



KEEPING PARK CITY MOVING

*A Conversation with Alfred Knotts,
Park City's new Transportation Planning Manager*

PCMC Community News: You are joining us after the retirement of Kent Cashel, our longtime transportation manager. Being new to the position and the city, how will you determine your priorities?

Alfred Knotts: I have had several orientation meetings with key city and county staff (including Kent) as well as a few community stakeholders to get up to speed on the key initiatives and challenges. And I'll spend a lot of time over the next few months just getting to know the rhythm of the community—both in terms of seasonal and day-to-day characteristics. I want to get a sense of the community's habits: How do they travel? What are the key problems? What are the priority areas that need to be addressed? Coming from Tahoe, I have a good sense of how resort destinations generally tend to function as well the challenges they face, but every community is unique. And one big difference is that the high seasons for the two resort areas are reversed: Tahoe really comes alive in Summer, while Winter is Park City's busiest season. Everyone wants to visit the beautiful places we choose to live but it's a balance of not loving it to death.

PCMC: You are joining us from Lake Tahoe. How does that area manage its growth?

AK: The area of Tahoe where I come from has very controlled and regulated land-use policies, which are a direct result of the fallout of the Squaw Valley Winter Olympics. Leading up to and after the 1960 Olympics, there was an explosion of uncontrolled growth that did not consider Tahoe's sensitive natural environment. But the policies subsequently put in place were too restrictive, and stymied what could have been context-sensitive development, as well as positive environmental improvements. The permit process for simple property improvements often triggered a series of other mandatory upgrades that became cost-prohibitive for many residential or commercial projects. So rather than engaging for the common good, a lot of private property owners hunkered down and did nothing at all. This taught us an important lesson about the importance of balance and regulatory predictability to achieve progress in public and private investment.

PCMC: What is the business and development climate like now in Tahoe?

AK: It's actually much more positive today. In 1997 President Clinton issued an executive order to federal agencies to accelerate restoration of Lake Tahoe. This order was known as the "Lake Tahoe Partnership" and designated the lake as an Outstanding National Resource Water. It also triggered a related environmental-improvement program (EIP).

PCMC: One strength you bring to the position is your experience having worked with multiple jurisdictions.

AK: Yes, the Tahoe area encompasses many different municipalities—including two states, numerous federal agencies, five counties and one incorporated city. The big difference between Tahoe and Park City is the larger amount of private land here. But both areas are subject to the same urban pressures (traffic, pollution, stormwater) even though they are rural or semi-rural regions. And I think there is a certain benefit to having constrained infrastructure in that it can drive more creative problem-solving. Park City is also ahead of the game in so many ways—we have a great free transit system, a great trails system, and an engaged citizenry.

PCMC: Let's talk about your approach for building consensus and moving controversial projects forward.

AK: It all comes down to effective and honest communication. With any endeavor, you should always start with a good message and a clear reason why things are being done the way they are. Tahoe residents understand that the lake's water-quality problem stems directly from the stormwater-pollution problem, so they are incentivized to change their daily habits to accomplish this larger goal. I also generally prefer carrots to sticks: creating incentives is very important for modifying behavior. And Utah has fewer sticks (regulations) than California, so this will generally be a more fruitful approach.

It's also important to work productively with watchdog groups, which play an important role and ensure the fox is not guarding the henhouse. I worked in Tahoe for 15 years under the watchful eye of the Sierra Club and League to Save Lake Tahoe and was able to accomplish many great things that were embraced by that constituency. I'm a pragmatist at heart, and I want to make decisions that are in the best interest of the entire community—rather than just the loudest constituency—so working collaboratively helps balance the objective of any project.

PCMC: I suspect you love the mountains, having lived in Tahoe for so long.

AK: Yes, I've always been drawn to the mountains, and have lived in them since I went off to college at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. I went to school there for two years and graduated from Montana State in Bozeman. There I studied environmental science with an emphasis in urban geography. I'm an avid snowboarder, fly fisherman, camper, skateboarder, mountain biker, outdoorsman. My wife is the same: I met her in Bozeman, and we moved to Tahoe together.

PCMC: Is your family excited to make the move?

AK: Absolutely. My daughter is six and my son is ten, and they are both avid winter-sports enthusiasts and all-around outdoorsy kids. I skateboard every afternoon with my son, Colton, and he is also a competitive snowboarder. I coached him all Winter and he went to Nationals this past season at USASA in Colorado. My daughter Brighton has been skiing since she was two. We love hitting the mountain as a family now because my children are on par with us ability-wise, which makes it so much fun for everyone.

Alfred Knotts officially began his position as Park City's transportation planning manager on May 18.