

# The Challenges of Small Town Planning

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Statewide Land Use Training  
Director  
Office of the Property Rights  
Ombudsman



# About the Office of the Property Rights Ombudsman

- Established by state statute as an independent, neutral office in the Utah Department of Commerce that safeguards the property rights of the citizens of Utah through education and dispute resolution
  - Assists citizens and government agencies in understanding and complying with property rights laws, resolves disputes, and advocates fairness and balance when private rights conflict with public needs
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# About the Office of the Property Rights Ombudsman

- Staffed by:
    - 3 Attorneys
    - 1 Land Use Trainer
    - 1 Administrative Assistant
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Nearly 20 years  
& approx. 50  
agencies

90% of them  
rural/small  
cities and towns

# 100%

Highlight these two items as their largest challenges to managing community growth and amenities:

1. Political disagreement
2. Lack of resources (staff and funding)



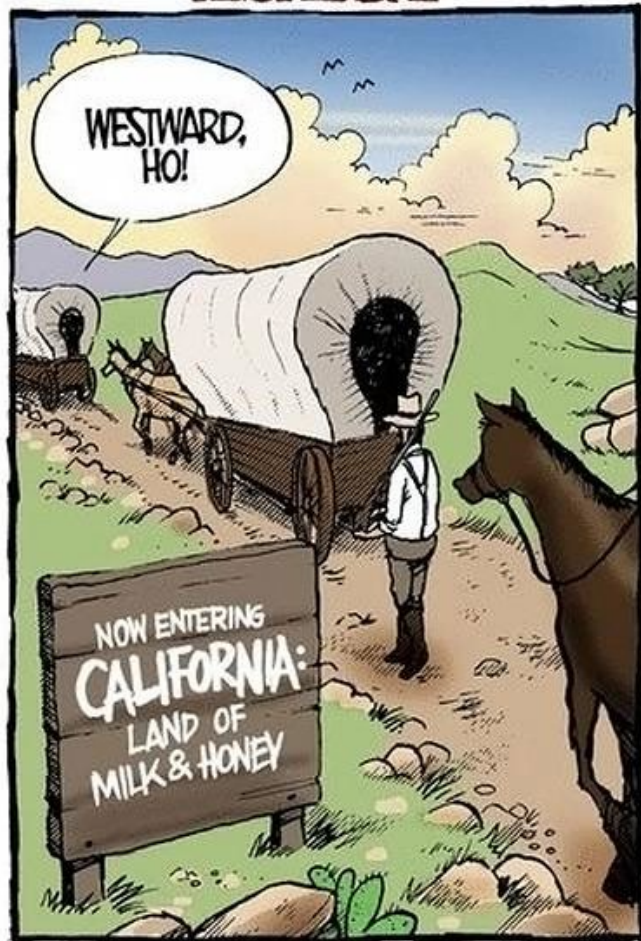
# 100%

Of Utahns agree:

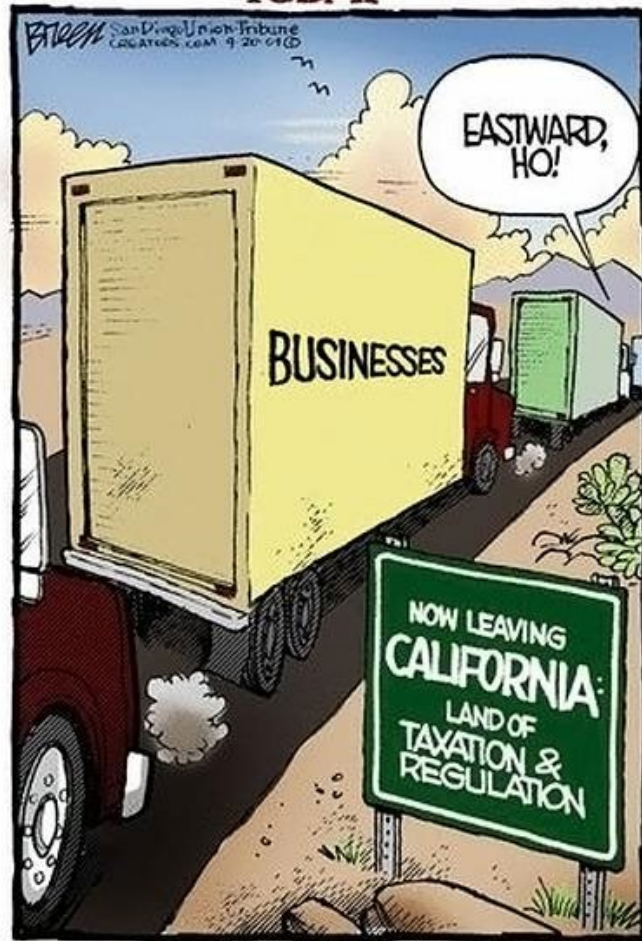
**Let's not become the next California!**



YESTERDAY



TODAY



# Who's in the Room?



## Agency Staff

Professional planning, engineering, or other staff that represent a town, city, county, region, or state agency.



## Consulting Staff

Professional planning, engineering, or other staff that work on a consulting basis for a local, regional or state agency.



## Local Official

An elected or appointed official that represents a town, city, county, or state agency.



## Citizen Planner

A member of the public who is interested and engaged in land use planning conversations, processes and outcomes.

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## Who's in the Room?

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## Who's in the room?

Agency Staff

Consulting Staff

Local Official

Citizen Planner

To



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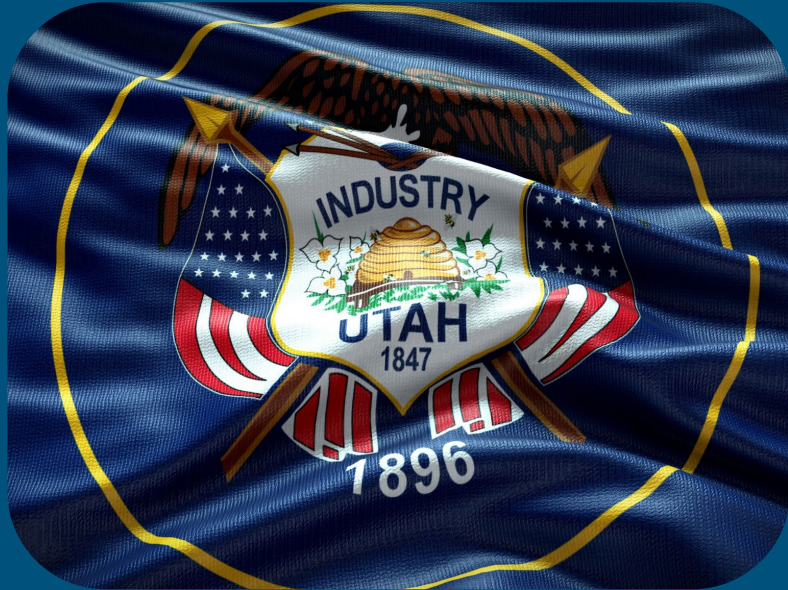
# Defining “Small Town”

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- Census Bureau defines it as a population cluster of less than 1,000 people
- Most federal assistance programs use the EPA definition, which is a city or town with a population of **2,500 or less**



# The Beehive State



Utah categorizes cities as:

Class 1 = 100,000+

Class 2 = 65,000 - 99,999

Class 3 = 30,000 - 64,999

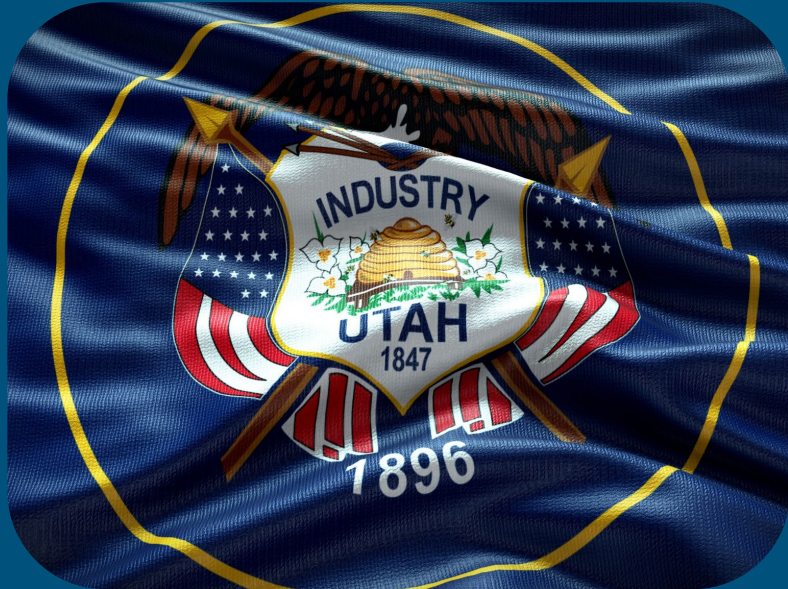
Class 4 = 10,000 - 29,999

Class 5 = 1,000 - 9,999

“Towns” are those with  
less than 1,000 residents

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# The Beehive State



% of Agencies:

Class 1 = 2%

Class 2 = 3%

Class 3 = 10%

Class 4 = 13%

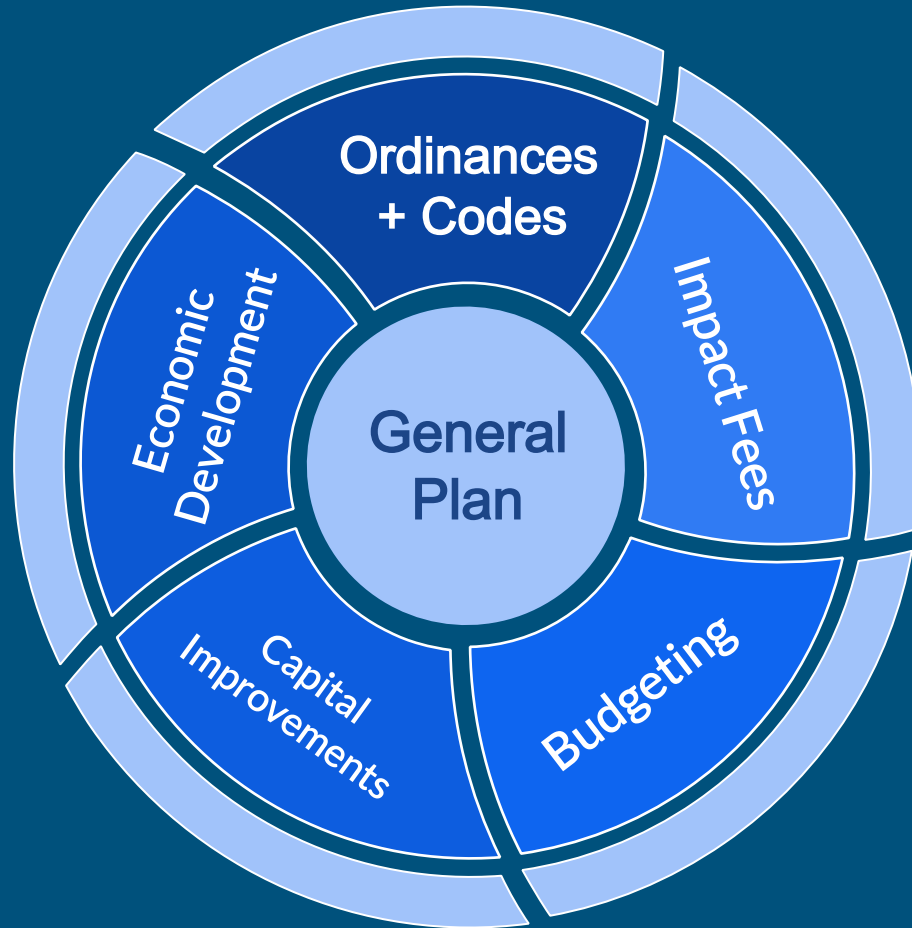
Class 5 = 34%

Towns = 38%

**2,500 or less = 56%**

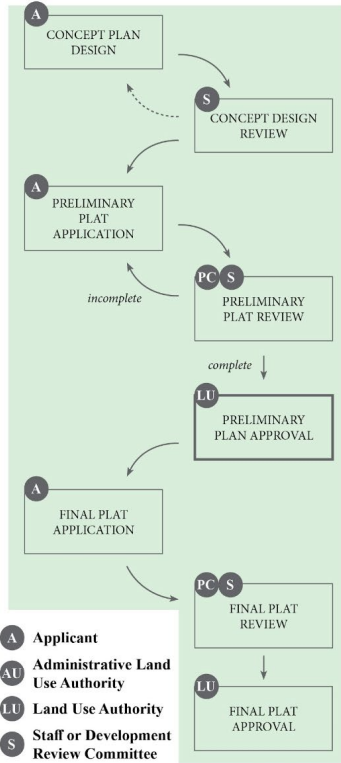
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*\*Graphic courtesy of Rural Community Consultants*

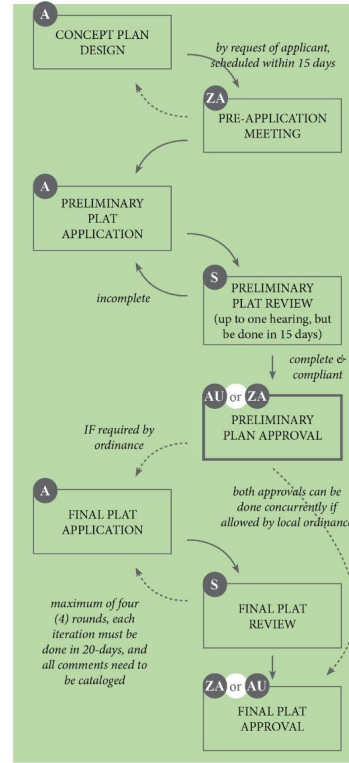
## Traditional Subdivisions



- (A)** Applicant
- (AU)** Administrative Land Use Authority
- (LU)** Land Use Authority
- (S)** Staff or Development Review Committee
- (PC)** Planning Commission
- (ZA)** Zoning Administrator

## Subdivisions for Single-Family, Two-Family, or Townhomes\*

*\*This process does not apply to the review for property located in identified geological hazard areas.*



**Disclaimer:** this graphic is intended to serve as an illustration of the subdivision statute in Utah. Each party involved should familiarize themselves with the current state statute as well as any local ordinances that might be related.

# Resources and Supports Available

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- State Technical Assistance
  - Planning, public infrastructure, data analysis, economic development, training
- State Funding
  - Policy implementation, growth management, mapping, general plans, ordinance updates, administration, finance
- State Programs
  - Public infrastructure, emergency vehicles, public buildings and spaces, land use planning supports, economic development, recreation lands
- Non-profit
  - Training, advocacy, visioning, planning best practices
- Private Sector
  - Technical assistance, examples and current topics, technology updates, training

*NOTE: Additional details will be covered in tomorrow's session:  
"Coordinating Planning Resources Statewide"*

# Pressures and Changes

## Everyday Deliverables

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- Roads
  - Operations & Maintenance
- Utilities:
  - Expansion
  - Maintenance
- Development/ Growth
  - Planning
  - Processing projects/entitlements
  - Policy formulation
  - Implementation & Enforcement

## Evolving Hot Topics

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- Housing Options
  - Affordable, accessible, and varied
- Aging or Failing Infrastructure
  - Water, Sewer, Storm Drain, Energy
- Community Character
- Regulatory Changes, Policy Changes and Enforcement

# Common Questions and Concerns

- What can we do to encourage a mix of housing options for our community?
  - How do we best address changes in law for entitlement applications?
  - How do we build, expand, and ensure our infrastructure remains sustainable?
  - What activities can we focus on to protect our community culture?
  - What are the best methods to address regulatory enforcement or changes within our community?
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# What Topics Are of Most Interest to You?



## Housing Options

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Coordinating efforts to ensure your community has housing options that are affordable, accessible, and varied.



## Infrastructure

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Planning, designing, constructing, operating and maintaining infrastructure such as water, sewer, storm drain, energy, etc.



## Community Character

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Protecting and enhancing those aspects of your community that provide its sense of place and character.



## Regulatory

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Balancing and implementing state and local regulatory changes and community preferences.

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## What Topics Are of Most Interest to You?

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## What Topics Are of Most Interest to You?

Housing Options

Infrastructure

Community Character

Regulatory Considerations

To



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# Housing Options



## Challenges:

- Housing is becoming more unaffordable
  - A mix of housing types is difficult to achieve and maintain
  - True mixed housing requires a significant amount of supportive infrastructure (transportation, utilities, supportive services, etc.)
  - Density often = 's community concerns
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# Strategies for Success

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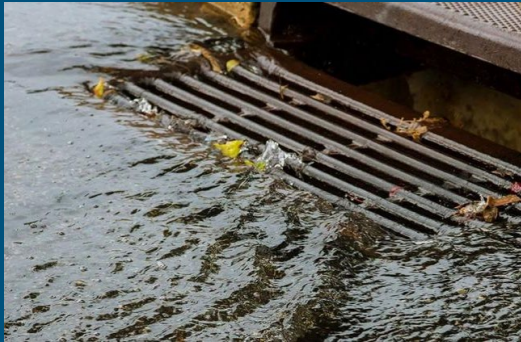
- First and foremost, set a vision for and with your community
- Understand that housing development is driven by the market
  - Establishing partnerships with private, public and non-profit organizations are key to addressing overall housing needs in a sustainable manner that provides options
- Know that a magic pill to provide housing options does not exist
  - No one project is the difference - but every single project makes a difference
  - Know it takes years to see the needle truly move, and maintenance is life-long

# Strategies for Success (cont.)

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- Major plans must be inter-connected, coordinated - and focused on people
  - General Plans, Master Plans, Capital Improvement Plans
  - Budgets for said plans should also link appropriately
- Education needs to be the major deliverable for the general public
  - Communicate community needs on a personal and empathetic level
  - Celebrate the steps along the way
    - Highlight how certain infrastructure projects such as roads, schools, and parks, support housing (and vice-versa)
- Stay the course!
  - Planning and budgeting take discipline to identify and maintain course

# Infrastructure



## Challenges:

- Growth requires expanded infrastructure - often relying on aged or needed/expanded parts of central systems
  - Infrastructure repair and maintenance costs are rapidly rising
  - Conservation of resources
  - Many rural communities have limited staff or infrastructure technologies in-house
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# Strategies for Success

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- Understanding the status of your current system is the best method to determine potential for sustainable growth/ expansion
- Invest in data processes to create, maintain, and consistently update the status and details of your existing infrastructure
  - *NOTE: state resources available to assist*
- Ensure consistent coordination of your data within your:
  - Capital budget
  - Capital Improvement Plan
  - General and master planning
- Utilize an inflation percentage to account for increasing costs

# Strategies for Success (cont.)

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- Take advantage of your community's natural geography to minimize additional infrastructure
  - Lift stations vs. gravity feed
  - Ponding basins vs. bioswales
- Consider policies that incentivize growth patterns that support or require limited infrastructure
- Educating your community on conservation of resources can add significantly to the life of your infrastructure
- Employ a “fix-it-first” mentality
- Utilize all the state resources available to plan it, place it, and maintain it

# Community Character



## Challenges:

- Every community is different; unique in interests and makeup
  - Balancing inclusivity while also delivering community-wide services
  - Growth can lead to undesirable change for many citizens
  - Change is often met with reluctance or pushback
  - Community “tone” is set and maintained by community leaders
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# Strategies for Success

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- Celebrate the unique aspects of your community that foster a sense of place
  - Invest efforts into community-visual projects like public art, outdoor gathering spaces, gateway monuments, design standards, etc.
- Seek to incorporate all aspects of your population into your community plans and activities
- Understand that “growing pains” are real, and impact each aspect of your community in some form
  - Manage growth and/or change with empathy and communication
  - Listen to fears and concerns, but have the strength to stay the course

# Strategies for Success (cont.)

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- Work with community leaders to establish and maintain trust throughout the community
  - Establish partnerships with local businesses, clubs, and organizations
  - Regularly communicate city/town activities, projects, and meetings utilizing multiple mediums (social media, website, print media, etc.)
- Seek policies and regulations that are respectful of your communities values and character
- When changes are needed, conduct the process with transparency and inclusivity

# Regulatory Considerations



## Challenges:

- Overseeing regulatory activities in any city or town is a multi-faceted and intense responsibility
  - Balancing federal and state mandates with local preferences
  - Creating and maintaining processes that are consistent, transparent, and fair are critical
  - Resources are limited and decreasing, while regulations and costs are increasing
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# Strategies for Success

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- Follow the three C's of “clear, concise, and consistent,” when considering policies and regulatory activities
- Seek the employment of best practices within your community's ordinances
- Focus on the aspects of “health and safety” when considering enforcement actions
- Coordinate with multiple departments, organizations, and/or staff to ensure actions are vetted and in accordance with regulations
- Document, document, document
- Utilize state programs and resources to address state-level mandates that impact your community

# Strategies for Success (cont.)

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- Utilize partner agencies to communicate and lobby for needs or concerns at the local, regional, and state levels
  - Local Chambers of Commerce, community and/or volunteer groups are an excellent way to maintain connection with the community at-large, and to strengthen communication and trust
  - Association of Governments (AOGs) are an excellent resource with both local knowledge and a collective voice for your region
  - The League of Utah Cities and Towns (ULCT) is an active voice for smaller agencies, particularly at the state level
  - Use state agencies to provide technical assistance and resources



peacock **Parks and Recreation**

# Contact Me

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