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2 **MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL WASATCH COMMISSION (“CWC”) BUDGET**
3 **FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ELECTRONICALLY ON**
4 **WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2021, AT 3:00 P.M.**
5

6 **Present:** Chair Jeff Silvestrini, Mayor Harris Sondak, Councilor Jim Bradley
7

8 **CWC Staff:** Executive Director Ralph Becker, Deputy Director Blake Perez,
9 Communications Director Lindsey Nielsen, Office Administrator Manager
10 Kaye Mickelson
11

12 **Visitor Use Study Work Group Members:**
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14 Annalee Munsey, Jan Striefel, Carl Fisher, Patrick Nelson, Will McCarvill
15 **Absent:** Helen Peters
16

17 **Responder:** Dr. Jordan Smith, Utah State University
18

19 **Others:** Robert Sampson, Pat Shea
20

- 21 • **Open Budget Finance Committee Meeting: Chair of the Committee, Mayor Jeff**
22 **Silvestrini, Will Open the Meeting and Note that the Meeting is to Occur only**
23 **Electronically without a Physical Location.**
24

25 Chair Jeff Silvestrini called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. He explained that it was a joint
26 meeting of the Central Wasatch Commission (“CWC”) Budget/Finance/Audit Committee and the
27 Visitor Use Study Work Group. The purpose of the meeting was to further discuss the proposal
28 for Phase II of the Visitor Use Study.
29

30 **1. Discussion/Direction: Discussion with Dr. Jordan Smith Regarding Study**
31 **Methodology and Phase II.**
32

33 Deputy Director, Blake Perez explained that the meeting was a continuation of the previous
34 Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting held on June 14, 2021. During that meeting, there was
35 discussion related to Phase II of the Visitor Use Study. A lot of those discussions had to do with
36 the costs and the social component of the study. Dr. Jordan Smith from Utah State University was
37 now available to answer outstanding questions.
38

39 Mayor Sondak had issues with the construct validity and the reliability of the social aspects of the
40 study. He commented that people were not good at forecasting their contingent future behavior.
41 Additionally, acceptable levels of visitor use would depend entirely on past experiences and

1 personalities. An extrovert may want to see 10 people on the trail while an introvert may not want
2 to see anyone on the trail. He noted that acceptable levels of visitor use would also shift and
3 change over time. Mayor Sondak posed a number of questions:

- 4
- 5 • What are we going to do with the data?
- 6 • How biased are the estimates?
- 7 • How do those estimates change over time?
- 8

9 Dr. Smith agreed that perceptions of acceptable visitor use would change over time. As people
10 got used to busier settings, those busier settings may become desirable or more normalized in
11 certain locations. Dr. Smith explained that what they tried to do was measure indicators across a
12 variety of different sites so they knew where the specific thresholds were. There would be different
13 metrics based on individual sites. For example, if individuals were surveyed at Snowbird, the
14 acceptable number of visitors would be much higher than at another location, like Lake Blanche.

15

16 All of the study work was guided by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council and their
17 Visitor Capacity Guidebook. The guidebook was created across several different federal agencies
18 and included the U.S. Forest Service. It provided standardized guidance for how those agencies
19 could manage and set capacity limits. Dr. Smith noted that visitor capacity was measured through
20 both ecological capacity and social capacity. He shared a graph with the Budget/Finance/Audit
21 Committee and explained that the X-axis on the graph measured the level of use and the Y-axis on
22 the graph measured the acceptability of the social impacts.

23

24 Dr. Smith noted that it was important to study social capacity. In different locations, the acceptable
25 social indicators could vary widely. Visitors at Snowbird might see 20 other groups on a hike and
26 feel that was acceptable. Visitors at Lake Blanche might see two other groups on a hike and feel
27 that was not acceptable. As a result, it was important to have multiple capacity indicator measures,
28 such as ecological capacity and social capacity. If the study only looked at ecological capacity,
29 there would not be information about the variability of the sites. The value of studying social
30 capacity as well as ecological capacity was that it would provide additional information.

31

32 Mayor Sondak wondered what would happen if there was a site that had not been poorly impacted
33 ecologically and visitors believed additional use levels would be appropriate. Dr. Smith noted that
34 if there was not a lot of ecological damage but use was high, the priority would be placed on the
35 ecological integrity of the site. Will McCarvill commented that the model described had to do
36 with the management of areas where there could be both minimal social connections as well as
37 areas where there could be denser social connections.

38

39 Mr. McCarvill reported that he had read the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest Plan. That plan
40 believed there was enough capacity in the forest to have some special areas as well as areas that
41 were more heavily used. However, the flaw in that plan was that the urban environment continued
42 to grow. It may be beneficial to look at a new model. Mr. McCarvill did not believe there was
43 enough capacity in the Wasatch to satisfy the desire for areas with minimal social connections.

44

45 Dr. Smith noted that the Forest Service identified recreation opportunities that they wanted to
46 manage across the entire forest unit. In locations like the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache, where there were

1 heavily urbanized areas, the areas that were managed for solitude or wilderness experiences tended
2 to be more distant from the urban centers. Looking at the entire forest as the unit of analysis led
3 to areas further away from the Wasatch Front being managed for less use and everything on the
4 Wasatch Front becoming a high-use area. Dr. Smith felt that approach was a mistake because
5 there were individuals that wanted wilderness experiences along the Wasatch Front. The Visitor
6 Use Study could identify specific sites that could preserve those kinds of experiences.

7
8 Carl Fisher commented that visitation and visitor perspectives had been explored by Save Our
9 Canyons in a 2015 survey. He explained that many people who went out for solitude did not find
10 encounters with other visitors to be negative. However, he noted that there was likely a threshold
11 where those types of encounters would become negative. That was something Mr. Fisher was
12 interested in understanding. He was also interested in some of economic barriers that prevented
13 people from visiting the canyons. Mr. Fisher hoped to hear from non-users and casual users rather
14 than only habitual users of the canyons. Mayor Sondak pointed out that the plan was to survey
15 people who were on site. Discussions were had about traffic congestion and transportation issues.

16
17 Mr. McCarvill believed that environmental protection was the number one priority. He felt the
18 ecological capacity aspect of the Visitor Use Study would be especially important. Mr. McCarvill
19 noted that while some canyon visitors may not want to see other users on trails, there would be
20 some level of social change over time. The priority needed to be on the environment more so than
21 the preference of visitors. Mr. Fisher expressed concerns related to hardened areas.

22
23 Mayor Sondak noted that there were two aspects of the study that were relatively expensive: the
24 mobile location data and the surveys. Dr. Smith explained that the purpose of the mobile location
25 data was to provide a historical perspective. It would also allow the study to look at many different
26 locations throughout the Central Wasatch. Trail counters could be set out at standard locations
27 and monitored throughout the year. However, that would only include 30 or so locations. The
28 mobile location data would be broader and include specific trail segments. Using both the trail
29 counter data and mobile location data could create more comprehensive data.

30
31 The survey data would provide information about acceptable visitor use levels in specific settings.
32 It would create one more measure and help determine when visitor use levels were unacceptable.
33 Dr. Smith explained that the other benefit of the survey data was that it could make it easier to
34 further understand the repercussions of displaced recreation. For instance:

- 35
36
- If a capacity limit was set in a particular area, what would the repercussions of that
37 limitation be? How would that limitation impact other nearby areas?
- 38

39 Mayor Sondak asked Dr. Smith about the increased levels of outdoor recreation caused by the
40 COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Smith noted that preliminary indicators in similar studies saw that
41 outdoor use remained at pandemic levels early in 2021. It would take time to know what those
42 use levels would look like in the long run. Jan Striefel believed it would be best to let the experts
43 do what they needed to do and move forward with the full study. Mayor Sondak noted that the
44 cost for the Visitor Use Study was high and he still had some concerns. Ms. Striefel felt the cost
45 was necessary to obtain all of the information.

1 Office Administrator Manager, Kaye Mickelson noted that there had been questions related to
2 personnel and salaries. Dr. Smith explained that there was tenure track faculty and senior staff.
3 He discussed the summer salaries and noted that time commitments were built into the proposals.
4

5 Chair Silvestrini commented that the Visitor Use Study was a substantial budget expenditure.
6 There would be some State money for the study but the CWC would still need to take money from
7 reserves for a significant portion of the funding. He wondered whether that was something the
8 Budget/Finance/Audit Committee wanted to do. Chair Silvestrini also wondered whether those
9 present had any additional questions to ask Dr. Smith.
10

11 Executive Director, Ralph Becker made note of the increased visitation levels that had taken place
12 across the country since the start of the pandemic. He explained that some areas were able to
13 regulate visitation due to transportation limitations. Mr. Becker wondered what would happen
14 when transportation capacity was increased and to what extent it would be possible to protect both
15 the environment and user experience. He understood the need to protect a range of outdoor
16 experiences. However, he wondered to what extent that would be possible. Mr. Becker posed a
17 number of questions to Dr. Smith:
18

- 19 • Is it reasonable to talk about retaining solitude in the Wasatch?
- 20 • Are those types of experiences achievable?
- 21 • What measures would it take to achieve solitude?
22

23 Dr. Smith felt it was possible to achieve solitude in the Wasatch. Experiences of solitude were
24 dependent on context (overall perceptions and expectations) but standard measures of crowding
25 and density could put things into perspective. He commented that the range of outdoor experiences
26 needed to be preserved where possible. Pat Shea suggested prioritizing the studies in a sequence.
27 Once the ecological aspect of the study was complete, the social aspect could be done. Dr. Smith
28 noted that both ecological and social indicators were dependent upon the desired conditions set by
29 the management agency. The science should inform those desired conditions.
30

31 Chair Silvestrini asked Ms. Mickelson to overview possible funding strategies. Strategy 2 was
32 discussed. Ms. Mickelson explained that an appropriation of \$95,000 was received from the State
33 Legislature for a portion of the study. Approximately \$34,000 of that would be put towards Phase
34 I and the remaining \$61,000 would be applied to Phase II. During the 2021-2022 budget building
35 process, \$50,000 had been returned to reserves. However, it would be possible to pull that money
36 back from reserves and add the remaining funds from the appropriation for a total of \$111,000 for
37 Phase II. Additional funds would still be needed. They could be requested from Salt Lake City,
38 Salt Lake County, and other entities. Ms. Mickelson reported that approximately \$143,500 of
39 additional funds would be needed to complete the study.
40

41 Strategy 3 involved asking for more money from the State, but that was not currently an option.
42 Strategy 4 was to spend down the reserves and ask member jurisdictions to increase their
43 contributions. Strategy 5 was to spend down the reserves. Ms. Mickelson explained that other
44 items, such as short-term projects and other budgeted costs, would need to be eliminated. Strategy
45 6 stated that because the length of the study had been extended, funding could take place over two

1 fiscal years. There would be a dollar amount of \$247,000 from the next fiscal year and \$40,000
2 from fiscal year 2022-2023.

3
4 Mr. Shea wondered whether it would be possible for Dr. Smith to break down the numbers. The
5 CWC could look into funding the ecological aspect of the study first, have Dr. Smith report back,
6 and then make a decision about whether or not to fund the social aspect. Councilor Jim Bradley
7 asked when an ecological assessment would be available. Ms. Mickelson reported that the
8 extended Visitor Use Study would be completed in August 2022 and there would be seasonal
9 reports from Utah State University for the Commission to review.

10
11 Councilor Bradley wondered whether the Visitor Use Study data would be able to assist with the
12 Utah Department of Transportation (“UDOT”) Little Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Impact
13 Statement (“EIS”) discussions. Chair Silvestrini noted that the decision to extend the Visitor Use
14 Study was done knowing that UDOT would likely release their Draft EIS before the completion
15 of the study. He asked Dr. Smith if it would be possible to break down the second phase of the
16 study into ecological and social aspects. Dr. Smith explained that he could break out the cost
17 differences or eliminate the social surveys from the current scope of work if that was desired.
18 Chair Silvestrini felt it would be better to separate the costs rather than eliminate certain costs. It
19 would be useful to see a breakdown of the numbers.

20
21 Mayor Sondak reported that he recently had a conversation with Laura Briefer. She had
22 communicated with Josh Van Jura from UDOT. Mr. Van Jura stated that even if the preferred
23 transportation alternative was issued shortly, UDOT would still be interested in CWC feedback
24 between the time the preferred alternative was issued and the time the final recommendation was
25 made. Mr. Becker explained that CWC Staff had done some follow-up with UDOT since then.
26 They were not certain that they could use any of the Visitor Use Study information but encouraged
27 the CWC to do what they wanted to do. He added that the recreation manager for most of the
28 Wasatch was the Forest Service. The Forest Service was more receptive than they had been in the
29 past and had been communicating well with the CWC.

30
31 Chair Silvestrini asked about the timeframe for the ecological aspect of the Visitor Use Study. Dr.
32 Smith reported that the ecological assessment would be done over two seasons. They would collect
33 the appropriate indicators, such as exposed soil, the number of social trails created, and water
34 quality indicators over those two seasons. There would ideally be a fall data collection in fall 2021
35 and then spring data collection in spring 2022. He noted that had been the original proposal.

36
37 Ms. Striefel wondered whether the ecological aspect of the Visitor Use Study would establish the
38 maximum number of visitors that could be in a place before environmental degradation occurred.
39 Dr. Smith noted that the study would look at the relationship between visitor use and environmental
40 degradation. Ms. Striefel believed the social aspect of the study would make it possible to better
41 manage the resource. Dr. Smith explained that the ecological assessment was one measure of
42 capacity and the social assessment was another measure of capacity. The social aspect of the
43 Visitor Use Study would provide additional data that could potentially assist capacity-related
44 decisions in the future. Ms. Striefel felt it was important to move forward with the full study and
45 to obtain all of the necessary information from the experts.

1 Chair Silvestrini asked whether there would be cost savings if the ecological and social aspects of
2 the study were done together. Dr. Smith reported that there were economies of scale. The same
3 crew would be used to do the ecological site assessments and the visitor surveys. The human
4 resource costs would be less if the ecological and social aspects of the study were done at the same
5 time. He explained that it would cost more to separate them out.
6

7 Councilor Bradley had concerns related to funding. He was nervous about being able to obtain
8 enough funding without jeopardizing other CWC work. He noted that spreading the study out
9 over two fiscal years could make budgeting easier. Councilor Bradley appreciated the perspective
10 shared by Ms. Striefel but noted that the ecological assessment was critical. Chair Silvestrini felt
11 there were benefits to both pieces of the study. If there was an economy that could be achieved by
12 doing the data collection at one time, it made sense to try to figure out how to fund that. He
13 commented that it could require the CWC to sacrifice other programs in order to do so. The Visitor
14 Use Study had been a priority for a long time but there were decisions to be made about funding.
15

16 Mr. Fisher commented that Save Our Canyons would be willing to contribute to the Visitor Use
17 Study. Additionally, they could help write grants in order to potentially augment some of the
18 funding. He noted that there were real costs being borne by municipalities as visitation continued
19 to increase. The information from the Visitor Use Study would make it easier for local
20 governments and the Forest Service to better plan for future needs. Mayor Sondak noted that the
21 offer of support from Save Our Canyons was very generous. Further discussions were had about
22 possible funding sources for Phase II of the study.
23

24 Mr. Becker wondered whether the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee would feel comfortable
25 making a recommendation to the CWC Board. He noted that Dr. Smith might be able to provide
26 a breakdown of the study as it related to the ecological and social costs. That way when the CWC
27 Board met in July, there would be a significant amount of information available. Ms. Mickelson
28 commented that Phase II of the study had undergone a lot of review by the Budget/Finance/Audit
29 Committee and the Visitor Use Study Work Group. They could conceivably recommend that the
30 proposal be paid over two fiscal years. That would allow time for fundraising efforts and a minimal
31 amount to be taken from reserves.
32

33 Discussions were had about a possible recommendation to the CWC Board. Mayor Sondak noted
34 that the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee could make a recommendation to go ahead with the full
35 study. The CWC Board could make a change to the reserve policy or the CWC could look into
36 fundraising efforts from other entities. Mr. Shea suggested there be a recommendation to continue
37 with the study but that the study be divided into two phases: ecological and social. Mr. Fisher
38 wondered whether that would end up costing more in the long run. Mayor Sondak believed it
39 would as there would need to be separate data collection for the social aspects of the study.
40

41 Councilor Bradley asked how flexible Dr. Smith could be. For instance, he wondered what would
42 happen if the CWC was able to find funding in the next few months. Dr. Smith explained that if
43 the CWC wanted to do an ecological assessment in the summer, that could be done. If additional
44 funding sources became available later for the social study, that work could be folded in. They
45 would need to make up the difference and run the surveys for whatever period of time went beyond
46 the start of the study. Mayor Sondak wondered when Phase I would be completed. Dr. Smith

1 reported that Phase I of the original agreement had an estimated timeline of October 2021. They
2 were almost ready to finalize the preliminary report on the Legislative review, existing data review,
3 and interviews. That would be shared with the CWC soon.
4

5 Mayor Sondak wondered whether there would be duplicate data from the ecological collection
6 proposed in Phase II. Dr. Smith explained that there was some existing ecological data but it was
7 not consistent throughout the entire area. The data needed to be collected in a consistent and
8 uniform fashion. He did not believe there would be any overlap or duplication of data.
9

10 **MOTION:** Mayor Sondak moved that the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee recommend to the
11 CWC Board that they move forward with a phased approach for the Visitor Use Study. The CWC
12 would engage their own resources for the ecological aspects of the proposed Phase II study and
13 wait to see what financing was available before moving forward with the social aspects of the
14 proposed Phase II study. Councilor Bradley seconded the motion. The motion passed with the
15 unanimous consent of the Committee.
16

17 Chair Silvestrini felt it was important to determine how to present the information to the CWC
18 Board. Mayor Sondak suggested that they inform Commissioners that there was universal support
19 for the ecological aspects and a fair amount of consensus for the social aspects of the study. The
20 Budget/Finance/Audit Committee had tried to prioritize the different aspects due to funding
21 concerns. Ms. Mickelson noted that the next CWC Board Meeting would be on July 12, 2021.
22

23 Mr. Shea volunteered to assist CWC Staff in writing a two-page memorandum that explained past
24 complications related to Phase II of the Visitor Use Study and how they wanted to proceed. Chair
25 Silvestrini liked the idea. Mr. Becker suggested that the two-page summary could be put together
26 and then circulated to the Committee for further refinement. It could then be forwarded to the full
27 Commission for review prior to the next CWC Board Meeting.
28

29 Annalee Munsey commented that she had discussed funding strategies and the scope of the Visitor
30 Use Study proposal with Sandy City and Salt Lake City. Chair Silvestrini thanked Ms. Munsey.
31 He also noted that he would speak further with Mr. Becker about the best way to present the
32 information to the CWC Board. Chair Silvestrini thanked Dr. Smith for his time and for attending
33 the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting.
34

35 • **CLOSE BUDGET/FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING**

36
37 2. **Chair Jeff Silvestrini will Close the Committee Meeting as Chair of the**
38 **Budget/Finance/Audit Committee of the Central Wasatch Commission.**
39

40 **MOTION:** Councilor Bradley moved to adjourn the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee. Mayor
41 Sondak seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Committee.
42

43 The Central Wasatch Commission Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting adjourned at
44 approximately 4:48 p.m.

1 *I hereby certify that the foregoing represents a true, accurate, and complete record of the Central*
2 *Wasatch Commission Budget/Finance/Audit Committee Meeting held Wednesday, June 23, 2021.*

3

4 *Teri Forbes*

5 Teri Forbes

6 T Forbes Group

7 Minutes Secretary

8

9 Minutes Approved: _____