



The population of the Wasatch

Back (which includes all of Summit County and the Heber Valley) is growing, and some say it's at an alarming rate. Residents new and old bemoan the potential loss of the small town and countrified settings behind the pristine mountains that shelter the eastern reach of the Salt Lake Valley. And yet, while we might wish to close the gate behind ourselves, it continues to swing wide open, welcoming newcomers eager to embrace this area rich in material and natural resources. All the reasons that attracted you, me and the new family down the street are continuing to work their magic on the thousands of additional residents who will be arriving over the next several years. The social and cultural demands of these newcomers on the current infrastructure could be devastating unless far-sighted community planners anticipate and prepare for the needs that will arise. But before we pack our own bags and run for new hills, plans in the works for an accommodating future deserve a glimpse.

Wasatch Back to the Future

By Sedona Callahan

Art by Bob Commander

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Population Growth

According to the Utah Office of Planning and Budget, in the year 2030, the projected population of Summit and Wasatch counties will be over 130,000, or about a 130 percent increase from the present 56,000 combined county populations. This increase could potentially create an enormous impact on energy/power and water demands, traffic issues, the conservation of and access to wilderness areas, available housing and employment.

Traffic and Transit

Summit County Public Works Administrator Kevin Callahan said, "People know the future will be different, but they don't know how it will be different. The county management team looks further ahead than most people do, so we can foresee what the probable conditions will be. Daily traffic will increase by at least 130 percent. The economies of Summit, Wasatch and Salt Lake counties are becoming more integrated, with more people commuting back and forth to work. Many of the Wasatch Back residents will move out of western Summit County to either eastern Summit or Wasatch County, because of more affordable housing in those areas, which will increase the commute rate."

Summit County's strategy for addressing traffic and transit issues is multi-faceted. "One aspect is to increase the capacity of our roads in order to maintain a viable economy. Plans in the works for accommodating this traffic increase include the widening of Highway 224, and a new commercial road system for Kimball Junction, as well as widening of the frontage roads," said Callahan.

A transit planning study shows an increase in bus ridership of about 25 percent a year for the next decade. Summit County has adopted a transit plan that includes \$17 million for improving the transit infrastructure, such as buildings, improved technology and busses, over the next five years. Park City and Summit County are also discussing the establishment of Park and Ride lots, dedicated bus lanes in heavily used transit corridors, and the possibility of a bus rapid transit system that would serve the area between

Park City and the Snyderville Basin, as well as transit connections between Salt Lake City and Summit County. "I think that would be a freeway-based commuter bus system rather than a rail system, which is too expensive to justify," said Callahan. "The county is also looking at gondolas as public transportation. This is being evaluated as a way of conveying passengers across Highway 224 in the Kimball Junction area."

Renewable and Efficient Energy – Wind Farms in Summit and Wasatch Counties

Sarah Wright, director of Utah Clean Air, has said that according to a recent study done by Western Resource Advocates, electricity demands can be reduced by 30 percent by the year 2020 through straight-forward energy efficiency measures, as well as the use of renewable resources through the use of wind, geothermal, solar and biomass energy [manure] sources.

Additionally, Park City Mayor Dana Williams expects to see a mandatory renewable energy portfolio from the State Legislature and Governor's Office within five years, which will require that cities' power be generated from renewable sources at the rate of 10 percent. "Park City's use of renewable energy is already at about 28 percent, and I would expect it to approach 50 percent in ten years," said Williams. He is a strong advocate for renewable power usage and believes there will be wind farms in Summit and Wasatch mountains and canyons within the next decade. Williams said that all three ski resorts are already buying wind power shares, and he anticipates that other industries will do the same. "Industry is amenable to paying for increases in renewable power, and this is very effective in agricultural areas as well," he said, adding that ranchers and farmers in the county could benefit from renting land for the installation of wind farms. "This is a boon for rural Utah."

Recreational Trails to Link Summit and Wasatch Counties

Carol Potter, executive director of Mountain Trails Foundation, is well aware of the potential of an old rail-

road grade called "The Phoston Spur," just a few miles outside of Park City near Highway 248. This historic link is about to be developed by Summit and Wasatch counties to provide trail access to the entire Wasatch Back.

"As the development and population in Summit County and Wasatch County are booming, the prospective benefits are huge. The highways adjacent to this connection are almost at failure level right now, and the potential to use this as a transportation trail is increasingly appealing," said Potter. Trish Murphy, trail coordinator for Summit and Wasatch counties, added, "Instead of trails and pathways being viewed as recreation and therefore optional, they become a component of our statewide transportation planning and are viewed as an absolute necessity. Closer to home, this would mean an extensive pathway network between the Heber Valley and the Jordanelle Reservoir; between Midway City and Soldier Hollow; between the Kamas Valley and Park City; a shared use path and a bridle path from Wanship all the way to the Provo River

Corridor in the Uinta Mountains; and access to the Snyderville Basin from the Salt Lake Valley."

The unique partnership between Utah State Parks, Summit County, Park City, Snyderville Basin Recreation, Mountain Trails Foundation and developers allows them to execute such a project, demonstrating a mutual interest and guaranteeing that the effort will be maintained through the years. "We are virtually licking our chops at the opportunities," said Potter. "As trains chugged along the tracks 100 years ago and connected communities, we will be creating our own history by linking towns and villages along the trail," said Potter. r

Sedona Callahan has been a resident of Summit County for almost seven years and looks forward to the unfolding future of the Wasatch Back.

Look for the second installment of this article in the winter edition of *Park City Magazine*. Topics to be covered will be water issues, housing, open lands conservancy, and employment.

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