excavation and backfilling.

Cawley noted a critical procurement deadline for materials and contractors, with the project anticipated to begin in mid-May and be completed by September 30, barring any complications. Cawley also addressed the funding options for the project, with an estimated cost up to $540,000, though he believes this estimate is high. The town currently has about $490,000 in cash on hand, but Cawley mentioned that borrowing from the general fund or other funding sources, such as state money or a bond, may be necessary depending on cash flow.

In conclusion, while the project is significant, it is not large enough to warrant bonds or a state loan. Cawley emphasized that the budget amendment scheduled for March would consider funding options, and the project timeline remains aggressive, aiming for completion before the snow returns.

Byrne expressed support for the recommendation to fund the project using the water fund, with a focus on the projected fiscal 2026 budget. Byrne noted that the project costs would mostly fall into fiscal 2026, allowing the capital expenditure (capex) fund to grow during the year, offering some cushion. Byrne pointed out that if the cost reached $550,000, the balance at the end of 2026 could be near zero, but he was confident in the water fund's ability to cover it, with possible adjustments made as needed. Cawley acknowledged John's input, referencing a tool Byrne had developed to help with water fund budgeting and rate-setting projections, which had been useful in determining when the town could afford the project. Cawley indicated that if necessary, an inter-fund loan could be an option to cover costs, though they hoped to manage the project through careful contractor negotiations.

Mayor Bourke agreed with the direction and expressed support for proceeding. Anctil raised concerns about potential disruptions to events and weddings due to the construction, urging that all parties be aware of potential impacts. Cawley assured that, like any major construction project, efforts would be made to minimize disruption, including notifications to the community. Morgan expressed her support for the project, particularly its focus on improving fire flow, citing recent fires in California as a reminder of the importance of adequate water infrastructure. Morgan thanked the ski area for allowing the town to share the trench for the project, which would significantly reduce costs. Cawley also expressed appreciation for the ski area's cooperation, acknowledging that the project would be more efficient and less disruptive due to the partnership. Morgan further emphasized the benefit of sharing the trench to avoid opening additional trenches in a heavily trafficked area, which would have created more disruption for residents. Mayor Bourke concluded that the project represented a significant undertaking for the town, in terms of both its scope and impact.

13. CANYON GUARD UPDATE, CRAIG HEIMARK

01:46:50

Craig Heimark began the presentation by outlining Canyon Guard's shift in focus, moving away from opposing the gondola project and instead focusing on syndicating solutions for transportation issues in Little Cottonwood Canyon. Heimark emphasized the importance of collaborating with local resorts, businesses, and municipalities to develop viable alternatives to the gondola, inspired by the success seen in Big Cottonwood Canyon, where multiple stakeholders coordinated solutions that had weight in UDOT's transportation planning. Heimark also stressed that public input was crucial, sharing how the previous year's resolution had been broken down into 14 actionable goals, some of which were already completed while others were in progress.

Heimark introduced Charlie Luke as the new executive director of Canyon Guard, praising his background in community service and political action, and noted that Luke would be leading the rest of the presentation.

Charlie Luke then introduced himself, sharing his professional background in public affairs and his personal connection to the area. Luke outlined Canyon Guard's mission to focus on finding real solutions for the region, including research, education, and advocacy efforts. Luke highlighted that, unlike the gondola solution, UDOT had already begun exploring alternative solutions in Big Cottonwood Canyon, such as enhanced bus services, resort bus stops, and tolling, which represented a significantly more cost-effective approach.

Luke discussed the differences between Little Cottonwood and Big Cottonwood Canyons, noting that while both are avalanche-prone, there are diverse ways to address transportation challenges. Luke also emphasized the importance of increasing vehicle occupancy, which could significantly reduce traffic congestion in the canyons. Luke pointed out that near-term solutions were needed to address current issues impacting residents, visitors, and employees in the area, and he invited feedback on which solutions the town would like to pursue.

Morgan expressed concerns about keeping the main road open during congestion, suggesting that a study might be needed to explore solutions like avalanche sheds. Morgan emphasized that when the main road is closed, they rely on Snowbird, which causes additional issues. Morgan also raised concerns about the feasibility of tolling for residents and employees, noting that UDOT had previously mentioned that they couldn't treat different groups differently, which Morgan thought would pose an undue financial burden on employees.

Heimark explained that the reason a study for the main line was only partially done was because it was an area being considered for a grant. Heimark also mentioned the importance of continuing research on tolling and its impact on various groups.

Anctil shared her concerns about bad drivers and vehicles in the canyon, advocating for reducing the number of cars. Anctil suggested that high-occupancy vehicles (HOV) such as buses and vans might be a better solution, though she noted concerns about the safety of current bus drivers on the road.

Mayor Bourke brought up the idea of imposing standards on vehicle operators, drawing a parallel to the aviation industry, though he acknowledged that such regulations would likely face resistance.

Mike Maughan discussed the difficulty of managing the high volume of traffic in the canyon, pointing out that many visitors to Alta are not familiar with driving in the canyon. Maughan expressed concerns about increasing capacity for vehicles and the potential negative impacts of tolling, especially on employees and lower-income visitors. Maughan advocated for a reservation system to manage the number of vehicles, which he believed would be more effective than tolling. Morgan agreed with the idea of a reservation system and noted that there were ongoing efforts to address roadside parking issues at Snowbird.

Mike Morey, the Town Marshall, emphasized the importance of maintaining good relationships with UDOT and avoiding the prioritization of projects that might harm other important initiatives, like sheds at White Pine. Morey stressed the need to approach these issues with a collaborative mindset.

Luke concluded by reiterating the importance of Canyon Guard as an advocacy organization, working collaboratively with local governments and businesses to address these issues and improve the traffic situation in the canyon.

14. **NEW BUSINESS**

02:16:10

No new business.

15. **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO COMMENCE A CLOSED MEETING TO DISCUSS A MATTER AUTHORIZED BY UTAH CODE SECTION 52-4-205(1)**

02:16:30

MOTION: Elise Morgan motioned to commence a closed meeting. Carolyn Anctil seconded.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Mayor Bourke – yes, Councilmember Morgan – yes, Councilmember Anctil – yes, Councilmember Byrne – yes, Councilmember Schilling – yes, a closed meeting was unanimously approved by Utah code section 52-4-205(1).

RESULT: APPROVED

The Alta town Council approved and went into a closed meeting, they then adjourned the closed meeting and came back into the open public meeting.

John Byrne and Dan Schilling did not re-enter the meeting.

16. **MOTION TO ADJOURN**

MOTION: Elise Morgan motioned to adjourn, and Carolyn Anctil seconded.

VOTE: All in favor. The meeting was unanimously adjourned.

RESULT: APPROVED

Passed this 12th day of March, 2025

Jen Clancy

Jen Clancy, Town Clerk