

## **Nibley City Mayor's Report**

**8 January 2024 – 21 January 2024**

Larry Jacobsen

Greetings, boss! Thanks for reading this report.

These reports are not intended to replace the official public notifications on Nibley's website ([www.nibleycity.com](http://www.nibleycity.com)) and the Utah Public Notice website ([www.utah.gov/pmnl/](http://www.utah.gov/pmnl/)), but rather to provide advance information about what the city is working on before the official notifications.

With the new year, there seems to be lots of new activity and new proposals. I will try to hit the high points in this report and follow up in future reports as the proposals progress. Here are the topics in this report.

- **Morgan Farm: Refining USU Concept Plans and Grant Award**
- **New Ordinance Regulating Basements in Nibley**
- **Dignity Index Revisited**
- **Active Transportation**
- **Indoor Recreation Discussions**
- **Park at Ridgeline Park Phase 2 Engineering Design**
- **Commercial Development Possibility**
- **Cooperation with the Cache County School District**

### **Morgan Farm: Refining USU Concept Plans and Grant Award**

Justin Maughan, Nibley City Manager, and I had an exciting meeting with Mike and Roxie Christensen, Volunteer Morgan Farm Managers, and USU personnel from the Department of Landscape Architecture and the Extension Office. I mentioned previously (link below) the chance to see 14 different concept plans for the farm put together by a USU Landscape Architecture class. These plans were inspiring and diverse, giving us some great ideas about what Morgan Farm could become. Because this was a USU class project, there was no cost to Nibley for these concept plans. To follow up on that effort, Jake Powell, USU LAEP Extension Specialist, will refine and combine those 14 plans into a couple of different concept plans that keep the best parts of the students' work.

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While at that meeting, JayDee Gunnell, USU Extension Professor, let us know that he received a grant for between \$40k and \$60k (the actual amount is pending) to complete development of the community gardens at the Morgan Farm. This grant came from the USDA and ours was the only one awarded in Utah. JayDee told us this would fully develop the community gardens, including a high-tunnel greenhouse. This grant required no matching funds from Nibley City. Mike and Roxy are working on another grant through the USU Extension Office that will focus on shelters for 4H animals at the farm. We will find out about that award in February. The

Morgan Farm is a great asset to Nibley City, and thanks to volunteer efforts and grant funding, has the chance to be a special place that makes us proud to be Nibley citizens.

### **New Ordinance Regulating Basements in Nibley**

I previously mentioned (link below) work by city staff and the city council to regulate new basements in Nibley because of problems caused by high ground water. As reported, I see these decisions that draw the line between individual property rights and rights of the community as one of the fundamental responsibilities of local governance. The discussion on the draft ordinance is one of the few times that my life as an electrical engineer who designs environmental instrumentation and my life in local governance have come together. The old ordinance relied on physical groundwater measurements to determine maximum basement depth, and the draft ordinance relies on a groundwater map from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). As an instrumentation engineer, my historical bias favored on-site measurements rather than a general map. However, discussions showed problems with the on-site measurements that I had not considered, and I promised I would do outside research in an attempt to get comfortable with the map. The council adopted the draft ordinance that uses the NRCS map, a decision I came to agree with, but there were some tense moments during our discussion that led to that decision. Recalling those tense moments gives me a chance to introduce the next topic in this report.

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### **Dignity Index Revisited**

The Dignity Index (<https://www.dignityindex.us/>) is an effort “to encourage Americans to reject ‘us vs them’ thinking and stand together in common purpose.” It does not say we have to agree; it does say we should focus on disagreeing with dignity. Governor Cox has similar intentions when he urges us to “disagree better.” I have mentioned the Dignity Index before (link below), and last week the Utah League of Cities and Towns sponsored a seminar for all Cache Valley mayors and council members to learn about the Dignity Index. The Dignity Index ranks political discourse on a scale of 1 (low dignity) to 8 (high dignity). While thinking about that scale, the tense moments while we were discussing a new groundwater ordinance came to mind. How would I rate our discussion? I forced myself to listen to the YouTube recording of our first meeting during the groundwater debate, and I am proud of how our city council and city staff respected each other, despite having different opinions and backgrounds. I am giving us a 7 on the Dignity Index, which means “We fully engage with the other side, discussing even values and interests we don’t share, open to admitting mistakes or changing our minds.” In the previous paragraph, I mentioned my 40-year historical bias relating to on-site measurements to determine allowed basement depths. However, I promised to research the idea of using the NRCS map rather than on-site measurements. Towards that goal, I talked at length with four licensed civil engineers and one licensed geologist, the type of people that make these groundwater measurements and write the stamped reports. Based on about six hours of

discussion, it was those professionals that helped me decide the NRCS map was the better approach. This is a rather long story to get to this point: being open to changing our minds requires a lot more work than sticking to our historical bias. If we truly want to have meaningful discussions intended to make good decisions, we must be willing to not only speak with dignity, but to do the work required to understand the other side's point of view. I hope we can set that as a goal at all levels of government.

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### **Active Transportation**

Levi Roberts, Nibley City Planner, led a meeting where we selected the consultants who will help us write our first-ever, stand-alone Nibley Active Transportation Plan. I am excited about this work. I see this effort as an important part of local governance that provides connected, healthy, and safe communities. I attended a Cache County Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) meeting last week where we started a practical discussion about bike lanes versus shared vehicle lanes. I love dedicated bike lanes, and I realize that they come at a cost with an impact on parking and vehicle throughput. I look forward to these types of discussions as we work on our new plan.

### **Indoor Recreation Discussions**

I was involved with three different meetings about potential indoor recreation spaces during the last two weeks. There is pent-up demand for such a facility, and Nibley's residents aren't unique in their desires for indoor recreation. The solution to meet the demand could come on a number of different scales, from a county-wide proposal, to an interlocal agreement between cities in the south of Cache County, to a Nibley-only approach, to a partnership between private enterprise and local government(s). To understand the costs associated with constructing, maintaining, and operating an indoor recreation facility at different scales, Nibley City is in the process of hiring a consultant to help us form the appropriate proposal to present to our citizens. I know it is difficult to wait for this proposal to take shape, notwithstanding the need to be careful, thoughtful, and thorough as we talk about spending taxpayer money. I will keep you informed as we move closer to a proposal, and please be on the lookout to help form that proposal.

### **Park at Ridgeline Park Phase 2 Engineering Design**

Tom Dickenson, Nibley City Engineer, held a meeting with our design consultant for engineering work on Phase 2 of the Ridgeline Park Park. This phase will include a bicycle skills course and pump track, and we have some great design ideas to consider from a consultant with lots of innovative and practical experience. We will be applying for a Utah Outdoor Recreation Grant in March to help construct this phase of the park. Fingers crossed.

### **Commercial Development Possibility**

City staff and I met with a potential commercial developer who is interested in a project on the west end of 2600 South. This is the same commercial developer, as well as the current land owner, that we have been talking to for nearly two years. Therefore, this may not seem like big news. However, the agreed-upon next step after our meeting is to have a commercial concept plan to present to the Planning Commission in February or early March. I am impressed with the practical approach the commercial developer brings, and I am excited to see this project move forward. When this happens, it will be good for Nibley.

### **Cooperation with the Cache County School District**

To finish, I will mention a very promising meeting that several mayors from cities in the Cache County School District had with Todd McKee (Cache County School Superintendent), his staff, and several school board members. The school district is a different political jurisdiction than Cache County and the municipalities within Cache County. As a result, we don't always keep each other up to date. In reality, the school district plays a big role in Nibley's land-use planning. New residential housing often follows the placement of new schools. Conversely, residential development increases the local demand for new schools. I was happy to see a spirit of cooperation expressed by Superintendent McKee, including his intent to develop and share with the municipalities a 20-year facilities plan so we can work together on these land-use issues. Hmm ... maybe we should talk about indoor recreation facilities with the school district. It's been done before, with different levels of success. I will leave that for a future report.

This was sort of a long report. It must have been a busy two weeks. Sometimes I'm not sure how effective these reports are to Nibley citizens. Nevertheless, it helps me regroup by writing them, so I'm going to keep doing it. My thanks if you are on the distribution list for these reports. If not and you would like to be, please let me know.

Thanks for reading,  
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My continued and sincere appreciation to volunteer Leslie Maughan for proofreading and reviewing these reports for clarity before you see them.