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West bench area called model of smart growth

Envision Utah lauds Kennecott development

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This is the first place light hits as the sun crests the Wasatch Mountains into the Salt Lake Valley. It is the west bench — an area a valley away in location and growth-planning philosophy from its sister community on the east bench.

Nine years after it first began an effort to curb sprawl and sloppy growth in Utah, Envision Utah and members of its parent group said Thursday they finally have a model example of "smart-growth" principles the groups have so long encouraged.

Look west, these leaders say, to the area near Utah's famous open-pit copper mine on Kennecott property that stretches up and across the Oquirrh Mountains.

At the fore of this effort is the 93,000-acre parcel of land under development by Kennecott Land.

"We exist to build a great and enduring community on the west bench of the Salt Lake Valley," Peter McMahon, president of Kennecott Land, told a group of businesspeople, community leaders, planners and local officials gathered for a breakfast hosted by the Coalition for Utah's Future and Envision Utah.

"You have done a beautiful job of incorporating all of those elements that we know are so important to us here in Utah," Pamela Atkinson, new chairwoman of the Coalition for Utah's Future, told McMahon.

In the next 25 years, more than a half-million people will make their home in the Beehive State. Many of those people will live in communities developed by Kennecott Land, McMahon said.

Later this year, Kennecott land will open "Daybreak," a 4,200-acre community that will eventually include 13,667 homes, 1,200 acres of parks, and nine million square feet of commercial space.

Daybreak neighborhoods will be "walkable, workable and liveable," which McMahon acknowledged was a marketing slogan wisely chosen and accurate nonetheless.

Daybreak homes will use 30 percent less energy than a typical Utah home, for example, and water-efficient landscaping and a secondary water system will allow homes in the project to use 15 percent less water.

"For years we've looked for a place to point to say 'This represents the Envision Utah principles,' " said Robert Grow, a long-time community leader on growth-planning efforts. "We finally have one."

Gov. Olene Walker has lauded the company for leading the way in using Envision Utah's "Quality Growth Strategy," which asks communities to consider how to use and develop land wisely, how to promote open space and conserve precious resources.

"By building quality housing, protecting open space, and creating a pedestrian-friendly transportation plan, they will create quality, timeless communities for Utah families," Walker said.

Jordan District children living near Kennecott in South Jordan could someday attend classes in a school that doubles as a community and recreation center — one of only a handful of such projects in the nation.

The Jordan Board of Education has OK'd a resolution to continue discussions on developing the joint facility with Kennecott Land Co. Construction. The school/recreation center would be located in the new "Daybreak" development and will be built with money from a voter-approved \$281 million bond.

The Daybreak project has injected some enthusiasm into a growth-planning effort sometimes stymied by contradictory desires among Utah residents and elected officials.

Utahns generally agree they want to protect open space, have less traffic congestion and better air quality, but some towns and cities have been reluctant to make building-block decisions at local planning commissions and city councils.

In 1999, Gov. Mike Leavitt and GOP leaders made passage of the Utah Quality Growth Act a top priority. Still, it took nearly the entire 45-day session of the Legislature before the majority of 104 elected officials finally agreed on the 26th draft of the act many people called landmark legislation to help shape the way Utah will grow in the future.

The Quality Growth Commission was a large part of the act and was charged with answering

challenging growth-related questions while ensure private-property rights are protected. The commission has disseminated dwindling quality growth funds to communities, but has done little else.

Since 1995, Envision Utah, under the umbrella of the Coalition for Utah's Future, has worked to weave quality-growth philosophies into the minds and plans of those who decide how Utahns are going to live, work, travel and play. Ultimately Envision Utah has had greatest success patiently educating planners and city officials in hundreds of Utah towns — providing tangible tools to help communities plan their acres more efficiently to include green space, affordable housing, various kinds of zoning, transportation options and other economic considerations.

"This has been a great blending of private-sector commitment and public-sector support," Grow said. "It really is the perfect way to go."

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