

Mayor's Report

19 February 2023 – 3 March 2023

Larry Jacobsen

Greetings, Nibley! You are my boss, and here are some highlights of items I worked on during the past two weeks.

I am starting with a request. If you find these status reports worthwhile, then you might give me some feedback by simply texting me, "I read it" to 435-512-7495. Thanks!

Water and Snow

The March newsletter focused on water, and I am going to put in this report a couple of shortcuts so you can track updated graphs shown in the newsletter. First, here is a shortcut to the water in the snowpack at Bug Lake, one of the sites in a US Department of Agriculture network that measures our snowpack. The gray line is the historical, most common amount of water, and the blue line is this year's snowpack water. The storms at the end of February were impressive. To encourage you to follow the link, I am not pasting the graph in this report.

www.tinyurl.com/buglakesnow

Second, here is a link to the real-time flow rates on the Blacksmith Fork river. Because this is the one that will be the most interesting when the spring runoff starts, city staff have also put this link on our website so you have easy access to it. Please have a look.

www.tinyurl.com/bsfrealtime

BRAG Human Services

I have previously mentioned that I am on the Bear River Association of Governments (BRAG) Governing Board. That job led to another appointment on the BRAG Human Services Committee. I am excited about this new assignment. I attended my first meeting in this role last week and heard about the many services offered through BRAG. Rather than list them all here, please visit the BRAG website (www.brag.utah.gov). You will see from the website that these services range from utility bill assistance to help completing income tax returns.

The big topic at the meeting was hearing about the new William A. Burnard Warming Center (www.wabwarmingcenter.org/) that provides safety and warmth for unhoused individuals and families during the Cache Valley winter months. This is not a homeless shelter, but a place for overnight, temporary relief from cold temperatures. The Warming Center is a separate entity from BRAG, but the cooperation between BRAG and the Warming Center helps document the homeless need so Federal assistance can come to Cache Valley. Becky Yeager (I'm Becky's husband) is one of the many volunteers at the Warming Center, and these are the people that

make it possible. When Becky started volunteering at the Warming Center, I asked her, “Why would an unsheltered person decide to spend the winter in Cache Valley? There must be warmer options.” I have since learned that the people who use the Warming Center all have a connection to Cache Valley. Those connections include employment, as many of the unsheltered in our valley are employed by local companies. In addition, those connections include family and community. Many thanks to the people that make the Warming Center a reality. If you know someone who needs respite from a cold night, please let them know about the Warming Center.

Utah Land Use Institute Workshop

Levi Roberts, Nibley City Planner, and I helped on a discussion panel put on by the Utah Land Use Institute (<https://utahlanduse.org/>) last week. The workshop’s focus was on preserving community character and open space. My job was to give an introduction to the workshop, and I tried to remind the elected and appointed officials in the audience that the challenges associated with growth that we struggle with at the local level are a consequence of success. That success includes economic success (Cache Valley’s unemployment hovers at a low rate between 1.5 to 2.0 percent.) and familial success (86 percent of Cache Valley’s population increase between 2010 and 2020 was the result of us having kids.). To make the point that we have contributed to the forces that drive growth, I asked the following question: are we tired of winning yet? I’m not sure if that point came through, but I was happy to see the workshop stress that “winning” includes preserving community character.

I believe that Nibley City has tried to be on the forefront of this goal with efforts like the Open Space Subdivision process and the Transfer of Development Rights currently being contemplated by the City Council. Given the changes that have come to Nibley, Cache Valley, and northern Utah in the past twenty years, I won’t claim that we have found the magic formula to freeze time, but I will urge us to keep trying. We must keep trying to find the thin line that balances private property rights to develop land with community rights that preserve our character. If you have ideas on how to find that appropriate balance, please share them with me.

Meeting with US Representative Blake Moore

Justin Maughan, Nibley City Manager, and I had a chance to visit Nibley Elementary School at the same time as our US Representative, Blake Moore. Representative Moore talked to the Nibley Elementary fifth grade about (1) being fiscally responsible by saving early for retirement, (2) not depending on anyone else to take care of you, and (3) living the Utah Way that embraces inclusivity and being civil with one another. After Representative Moore spent time with the fifth graders, a small group that included Principal King, Justin, and I met with Representative Moore. During that meeting, I shared that one of the best things about municipal governance is that there are no R’s and D’s behind the names of elected officials. As a result,

our City Council works with one another to find solutions rather than build partisan coalitions focused on building power. I asked Representative Moore if he could inspire that local governance approach at the federal level.

CDC Walkability Virtual Academy

I have mentioned that Levi Roberts (Nibley City Planner), several county staff, and I are on a Nibley team taking part in training provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) with the goal of building walkable communities. As I have thought about Nibley as a walkable community, I have worried that we may not have enough walkable destinations in our town to become a community that chooses active transportation over driving. For example, given the distance to shopping outlets, walking to the grocery store may be out of reach. However, as I thought about it some more, I realized we do have walkable destinations. We have parks, churches, and schools. One of the biggest safety challenges for the three elementary schools in Nibley is providing safe pick-up and drop-off for parents that drive their kids to school. According to the Cache County School District, these kids live close enough to the school that the district does not provide bus service for them. I am not being critical of the parents' decisions to drive their kids to school. However, I am committed to learning what challenges exist that encourage driving over walking. It might be concern for safety, it might be weather related, it could be distance, or any number of things that I haven't thought of. Once we understand those challenges, we might be able to work on changes to improve walkability in Nibley City. Interestingly, in last week's session, one of the instructors mentioned a project that he worked on in Boston that dealt with this very same walk-to-school issue some twenty years ago. I guess figuring out how to encourage walking to school over driving isn't unique to Nibley.

Watermark Update

I have mentioned previously about the possibility of the property north of the Thomas Edison Charter School (called the Watermark property) disconnecting from Logan City and annexing to Nibley City. Although it would be a long process, there is optimism for this possibility from the property owners, the Charter School, and Nibley City. Last week I received from the property owners their land-use expectation if they came to Nibley. That expectation would be a substantially smaller impact to the school than the impact that Logan City already allows. However, the density expectation from the landowner needs to balance against a setback buffer that would benefit the school, and it will take some concept planning to find that balance. The property owner agreed to work on that concept design. When that is complete, we will share it with the school and the City Council to see if there is an intersection of desires between the three parties.

Utah Legislation

I mentioned in the last report that this year's Utah legislative session has seen a number of bills that would affect the processes that govern residential development. While the motivation for these bills is advertised as providing affordable housing, I feel they are more aimed at developers maximizing their profits at a time that the demand for housing is far outpacing the supply (too much winning?). To that point, the sponsors of these bills are largely legislators who are developers themselves or organizations formed to lobby the interests of developers. I admit my bias, as my spidey senses tingle anytime a developer tries to affect the jurisdiction of local municipalities. One of the most egregious bills was abandoned at the last minute (at least for this year) in part thanks to opposition by the Utah League of Cities and Towns (ULCT), along with individual mayors and city councilmembers that rallied against it. This bill would have allowed land development through the creation of Development Infrastructure Districts (DIDs) outside the land-use jurisdiction of counties and cities. These districts would be formed by developers, be exempt from county and city land-use ordinances, could take out loans that would be passed to residents, and be granted taxing authority without representation by elected officials.

Because the bill was withdrawn, we dodged a bullet this year. However, factions in the Utah legislature attempt bills like this each year, and these bills are gaining more traction with each session. The result is that the Utah legislature is increasingly taking authority away from local jurisdictions and granting it to themselves and developers. Ironically, this is the same legislature that complains about the federal government sticking their nose in Utah's tent. As I see it, there are undesired circumstances that deter citizens from being part of the state's legislative process. First, the legislature does not require the same open and transparent process of themselves that they require of municipalities. Second, the 45-day legislative session is so fast and furious that it is difficult to keep up. Finally, state legislators are more removed from the citizens that they represent than are local elected officials. These effects are mitigated by the efforts of the ULCT, who lobby the legislature on our behalf, and the efforts of locally elected mayors and councilmembers. There is also a role for individual citizens to play by being more active in the Utah legislative process. I encourage you to do that. Thanks for letting me vent.

With that, I will end this report. Thanks for reading, boss. Please call, text, or write any time.

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My continued appreciation to Leslie Maughan for proofreading and giving feedback on this report before you see it.