

The Salt Lake Tribune

<http://www.sltrib.com>

Article Last Updated: 10/13/2005 12:43 AM

Oquirrh ski resort could add glitz to new west bench

Grand plan: Proposal is just part of a huge vision for western S.L. County

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The Salt Lake Tribune
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WEST VALLEY CITY - When future generations of Salt Lake Valley skiers head for the mountains, they may be going west.

A potential ski resort - the closest to an international airport anywhere in the world - is just one element under consideration as part of a gargantuan planning effort for Salt Lake County's barren bench between the Great Salt Lake's wetlands and Utah County's western slopes in the shadow of the Oquirrh.

On Wednesday, planners and policymakers got their first peek at a draft master plan for the 93,000-acre west bench owned by Kennecott Land.

Highlights include two urban centers, 163,000 housing units, walkable neighborhood villages, north-south mass transit with east-west connections, room for a 100-acre college campus, a trail system, potential reservoirs and 34,000 acres of open space.

The proposed ski area would perch lifts near a 9,300-foot peak in the hills above Copperton west of Soldier Flats.

"This is an extraordinary undertaking," lead planning consultant Peter Calthorpe told the crowd crammed into an E Center conference room. "Balancing east and west in this community might be a really healthy thing on lots of levels."

Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon says the planning opportunity is unprecedented. By 2060, the west bench alone could swell the valley's population by 500,000 people and generate 100,000 additional jobs. But he noted the stakes are high.

"We'll have people studying us from all over the country and the world," Corroon said. "The opportunity we have is fantastic."

Kennecott hired Calthorpe Associates, a Berkeley, Calif.-based urban architectural firm, to help design the 144-square-mile swath.

The primary idea, Calthorpe emphasized, is to form walkable communities with mixed-use development - buzzwords in the sprouting world of new urbanism. The goal: avoid the "chaotic collage" mushrooming between so many urban centers and the suburbs.

Much of the housing would be patterned after Daybreak, Kennecott's popular South Jordan development that features classic architecture, green space and homes equipped with environmentally friendly power sources and wireless Internet.

A range of housing - from affordable to \$1.5 million units - would be clustered close to transportation hubs, designed to cut down on vehicle use.

Town and village centers would include blends of retail, housing and business - "no more isolated office parks," Calthorpe said - while neighborhood clusters would feature churches, schools, supermarkets and recreation centers. Industrial ventures would be concentrated on the north end near existing mine tailings.

The layout would be based on "places, not zones," incorporating historical names such as Little Valley, Clay Hollow and Midas Gulch along with Bingham, Butterfield and Barneys.

All the development would abide buffers from any fault lines and landslide areas, as well as streams and the Bonneville Shoreline.

"It will be a wonderful addition to the valley," said Riverton Mayor Mont Evans.

But Midvale Mayor JoAnn Seghini wonders about the unavoidable strain on police and public works resources.

"We've got to balance the absolute cost of building community with the real cost of providing services," she said.

"I didn't hear that in the discussion."

By contrast, the financial forecast from consultants focused on the positive.

Total construction of the west bench would cost \$28 billion and increase the number of existing homes in Salt Lake County by 50 percent, according to James Wood of the University of Utah's Bureau of Economic and Business Research. Retail in the county would balloon 25 percent, and office space would double.

All told, the county stands to see \$10 billion in extra tax revenue, an average of \$200 million a year.

"There are a million implementation questions we still need to address," cautioned Jeff Daugherty, director of planning and development services for the county.

Still, he praised Wednesday's summit - two more are scheduled before the county considers the master plan near year's end - for bringing together stakeholders more interested in proper planning than who gets control.

"That will lead to good government."

Calthorpe says his model should remain flexible, but insists the density projections are about right.

"We think it will stand the test of time."

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West bench plan by the numbers

- * Total acres planned for development: 41,000
- * Acres for open space: 34,000
- * Housing units: 163,000
- * New jobs: 105,000
- * Annual tax revenue: \$200 million
- * Boost in population: 500,000

More meetings set

Two more summits on Kennecott Land's west-bench master plan are scheduled for Oct. 26 and Dec. 7 at West Valley City's E Center.