

## Moab Area Land Use

### PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE + ADDITIONAL COMMENTS VIA EMAIL – SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Moab City Center Building

Tuesday, March 26, 2019 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 27, 2019 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

**TOTAL IN ATTENDANCE** (those who signed in): **107** (57 on 3/26; 50 on 3/27)

**Total Written Comments Received at Meetings: 25**

**Total Written Comments Received via Email (as of April 2, 2019): 26**

The purpose of the open houses was to get a sense of residents' current concerns and desires, particularly relating to the moratorium on overnight accommodations, as well as their concerns and desires for the future. The following summarizes key ideas heard at those meetings and input submitted via comment form and email (received as of April 2, 2019).

The purpose of this document is to capture the primary themes and sentiments expressed during the open house events. If you feel like there are any omissions or mischaracterizations of comments submitted to date, we encourage you to send or call us your feedback at [moab@ldi-ut.com](mailto:moab@ldi-ut.com) or 801.474.3300 (ask for Mark or Jenny).

## Quality of Life

### General:

- Moab has experienced significant growth in recent years, especially within the lodging and tourism sector. Many characterized this trend as too much, unwanted, and/or undesirable growth, and that it had fundamentally altered the community's character. Many suggested the Moab Area no longer feels like the place and community they valued, identified a lack of balance in the growth that has occurred, and noted different ways in which their quality of life has diminished, especially in the last three to five years. It was relayed that residents, friends, and neighbors have been moving away or making plans to do so, because of these changes.
- It was suggested that Moab and Grand County should take advantage of current opportunities to "creatively turn around the accelerating slide towards social, economic and environmental catastrophe."
- Strong desires to slow growth (in general, and in the lodging and tourism sector) to a level where people will still want to live and recreate here was expressed, with sustainable growth" and "smart growth" being used to describe this shift.

### Community Character:

- There is a great desire (and vision) for Moab to be a place that is "more than tourism" (See "What would you like Moab to be in 20 years?" section below)

- There is a desire for the Moab Area to be comprised of a diverse population; Some expressed concerns about fees/restrictions/economic conditions that might discourage or prohibit certain populations from visiting or living in the Moab Area.

Transit/Transportation:

- Traffic and congestion have increased dramatically with growth/increased tourism; specific problem areas cited by residents included:
  - The north end of town where US 191 changes from two lanes to four,
  - Recently signaled intersections,
  - Left turns in the downtown core, and
  - Parking.

These transportation trends, including infrastructure deficiencies, are seen as an impact to resident's quality of life and as a public safety issue.

- Regional transportation planning was identified as a need, with the following considerations being highlighted:
  - Bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly roadways
  - Curb cuts and dedicated lanes
  - Special attention to Spanish Valley Drive (particularly, its speed and impact to surrounding neighborhoods)
  - Carrying capacity and level of service studies
  - Public transportation and transit
  - Travel between the future USU Moab campus and downtown, as well as multi-family housing and employment issues
  - Future bedroom community development in nearby communities such as Monticello, Green River, and Thompson
- Parking was cited as a big concern. Specific circumstances described included:
  - Inadequate parking at homes where multiple people staying overnight or living, which often results in illegal parking or blockages of adjacent neighbors, and
  - Inadequate parking for different user groups (e.g. trucks and trailers).
- A need and desire for public transportation through the Valley and to the National Parks was communicated, particularly if significant amounts of residential development occurs in the southern reaches of the Valley; Public transportation may need to be considered from nearby communities such as Monticello and Green River, if rent/housing continues to become less affordable and workforce housing shifts to those areas.
- Some identified the need for more protected bike lanes as current bicycling conditions could be viewed as unsafe. Green infrastructure for stormwater management was cited as a potential use for establishing a buffer.
- The Moab Area has developed with relatively wide residential roads, and current standards also require wide roads to be constructed in new developments. Some recommended rethinking the road design standards and considering other beneficial uses in place of some roadway width and that development costs could be reduced by reducing road construction costs and land dedicated to roads instead of other uses.

### Overcrowding:

- Many expressed the ratio of hotels, short-term rentals, and other overnight accommodations to permanent residences as severely unbalanced (too many overnight accommodations); They suggested that the current supply of accommodations is sufficient and wanted to see a limit put on building additional accommodations in favor of, or in addition to, putting more attention towards the needs of Moab residents.
- It was suggested that different overnight accommodations should be treated differently (e.g. hotels vs. RV campgrounds). One person mentioned there were not enough places to accommodate RVs in Moab. Others suggested that “out-of-town” owners/developers should be held to different development standards than “local” owners/developers. Yet another individual feels like City/County to treat nightly condos projects differently than hotel projects, citing that condos have greater opportunity to be more sustainable (use less water, hire local property management companies, etc).
- Multiple individuals reported anecdotes from tourists/visitors that overcrowding in Moab negatively impacted their experience and may not or will not return, with one of those individuals saying that a recent guest at their condo/rental said, “This is a great place you have here, but there are too many people. We may or may not come back.”
- A sentiment of special event fatigue was expressed. Many feel the number and size of events occurring in Moab has increased, and the season for events taking place has extended. They expressed a desire:
  - To see fewer events permitted,
  - Additional restrictions placed on events, and
  - Periods of time restricted from events, such as a certain number of no-event weekends even during peak seasons.
- The proposed Arches National Park reservation system was identified as a potentially beneficial change for slowing visitation.

### Noise:

- Noise from UTVs and other motorized off-road vehicles was identified as another major concern. One resident stated, “City residents aren’t allowed to have roosters, yet UTVs are allowed at all hours of the day.”

## **Environmental Impacts**

### Water:

- Many expressed concern about having adequate water, especially with the amount of development/growth occurring; They expressed a desire to see greater coordination with San Juan County over this issue.
- Water consumption by tourists was specifically raised as a concern; Possible solutions offered were using water tokens to set limitations on time/amount of water consumed and regulating the size of pools that hotels can build.
- Others expressed that development/current activities/land use practices (grazing) impact the water sources and should be considered when planning for the future (e.g. the “dust on snow”

phenomenon is changing the hydrology of the Colorado River); It was mentioned that these activities also impact the local soils and that soil is also a non-renewable resource.

#### Landscape:

- It was noted that dispersed camping is taking a toll on the environment. Commenters suggested that overuse of the landscape is occurring, and questioned what the carrying capacity of the land. It was suggested that conversations between the local government and state/federal entities need to happen to minimize these impacts and come up with a solution.
- A feeling was expressed that public lands also have a “carrying capacity” and can’t take the current amount of people/use. For example, adding a second access point into and out of Arches NP might address traffic and auto congestion, but it does not increase the land’s carrying capacity.
- UTVs and other motorized off-road vehicles were reported to have greatly increased and encroached in both natural and residential areas the last few years. Commenters noted that the desert is delicate, and expressed concerns that the level of disturbance occurring could cause about “dust bowl” conditions.

Air Quality: Some communicated their experiences with and concerns about worsening air quality caused by grazing, development, and touristic activities in the area. They suggested the City and County need to record/track/mitigate before it becomes a bigger problem.

Light Pollution: Residents communicated a strong desire to protect dark skies in the area. They expressed concern about the impacts of development in San Juan County to the night sky and desire to see coordination between Grand and San Juan counties on the effort.

Wildlife Habitat: Reminders were expressed regarding the need to think about the impacts of development/tourism on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Visitor Education: Many brought up a need, and potential, for spending less money on marketing/advertising Moab as a destination and spending more money on visitor education (e.g. how to limit impacts on and provide care for the area’s unique environment).

### **Regulation/Local Government/Planning**

- Feelings were relayed that local government has not exercised enough will power in denying unwanted development or enforcing regulations on-the-books, and that up-zoning has occurred too often. The need to support local government officials as they make efforts to mitigate some of the “damage to our community” was also communicated.
- Many expressed a desire to see more regulation/controls put into place that would give elected officials far more discretion in determining which projects get approved and constructed, rather than “pre-approved” or “use by right” zoning that currently exists in commercial areas.
- Some observed that a lot of new construction has been/is out of scale for the town; In lieu of large hotels, commenters recommended only allowing smaller-scale hotels, inns or B&B’s and possibly requiring them to have street-level retail or restaurants and adjoining workforce housing.

- There was a desire by some to see zoning regulations in the City of Moab overhauled, specifically: consistency in height calculations, measuring setbacks and clarity in hillside development regulations.
- Some would like to see tiny homes allowed in residential housing areas, with a tiny home specific building code being instituted to make these a compatible use/viable housing option.
- There was a strong desire expressed for a permanent or lengthened moratorium to stop or slow down growth. Another common sentiment was the desire to limit the number of overnight accommodation units allowed.
- Many felt like development has happened without much thought to planning for the future or what residents want Moab to be. There was expressed that zoning could be a way to choose what you wanted What is the end in mind? Do we want unlimited tourist growth or do we want to be sustainable? If you don't build it, they won't come. Zoning seems the best way to do that
- Many residents commented on the need for more regulation in the future. Specific concerns/ideas suggested included:
  - Design: Create design guidelines or other mechanisms to give new construction a direction that cohesive and thoughtful.
  - Viewsheds: Look closely at implementing set backs and height restrictions to preserve valuable views of the canyon rims.
  - "Old Town": Create an overlay that helps preserve the sense of history and place of Moab.
  - Open Space: As the area densifies, acquire open/green space acquired. There is currently a need for more pocket parks and community gathering spaces and open/green space could be mandated in new developments.
  - Trails: Require new developments to provide easements and connections for/to a non-motorized trails.
  - Sustainable Architecture: Require new construction to incorporate passive solar construction.
  - Sustainable Practices: Require low flush toilets and showers in all new and existing overnight accommodations; Require hotels and retail businesses to recycle.
  - Vegetation/Soil Disturbance: Require a restoration plan for the disturbance of any soils or vegetation.
  - Noise: Implement noise requirements on all roads and investigate implementing a no UTVs or noisy motorcycles policy on city streets.
  - Parking: Require adequate on-site parking for recreational vehicles/trailers for all overnight accommodations.
- There was a desire expressed to see incentives and more flexibility for desired uses and less incentives and flexibility for undesired uses (e.g. tourism-related businesses). It was suggested that new hotels could be required to include street-level retail or restaurant space.
- One individual expressed that County high density residential overlays don't work in agricultural and existing residential areas and that existing road infrastructure cannot handle the increase in population.
- Some feel like the State and locals define a good "quality of life" differently and expressed a concern that State laws could potentially limit options that might work best for the Moab area.

- One individual expressed a feeling that landlords in the area need to held more accountable; Conversely, another individual expressed a feeling that there are good landlords out there (nightly rental, specifically) and that these good landlords get “punished” with additional requirements and fees because of the actions of others.
- A concern was expressed that if stricter restrictions occur in Grand County, developers will shift their attention to San Juan County. The amount of potential growth in San Juan County frightens some, particularly because San Juan County currently relies on Grand County for its emergency and sanitation services, and there was a desire expressed to see cooperation/planning between the two counties. One individual suggested that certain requirements could be required if/when development San Juan County is allowed to be serviced by Grand County Water and Sewer services, for example: the implementation of dark sky ordinance, lot size/density restrictions, limitation on large scale development and other commercial enterprises that don’t match the Grand County’s vision.
- One individual expressed a desire for Grand County and Moab work together/function as one “greater Moab area city-county”. They suggested that Grand County annex into Moab (south of Moab to the County line).
- Several individuals articulated the likelihood that an economic slowdown is likely to come. One individual mentioned that the City/County should use any downturn to catch up and get significant planning completed.

#### Overnight Accommodations/Higher Density in Existing Residential Neighborhoods

Varied concerns and opinions were expressed regarding overnight accommodations in residential areas, including the following:

- Allow nightly rental and/or higher density developments in existing residential areas (R-2 zones) causes conflicts; Zoning has been too easily changed on a property by property basis in the past and they would like to zoning be used and enforced to protect existing residential neighborhoods.
- R-3 zones are already mixed-use zones; Overnight/short term rentals should be considered in those zones.
- Rather than outright ban, provide less restrictions on short-term rentals in residential areas; For example, consider limiting the number of weeks or times a year that a home can rented out (Telluride and Austin have both done that).

## **Economy**

- Many expressed a desire for greater local ownership or a direct benefit from tourism to the local community, rather than large corporate/“chain” businesses. Many feel like these large corporate businesses don’t offer fair wages or support the local community (e.g. donations of time/money) and that these large, national chain hotels are “irreparably altering” the physical character and sense of community in the Moab area. One individual expressed the desire to see any resident be able to open up a B&B with profits coming back into the community/to local residents rather than the profit to go to large chain hotels, and another suggested that permits to build new overnight accommodations only to be issued to people who live in the Moab area.

- There is a strong desire to diversify the types of businesses and economy in the Moab area, with a belief that this could help lower the area’s vulnerability during an economic recession.
- There was also a strong feeling that making money/a profit currently seems more important than other pressing issues, such as overcrowding, caring for local/natural resources, etc.; Specifically, there was disappointment expressed that the decision to implement reservation system at Arches—that is anticipated to solve some of the overcrowding/overuse issues—was put on hold because of concerns about the impact to local revenue. One individual put it this way, “Greed is not a planning tool and has reigned supreme in the last several decades.”
- Many feel like space for new commercial enterprises is very limited and that skyrocketing land prices have shut out desirable small entrepreneurial/creative/non-profit opportunities. With every hotel that comes in, they feel like valuable space for other needs disappears and, therefore, would like to see less hotels and more opportunities for other types of businesses.
- Several questions or ideas relating to assessing additional taxes/fees to control or manage unwanted overnight accommodations were expressed, including:
  - Can a local fee be assessed in addition to the state tourism tax?; Are there any additional taxes/impact fees to pay for the tourism-related impacts that could be used to improve conditions in community (for example, improve salaries for teachers, police officers, etc.)?
  - Do timeshares pay transient room tax?
  - Can hotel owners be assessed an additional fee/tax to mitigate for visitor/tourism impacts to infrastructure, EMS services, law enforcement, etc.? Can they be required to “give back” to the town in such ways as affordable housing, education/environmental stewardship programs, and assisting vulnerable populations?
- A few commenters talked of property taxes have increased dramatically for commercial properties. They feel that the increase to property taxes makes it harder to build a successful/profitable business.
- There was a strong desire for advertising of the area to either be stopped entirely or put on hold. One individual felt like advertising should at least be truthful/accurate and, in doing so, would say something like, “Come to Moab to wait in line and hear noise of Razors”. Others expressed a desire to see funding from advertisements promoting tourism shift to educating visitors on how to recreate responsibly/take better care of the land.
- One local business owner felt like as tourism has increased and hotel prices have gone up, there doesn’t seem to be a proportional increase in revenue for local retail businesses.
- Many feel that local businesses are overwhelmed by the amount of tourists, with specific examples including restaurants having long (2 hour) wait times at dinnertime and City Market not being able to keep the basic necessities stocked on their shelves.

## Housing

- There was some support for higher density expressed, if that density was used for housing local residents.
- One individual mentioned that they would rather see affordable housing dispersed around town, than the south end of town grow.

- Many recognized that affordable housing and limited growth can't happen without higher density. One individual mentioned that a conflict of desires exists in the area with many residents wanting to see more affordable housing, but not wanting that housing in their own "backyard".
- A desire was expressed for impact fees waived for affordable housing.
- Several individuals mentioned that they would like to see employers provide housing for their employees. They related that there are many people living out of cars to survive/make ends meet and then they get fined for doing it. There is a great desire for change and solutions to this issue/problem, with one individual suggesting the provision of safe places for temporary workers to park and camp if they unable to afford housing.
- There was optimism expressed regarding the housing that is planned adjacent to the future USU campus. They relayed that there will be both student housing as well as housing for the larger community.
- There was also a fear expressed that some affordable housing is being acquired and flipped (sold at market-rate prices) to make a profit; This situation was specifically linked to those getting help from the Self-Help Housing program, a federal assistance program.
- Some expressed a feeling that the lack of residential housing for year-round residents deters a healthy and diversified population.

## **Employment**

- There is an overwhelming agreement that tourism-related jobs do not pay enough for employees to find adequate housing in the area and many feel like employers should be required to provide affordable housing options for their employees. One individual mentioned that they would like to see a minimum wage increase in Moab to help solve this issue.
- Many see the lack of affordable housing as a deterrent to attracting labor, high skill labor and essential services (teachers, police, nurses, etc.) in particular.
- There was an expression of not enough employees on multiple levels, with some feeling like the number of hotels are putting a strain on the overall available workforce in the area and others citing that employed people have to work long hours because there aren't enough employees.

## **Growth**

- There was expression by a fair amount of people that people live off of tourism in Moab. Some individuals felt like you can't stop growth from happening and others that believe that market will monitor itself (e.g. developers won't invest/build in an oversaturated market)
- A few individuals feel like a greater demand for hotels is a good sign and is much better than the lean times that used to exist with the feeling that that any new hotels should be allowed in the downtown and in commercial areas.
- One individual mentioned that Arches could open up the other end of the park to help facilitate the number of visitors they get, rather than limit/require reservations.

## Re: This Planning Process

- One individual expressed the desire for the City/County to invite developers and pro-development residents to the table and get their input on the moratorium.
- Another individual thought it was important for the project team to reach out to the younger people working here, specifically those who want to stay and live here, but are currently working multiple jobs
- One individual was overwhelmed by the amount of conflicting desires/needs in the community. When they asked “How are we going to solve it?” the Mayor of Moab responded that it wasn’t going to be solved from the top down, but that the community will solve it together.

## Examples to Consider

There was a strong desire to look for possible solutions—specifically, smart and slow growth strategies—both inside and outside of the State of Utah. Specific places mentioned include:

- Ashville, NC: Limited nightly rentals/hotels
- Telluride: Stopped development and the town still continued to thrive
- Gatlinburg, TN (Gateway to the Smoky Mountains): Engaged with state representatives to get things resolved
- Park City, Dot Creek (Cedar City) and Kayenta & Ivins (St. George area): Potential local examples to look at

## What would you like Moab to be in 20 years?

During one of the open house sessions the question “What would you like Moab to be in 20 years?” was asked. The following answers were vocalized in that meeting and comments received after.

- A walkable community
- A family-centered community with younger people/young families; One that isn’t dominated by tourists
- A place that is safe to bike
- A diverse economy; Employment opportunities for different skill sets
- More remote/tech employment opportunities
- Opportunities to build local businesses
- Improved internet/co-working spaces
- A constructed USU campus (more students and faculty)
- Well-funded schools and EM services; A hospital
- Improved road infrastructure
- Better law enforcement (enough to match the number tourists that come here)
- A place people want to live (not a strip of businesses like Las Vegas)
- Have a balance of hotel rooms with residential
- A focus on the natural world rather than restaurants, hotels, services, etc. (this may require charging more/would have an impact on affordability to the tourist)
- Parking lots or garages at both ends of town—to get people parked/out of their cars and create a more walking centered community

- Denser housing near downtown
- Narrower streets
- Permaculture/urban gardening opportunities; Restaurants that compost their food waste
- Public transit along Hwy 191 and to Arches; Also along Mill Creek Drive and Spanish Valley Drive
- More green infrastructure to mitigate flooding and overwhelming heat during the summer months
- Affordable; Livable; Diverse; Cooperative