

SLC Public Lands Responses to Questions raised in the Greater Avenues Community Council Meeting, July 7, 2021.

Q: The amount of and speed of traffic through the upper avenues is impacting our community. What is the City doing about this? Can you also address the impact in regard to parking?

A: The City is committed to enhancements of trailhead and trail access infrastructure, as proposed in the Foothill Trails Master Plan, to facilitate public access to the trail system while helping to manage and mitigate residential impacts from trail access. The City is currently in the design process for trailhead improvements – including visitor amenities, parking, and traffic safety improvements – at numerous trailhead locations. Funding for these improvements has not yet been secured.

Q: Can you discuss the Native American sites which has been impacted? Can anyone expand on the lack of heritage/indigenous archaeology study? What environmental analysis was done prior and during Phase I?

A: Salt Lake City engaged a reputable environmental and cultural resources firm to conduct a resource impact survey in spring 2020 prior to initiation of trail construction, including inquiries sent to cultural resource officers with the Ute, Goshute and Northeastern Shoshone. SLC received no response to inquiries sent to tribal officials. The resource impact survey found no indication of cultural, archaeological or paleontological resources that would be disrupted by trail construction. In May 2021, prior to completion of the Twin Peaks Trail, a local advocacy organization highlighted the potential significance of the Avenues Twin Peaks site to indigenous tribes. The City has delayed completion of the Twin Peaks trail while it makes additional efforts to engage and consult tribal representatives. The Twin Peaks trail will remain closed to public use at least until October 2021. The City thanks trail users for being patient and respectful of the trail closure.

Q: What is/has been the role of Trails Utah and the BST committee? Did they initiate the idea of the trails project development? Are they being paid to consult on the project?

A: Trails Utah and BST Committee staff met with Salt Lake City Public Lands in 2016 to urge the City to engage in proactive trails master planning for the foothills above the City. Trails Utah proposed the idea to develop a coherent identify for the foothills as the Foothills Natural Area, despite the checkerboard of land ownership and agency jurisdictions, to facilitate coordinated, intentional management of growing trail use. During the master plan development process, these groups were included and participated along with many other stakeholder organizations, and repeatedly advocated in support of the project and emphasized the importance of proactive trail planning. They were not paid consultants on the project.

Q: Are e-bikes allowed on the Foothills Trails and/or the BST? The signage is not clear. What is the plan to keep them out if they are not allowed?

A: Salt Lake City Ordinance defines e-bikes as ‘motorized cycles’ / motorized vehicles, and bans unauthorized use of motorized vehicles in SLC parks and open spaces. This restriction does not necessarily extend across jurisdictions, and the Foothills include lands owned by Utah State Parks, the US Forest Service, the University of Utah, and various private owners. Currently, law enforcement officers do not patrol the Foothill Trails System and capacity for enforcement is limited. SLC Public Lands is working to develop clear signage for trailhead kiosks that is consistent with restrictions in City Ordinance.

Q: How will the City evaluate the work done so far? Will an impartial party be brought in to correlate the City's intentions to their actions?

A: Public Lands is evaluating the hiring of a professional consultant or consultants not involved in the previous Foothill trails planning or construction effort, with appropriate professional expertise, to review actions taken by the City to implement the Foothill Trails Master Plan, and evaluate instances where actions did not serve to advance the goals of the Master Plan. The process would include collaboration with diverse stakeholders and collection of public feedback, in order to produce policy guidance that improves management practices for the Foothills Natural Area and Foothills trail system.

Q: How are the trails designed and built? Do the trail builders each have their own style?

A: For recent Foothill trail construction (2020-2021), trail builders were provided with planning-level alignments, intended use designations, a narrative description of the intended function of the proposed trail, trail construction standards, and requirements for trail construction techniques. Trail builders were required to then survey and analyze the terrain and provide a precise recommended alignment, with GPS coordinates and survey markers on the ground. The route was then reviewed by SLC Public Lands staff ecologists, resource managers, and recreation staff. Revisions to the alignment were sometimes requested to address conflicts with desirable native plants, proximity to social trails, and other concerns. Once any revisions were made, the contractor was approved to proceed with a specific alignment, with regular check-ins with a Public Lands project manager.

While trail specifications are constrained by required standards, each trail builder does have their own style, which is generally more noticeable in the design of bike-specific trails. In the case of the 19th Avenue bike trail, Public Lands staff worked extensively with the builder to evaluate the style, difficulty and experience of the trail, with the intent of achieving a trail that would be enjoyable and desirable for the largest number of users.

Q: What changes were there in Phase I between the alignments found in the Trails Plan and what were actually built? How were these changes communicated to the community?

A: Trails constructed between 2020 and 2021 are consistent with the functional recommendations of the Foothill Trails Plan, and alignments roughly follow the plan-level recommendations shown in the trails plan document. Final alignment decisions were based on these recommendations and modified following the on-ground recommendations of professional trail builders hired by the City, based on what these contractors believed would best meet the City's objectives and the realities of the terrain. Final decisions on trail alignments were made by the Public Lands staff, and were informed by plan recommendations and public feedback, information provided by natural resources staff, consultants and contractors, legally-imposed requirements, and conditions on the ground.

Moving forward with future phases of trail construction, SLC is working to modify its process so that specific trail alignments are identified well in advance of the hiring of a trail contractor, so that the segments can be reviewed in detail by resource specialists and stakeholders to identify any issues and address them through changes to the proposed trail alignment and/or proposed management designation.

Q: What is the City doing to increase trail user safety and minimize collisions?

A: The recommendations of the Foothill Trails Master Plan include separated uses for foot traffic and mountain bikes, especially in critical locations where many users are accessing the Foothills trail system. As the recommendations are implemented, they are expected to increase separation of user groups to minimize collisions and increase trail user safety. Additionally, SLC Public Lands is working to expand regulatory signage

and initiate a trail etiquette campaign with the support of volunteer Trail Stewards. Public Lands is also pursuing funding for a Trail Ranger program to enforce posted rules and regulations and increase trail user safety.

Q: What are best practices for trail building regarding using trail excavator machines vs. hand-building? What does the USFS and National Parks recommend?

A: Most federal guidance on natural-surface trail building standards, specifications and techniques comes from the USFS. The USFS National Technology & Development Program has produced guidance for both machine-built trails and hand-built trails, and most of these documents are available online. The USFS does not generally recommend one form as preferential or superior to another, but USFS guidance on mechanized trail building equipment notes pros and cons. Generally, the same standards for trail design apply regardless of construction technique.

Q: What was the City's environmental analysis of prevention the spread of noxious weeds and protection of wildlife during nesting season and did the City comply with its own findings? Has there been any analysis of impacts on wildlife of the construction and use of the new trails?

A: Salt Lake City engaged a reputable environmental resources firm to conduct an extensive survey in spring 2020 prior to initiation of trail construction. The analysis found no indication of sensitive ecological resources that would be disrupted by trail construction. The City also consulted with the Salt Lake County Health Department's Weed Control Program, which required cleaning protocols for all equipment used for trail construction. These requirements were included in the contracts with trail builders, and were adhered to throughout construction.

Salt Lake City Public Lands is enlisting the help of environmental partners to study wildlife usage within the Foothills Natural Area and evaluate the impacts that trail-based recreation in the Foothills may have on wildlife species, with a particular focus on the habitat study areas proposed in the Foothill Trails Master Plan. The results of this research will help inform future trail construction and management. Public Lands is also evaluating the possibility of restricting trail construction activities to within a narrower seasonal window to support wildlife security during denning and nesting periods.

Q: Instead of closing the ridge trail with ditches and fences, why didn't the City reconstruct this trail to make it sustainable?

A: The management challenges presented by the ridge trail above Terrace Hills were related both to the steepness of sections of this route, and also to the fact that the trail – like many ridgeline trails – was not constrained by topography and had become wide and braided, with vegetation denuded to an average width of 30' - 40'. Attempting to constrain the trail to a narrower width with logs or boulders would have been more costly than reconstructing the trail to contour below the ridgetop, and possibly ineffective. The trail was therefore reconstructed a short distance downslope, consistent with Master Plan recommendations for grade, drainage, and trail width. The ridgetop trail was closed with fencing and trenches to prevent access and allow revegetation to occur.

Q: Why did the city continue to work on the BST – East City Creek trail (on Bonneville Blvd across from the "Salt Dome" after the pause in construction was in place?

A: This was an error on the part of Public Lands, resulting from a misunderstanding of the extent of the stop work request from City Council. Public Lands regrets the frustration this caused for residents and Council.

Q: Why should carefully planned trails need adjustments during construction?

A: Challenges while digging trail tread, such as discovering areas of bedrock below the surface, do occur periodically and necessitate adjustments during construction. Challenges identified by the trail contractor during construction, and solutions, were reviewed, discussed and approved in consultation with Public Lands staff. Most trails constructed between 2020 and 2021 were not adjusted during the construction process, after a final alignment had been approved.

Q: What analysis has the City done in projecting the changes in quantity and type of users once new trails are built?

A: SLC has assumed that there will be a steady increase in the number of trail users in the Foothills, due to population growth and the growing popularity of outdoor recreation on trails. New trail construction was anticipated to change use patterns in the Foothills, decreasing overall usage of some pre-existing multi-use trails while some trail users selected user-specific trails for either hiking/running or biking. The City is currently investigating whether new trail construction resulted in unintentional changes in use on multi-use trails and/or increases in user conflicts at some locations. The new trail above Terrace Hills Drive has been frequently identified as a trail segment of concern due to several reports of increases in trail user conflicts.

Q: Is the City prepared to continue to pause the construction past October to evaluate its work in Phase I and to reevaluate how to proceed in Phases II and III?

A: Yes, the City is prepared to continue the pause to allow the necessary time for evaluation, data collection and additional planning and engagement.

Q: There used to never be that many bikes in the Foothills. Why is there so much emphasis on bike trails?

A: The sport of mountain biking has seen considerable growth over the past few decades. It continues to increase in popularity, and in Utah, the recent phenomenon of high school mountain biking teams introduces many more young people to mountain biking each year. The Foothill Trails Master Plan recognizes that mountain biking is a significant, pre-existing and legitimate use of trails in the Foothills Natural Area, and seeks to provide enjoyable trail experiences for users on mountain bikes as well as trail users on foot. The Foothill Trails Master Plan recommendations also seek to reduce trail user conflict by adding separate user-specific trails to the system, and to reduce the prevalence of off-trail riding and hiking by providing quality trails that meet the needs of users.