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Alta stops Albion Basin subdivision
Council » Plans fell short for water and sewer service, emergency-vehicle access, etc.

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Plans to build 10 upscale homes at the gateway to Alta's Albion Basin have halted -- for now.

On Thursday, the Alta Town Council unanimously denied an application to create a 10-lot subdivision on Patsey Marley Hill. The 26-acre property is owned by the estate of JoAnne Shrontz, a former council member who died in a 2003 plane crash.

"We are carefully evaluating the situation and our options -- including our legal options," Alan Sullivan, an attorney for the estate, said in an interview. "We think [the decision] was premature."

At a September public hearing, environmental groups and others protested the proposal, arguing it would obliterate open space at the gateway to Little Cottonwood Canyon's flowery Albion Basin, one of the Wasatch Front's most popular hiking destinations.

The council denied the application, Mayor Tom Pollard said, because it failed to meet the requirements outlined by Alta's ordinances. A review by the Alta Planning Commission found the plans fell short for water and sewer service, emergency-vehicle access, winter parking and setbacks from natural waterways.

"One of the main sticking points is they do not have culinary water to the site," Pollard said. "This has been an issue since the beginning of the application."

The estate had vowed to build a private water line to the homes from a source near the Wildcat chairlift at Alta Ski Area. But securing the necessary permit to cross U.S. Forest Service land could take as long as two years.

The project also was waiting on approvals from other government agencies. Once those are in place, the mayor said, the estate could submit another application.

Jen Clancy, executive director of Friends of Alta, praised the council and Planning Commission for going through "painstaking detail" to evaluate the application.

"From my observations," said Clancy, who shared Friends of Alta's objections at the September hearing, "the applicant had many opportunities to bring their application into compliance with the town's ordinances, and they did not."

Could high-end homes dot the unpaved S-curve in the future?

"We certainly hope so," Sullivan said. "It is an extremely sensitive use of the land. The property ... is zoned for single-family residences."

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