

Town of Alta
Summer Economic Development Roundtable
October 6, 2011

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Executive Summary

Facing increasing costs to support non-paying summer visitors, increased competition for winter visitors, and massive summer unemployment, the Town of Alta leadership sought public input on ways to maintain the character of Alta while avoiding the economic collapse of the town. The Town of Alta Summer Economic Development Roundtable, held at Our Lady of the Snows on October 6, 2011, brought together nearly 60 Alta business owners, Alta residents, and community experts to address the following questions:

- What do we love about summer at Alta?
- What outcomes do we want to avoid as Alta faces pressure from Utah's population growth?

Participants used outcomes of the “what we love / what we want to avoid” discussion as guiding principles during the rest of the session. Additional discussion topics included:

- What are some ways to expand the summer economic base at Alta?
- What role should Town of Alta leadership play in moving forward?

Next Steps

Participants agreed that during the next eight months, Town of Alta leadership should coordinate efforts in four main areas to maximize revenue from 2012 summer visitors (1000 cars/day) with minimal capital investment:

- Define summer season to align businesses around highest visitor density.
- Create a short term “Visitor Center” and associated signage/information to direct visitors where to spend money in Alta.
- Host a “Summer Business Village” at the Albion Basin Shuttle hub, offering inexpensive food, small retail, etc. aimed at the needs of summer visitors.
- Support a few, low-overhead events as targeted revenue opportunities for summer businesses.

Detailed participant input on short term projects can be found on page 5-6 of this report.

Longer term, participants agreed that Town of Alta leadership should lead efforts to invest in a comprehensive trail usage plan and a Town of Alta business plan. These plans would guide capital investment in higher-overhead summer revenue strategies, protect Alta's natural environment, and maintain the character of Alta in the face of population growth. Town leadership should also research funding vehicles beyond sales revenue (e.g., grants, fees, endowments) to finance capital projects.

Detailed participant input on long term strategies can be found on pages 7-9 of this report.

Guiding Principles

What We Love About Alta

- The “Alta Experience” – nostalgic, authentic
 - “Minimalistic” feel
 - “Uncorralled” feel
 - “Home”
 - “Sense of ownership”
 - Affordability

- Sense of community
 - Community passion / participation
 - Friends of Alta / ACE / CCF
 - Town Park / volleyball
 - Good school

- Natural environment
 - Healthy forest / healthy ecosystem
 - Wildflowers
 - Wildlife
 - Clean air
 - Clean drinking water
 - Development localized at bases

- Access to Recreation
 - Hiking trails
 - Active, non-motorized recreation
 - Accessible / Walk-able / Convenient
 - Albion Basin shuttle

- History
 - Mining
 - Skiing

- Partnership with Snowbird

What We Want to Avoid

- Economic collapse of town
 - Increasing cost of services for summer visitors who don't spend money
 - Increasing pressure on businesses to survive in winter-only economy

- Growth that diminishes the "Alta experience"
 - Mechanized attractions
 - Excessive development / sprawl
 - Feeling of "crowding"
 - Development without appropriate public transportation / parking / services
 - Traffic gridlock
 - Insufficient restrooms / basic services

- Loss of our "township" feel
 - Becoming an "exclusive community" / turning people away
 - Loss of autonomy / control
 - Loss of voice of workforce
 - Loss of affordability
 - Out-pricing employees for local housing
 - Reliance on commuting workforce

- Unmanaged impact on natural environment
 - Trail gridlock
 - Clashes between hikers and mountain bikers
 - Negative impact on forest health / ecosystem

- Polarization (e.g., emotion & politics vs. analytical decision-making)

Maximizing 2012 Summer Revenue

- Define Summer Season for 2012
 - Close for break between winter and “summer season”
 - Coordinate businesses to choose “opening weekend”
 - Focus on consistent weekend hours

- Create a short term “Visitor Center”
 - Create a “sense of arrival” at beginning of town
 - Could be physical Visitor Center, or clear signage directing to it
 - Develop a “sense of place” to direct visitors within Alta
 - Common signage
 - Common landscaping
 - Compile information on “What Can I Do in Alta?” for drive-up visitors
 - Compile information on “What’s Open in Alta Today?” to encourage drive-up visitors to spend money
 - Use existing building or “yurt” to minimize cost in 2012

- Create a low-overhead “Summer Business Village”
 - Aim offerings to maximize revenue from summer visitors
 - Offer low cost food / services as easiest “first sell” to 1000 cars/day who are used to spending nothing in Alta
 - Offer small retail / general store (e.g., Alta t-shirts, packaged food, maps, sunscreen, souvenirs, etc.)
 - Co-locate with Albion Basin Shuttle hub to catch visitors while they’re out of their cars
 - Offer picnic tables
 - Maximize revenue / minimize risk
 - Permits would be a small source of revenue to town
 - Low overhead = low risk for current businesses
 - Low overhead = opportunity for “food cart” businesses run by winter employees
 - Consider locating at Albion Day Lodge
 - Public restrooms with sewer
 - Drinking water / hand washing
 - Garbage / recycling
 - Logical hub for Albion Basin Shuttle

- Schedule a few, low-overhead art/education events
 - Stick to agreed-upon “summer season” dates
 - Coordinate with local businesses to be open / offer specials / advertise at Visitor Center during events
 - Communicate “What’s Open in Alta” ahead of events so visitors can expect to spend money while they’re in town (e.g., not pack their own food)
 - Address barriers to events
 - Transportation/parking for large groups
 - Space
 - Legal / liability issues
 - Forest Service permits for anything on public land
 - Suggested event ideas:
 - “Taste of Alta” / wine tasting to introduce higher end summer offerings
 - Alta Historic “Ghost” Tour
 - Art Fair
 - “Alta University” classes as a short-term, day visitor precursor to future overnight “Elder Hostel” educational offerings. Consult Rex Falkenrath at Westminster College, rfalkenrath@westminstercollege.edu
 - Local theatre / dance performances
 - Kids’ education program with Canyons School District focusing on environmental stewardship
 - Local concert series
 - Town of Alta fundraising 5K
 - Painting classes (<http://www.sipandpaint.com/parties.htm>)

Planning for Growth While Protecting the “Alta Experience”

- Invest in a comprehensive “Trail System Plan”
 - Leverage Alta Ski Area’s study of existing trails
 - Consider adding new trails / retiring overused trails
 - Evaluate pros/cons of lift-served access
 - Partner with Forest Service to meet NEPA objectives
 - Seek public input
 - Use comprehensive “Trail System Plan” to:
 - Secure grant funding for implementation
 - Dedicate areas for specific recreation (e.g., hiking, mountain biking, climbing)
 - Provide appropriate signage / maps

- Invest in a professionally written “Town of Alta Business Plan”
 - Engage interns to research successes and failures of summer efforts at other ski resorts
 - Consult Scott Beck at the Salt Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau, sbeck@visitsaltlake.com, for “Summer Resort Success Factors” study.
Recommendations included:
 - Choosing a common base for events (e.g., food & wine at Sundance; dance studio at Taos)
 - Creating an “appeal to the masses”
 - Use “Town of Alta Business Plan” to:
 - Compare impact of various growth options, using free analytic tools from Gabe Epperson at Envision Utah, gabe@envisionutah.org
 - Prioritize capital investments in physical improvements
 - Evaluate, narrow, and align community around longer term, higher overhead strategies for summer revenue growth (listed on page 9 of this report)

- Research funding options beyond sales revenue
 - Research economic development grants to fund capital projects
 - Enlist Stan Parrish at Sandy Area Chamber of Commerce, stan@sandychamber.com
 - Consider more aggressive requests for donations / endowment
 - Consider a fee for parking / Albion Basin shuttle
 - Recruit small corporate offices for outdoor companies
 - Identify office space; register with www.utahsuresites.com
 - Partner with Jeff Edwards at EDCUtah to advertise to local companies / recruit out-of-state companies, jedwards@edcutah.org
 - Consider a testing laboratory for outdoor product companies

- Support public transportation

- Enhance community walking trail
 - Link to transit hub
 - Create signage, landscaping along trail to make visitors “feel safe”
 - Clearly sign places where visitors should “get out of the car”
 - Bring residents and visitors to the right places to spend money

- Grow “Visitor Center” into Community Center
 - Agree on permanent physical location
 - Secure financial commitment for physical improvements
 - Consider co-locating with Forest Service / Ranger Station
 - Encourage community / resident access
 - Serve as transit hub for future canyon public transportation system / visitor transportation within Alta
 - Include a convenience store for visitors and summer residents

Expanding Summer Revenue in 2013 and Beyond

- Market specific lodging/services to specific recreational visitors
 - Climbing hostel
 - Lift-served mountain bike park
- Market Alta for summer “EcoTourism”
 - Capitalize on existing Alta brand – “nostalgic”, “authentic”
 - Target “Elder Hostel” market – Baby Boomers with time and money
- Market to corporate retreats; specifically for outdoor product companies
 - Partner with Scott Beck at Salt Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau, sbeck@visitsaltlake.com
 - Partner with Riley Cutler at Governor’s Office of Economic Development to reach Utah’s outdoor product companies, rcutler@utah.gov
 - Do not target large, 1000+ conventions (not enough amenities to win them)
- Offer fee-based educational / guided outdoor services
 - “Bachelors of Mountain Biking”
 - Forest Ranger / Junior Ranger
 - Wildflower education / hiking
 - NOLS / IWLS
 - Class for credit, such as 6-week Geology course at University of Pennsylvania
- Mirror successful winter programs with separate options for adults and children
 - Consider weekend “kid camps,” similar to “ski school,” to attract adults to hike, mountain bike, and dine in Alta while kids are engaged in educational activities
- Grow “Wasatch Weddings” concept
 - Create an all-local wedding support package (e.g., venue, food, photography, music, etc.)
 - Schedule a “FAM Tour” to familiarize Utah wedding planners with Alta options
- Investigate additional campgrounds as a revenue source
- Structure an annual summer events series centered on a “common base,” such as dance at Taos, food and wine at Sundance, etc.