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Proposed homes would benefit Alta

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Development of land is often controversial, misunderstood and emotional. Such is the case with a proposed project in Grizzly Gulch at Alta, one which has been in the planning stages for years.

Homes in Grizzly Gulch are not new; it has been a residential area for decades. Bill Levitt, owner of the Alta Lodge and long-time mayor of Alta, has a home there. His wife, president of Friends of Alta, still lives there, too. My grandfather Joe Quinney, a key figure in turning Alta from a mining ghost town to a prime ski area, gave my mother a lot in Grizzly Gulch where she built a home.

Just like any other neighborhood, homes are bought and sold (at least one is now on the market).

The area, known as the Patsey Marley Hill Subdivision, has been slated for development since the 1970s. We have created a plan which adheres to strict guidelines established by the planning commission and Town Council in the 2005 General Plan. In adopting the General Plan, the Town Council conducted a comprehensive review and balancing of all considerations for the future of Alta.

This particular project was zoned and approved by the Alta Town Council for 16 homes in 1980. However, the currently proposed Patsey Marley Hill Subdivision plan, on 26 acres, has reduced the lots to no more than 10. Our plans impose reasonable limits on home size and comply with Alta's very restrictive land use requirements.

Designed as an environmentally sensitive use of private property, the development will leave more than 90 percent of the land untouched with more than 23 acres of natural habitat. We have completed an exhaustive review of soils, waterways, avalanche hazards, vegetation, slopes and natural features worthy of preservation.

At one time, my mother applied to the town to build a hotel on the property. The town never changed the zoning from single family and thus kept the land designated for residential development. We believe we can create a project that will not spoil the beauty of Grizzly Gulch and will benefit the community and the town. It is a sensitive and sensible project by the descendants of the visionary who helped create Alta as we know it today.

The project will preserve existing ski trails and roads. It will increase Alta's tax base and enhance its fire and medical emergency facilities. With Salt Lake City's and Alta's cooperation, a new underground water tank could increase firefighting capacity for the entire town. In the canyons, water is a very critical issue.

We have more than enough water available to serve the homes. Three options for delivery of water to the property are being considered, with the most logical one being to use the town water system which traverses the property, and from which the town agreed to provide service decades ago.

Some people have expressed their wishes for zero development in Alta; the town's 2005 General Plan does not endorse that view. We believe a handful of new homes will be a benefit to the town, are compatible with the long-term growth of the area, will provide additional tax base, bring year-round revenue to local businesses and will add financial support for things like a new community center many of the townspeople have long envisioned.

With careful planning and a thoughtful, open development process with the Town of Alta, we can all join to continue responsible stewardship and sustain Alta's environment and community.

Dr. Erik C. Erlingsson lives in Alta.

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