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April 11, 2025

Dear Alta Community,

Since learning of the Diocese of Salt Lake City's intent to divest the Our Lady of the Snow Center (OLS), the Town has been considering the public benefits and concerns related to purchasing or not purchasing the building.

The process for a government entity to purchase real estate is purposely designed to be deliberate and methodical. Utah law allows discussions regarding real estate to be conducted in a closed meeting to preserve the Town's negotiating advantage. The council met in a closed meeting, reached consensus, and directed staff to explore the purchase of OLS as a beneficial option for long-term and continued use by the community. The Town met with representatives of the Diocese and discussed the potential for the Town to purchase OLS. Late on April 9, 2025, the Diocese informed the Town that it intended to pursue a sale of OLS to the Town.

Ultimately the Council's decision on whether to purchase property can only occur at an open public meeting. The Town recognizes that this is a very emotional issue because of what OLS and Alta Community Enrichment mean to the community. We appreciate your comments and opinions and will hold a public meeting to take public input on Tuesday, April 15th at 2:00 PM at the Alta Community Center. The decision whether to purchase the property will only occur after a vote of the Town Council in a future public meeting, and the council will not take official action at the April 15th meeting.

A significant factor in our decision-making is our special relationship with ACE. Regardless of the future ownership of OLS, the Town remains committed to supporting ACE's mission and ensuring its continued success within the community.

The Council welcomes public comment regarding the potential purchase of OLS at the April 15th meeting.

Sincerely,

Roger Bourke, Mayor

Alta Town Council
Our Lady of the Snows



Staff Report:
April 9, 2025

To: Town Council
From: Jen Clancy, Town Clerk
Date Written: April 7, 2025

Dear Alta Town Council, Voters, and Community Members,

We appreciate the council's consideration about the future of the Our Lady of the Snows (OLS) building. As stewards of our unique mountain town, it is our responsibility to ensure that key community assets are managed in a way that best serves the long-term interests of Alta's residents, businesses, and visitors.

Our Lady of the Snows Center has long been a cornerstone of the Alta community. After multiple avalanches destroyed the original site, the building was reconstructed in its current location in the 1990s, thanks to the combined efforts of local community members and the Diocese of Salt Lake City. Since then, the Diocese has owned and maintained OLS, providing religious services, and a gathering space for the community, as well as leasing space to Alta Community Enrichment (ACE).

At this time, the Town is evaluating its options regarding the potential purchase of OLS and has not reached a decision. Elected officials are carefully considering what would be in the best interest of the Alta community and remain open to dialogue. Should the Town Council choose to proceed with the purchase, the decision will be made at a public meeting.

The Town is considering ownership of OLS FOR the following reasons:

1. **Preserving Community Control and Accessibility** – Town ownership would ensure the OLS building remains dedicated to serving the community. This would allow for inclusive decision-making regarding its use, ensuring accessibility and preventing any single entity from prioritizing specific interests over the broader public good.
2. **Financial Stability and Sustainable Management** – With Town ownership, public funding, grants, and budget planning can be utilized to maintain the building. The Town's resources and administrative capabilities provide a framework for ongoing maintenance and future improvements. Additionally, the Town will likely never have a similar

opportunity to purchase OLS at the same price per square foot, making this a financially prudent investment.

3. **Flexibility for Multi-Use Community Needs** – The OLS building has long served as a vital gathering space for residents, hosting meetings, educational programs, weddings, and social events. Under Town ownership, this space can remain adaptable to evolving community needs rather than being confined by the mission or limitations of a single entity.
4. **Long-Term Vision and Public Interest Protection** – The Town of Alta has a vested interest in safeguarding community assets for future generations. Municipal ownership would prevent the possibility of future sales, repurposing, or changes in mission that might arise under private ownership, ensuring the building remains dedicated to community use.
5. **Commitment to Collaboration** – The Town recognizes and values the role of local non-profits. Under Town ownership, we envision continued collaboration with organizations like ACE, Friends of Alta, and the Alta Historical Society to ensure OLS remains a hub for cultural, educational, and recreational activities. The Town is committed to establish shared-use agreements to support community needs and local initiatives.
6. **Support for Local Organizations** – Town ownership would best position the Town to support ACE, Friends of Alta, the Alta Historical Society, and any future organizations that may emerge. It also provides continuity in case any of these entities cease to exist in the future.
7. **Investment in Alta's Future** – Given the limited properties available to the Town, acquiring OLS could be a sound long-term investment, especially as pressures on Town resources continue to grow.
8. **Town's Financial Readiness** – Thanks to competent financial management, the Town is in a strong position to make this purchase while still maintaining financial planning for the future.
9. **Land Ownership Considerations** – The land underneath OLS is owned by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and would not transfer with the building's sale. However, all Town-owned buildings began on USFS land and were later transferred to the Town at no cost (aside from administrative efforts). While there is no guarantee, it is far more likely that the USFS would transfer the land to a government entity.
10. **Public Restrooms and Trailhead Access** – Trailhead and restroom facilities are a known issue in Little Cottonwood Canyon. OLS offers a strategically placed and cost-effective option for improving visitor amenities, including restrooms for summer hikers, backcountry users, and skiers caught in the "red snake."
11. **The Diocese's Preference** – The Diocese of Salt Lake City has expressed its desire for a government entity to purchase the building, ensuring that it remains a public asset.

Here are some potential reasons AGAINST the Town of Alta purchasing OLS:

1. **Financial Burden on Taxpayers** – Some may argue that town resources should be allocated to other pressing needs. Will the town need to raise taxes or reallocate funds from other essential services to cover ongoing maintenance and operational costs?
2. **Opportunity Cost** – Purchasing OLS may limit the town's ability to invest in other infrastructure, emergency preparedness, or future capital projects.
3. **Liability and Maintenance Costs** – As the owner, the town would assume full responsibility for maintenance, repairs, and potential liability issues. Is the town prepared to handle unforeseen expenses, particularly given the harsh mountain environment?
4. **Government vs. Non-Profit Management** – Some may argue that a local non-profit would be better suited to manage the building efficiently and in alignment with community interests. Additionally, ACE is a well respected non-profit and has been a tenant of OLS for almost 30 years.
5. **Restrictions on Land Use** – Since the land beneath OLS is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, the Town may face limitations on future modifications or expansions. How does this impact the town's long-term vision for the building?
6. **Potential for Political Influence** – Government ownership could introduce political challenges, where future leadership may change policies or priorities regarding OLS's use. Would a non-profit structure provide greater continuity and independence from political shifts?
7. **Fairness to Other Organizations** – If the Town purchases and manages OLS, how will it ensure equal access for all community organizations without favoritism? Would some groups feel they are at a disadvantage compared to ACE or others with historical ties to the building?
8. **Alternative Ownership Models** – Are there hybrid models that could balance public interest and financial sustainability, such as a joint partnership between the Town and a non-profit?
9. **Need for a Transparent Public Process** – Given the significance of this decision, will there be public hearings, financial disclosures, and a clear plan for how the town will operate OLS? Some community members may want more details before supporting the purchase.
10. **And last but not least ACE** – ACE has been a long-standing tenant at OLS, contributes greatly to our community's well-being, and has approached the Town asking for support in their bid to purchase OLS.

The Town Council and staff are working to evaluate the public benefits and issues involved in this potential purchase. No decisions have been made, and we will continue evaluating all aspects of this opportunity. A significant factor in our decision-making is our special relationship with ACE. Regardless of the future ownership of OLS, the Town remains committed to supporting ACE's mission and ensuring its continued success within the community.

We value your input and encourage you to share your thoughts as we navigate this decision together. Thank you for your continued support of Alta, your commitment to our community.