

MOAB SUN NEWS

Voices & Opinions

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Echo Canyon — saying vs. doing

I almost, but not quite, found Craig Weston's letter in last week's Time-Independent amusing, because it so perfectly resembled tasteless pabulum (a blended baby food developed in the 30's that has come to describe "bland or insipid intellectual fare"). It's tasteless because he didn't convey any useful information, just cliched platitudes, and also tasteless because what he was presumably trying to sell was so out of line of his project's and the promoters' actions so far. Let's consider what he said.

Regarding welcoming newcomers, Craig said, "every home, business and road in Grand County exists today because someone before us welcomed newcomers and believed this community was worth investing in."

We might say most of those "newcomers" were welcomed because they became a part of the community, something Weston and his cronies seem to have no intention of doing.

Regarding housing for workers, he said, "What concerns me most about Moab today is that the people who keep it running— teachers, police officers, EMTs, service workers, young families — increasingly can't afford to live here. That's not a talking point for me. It's personal. I believe people who want to build a life in a community should have a real shot at doing so."

Echo Canyon, formerly "Kane Creek Development and Preservation," was a resort concept from day one, not a mixed-use community. It was and is presented on the web as luxury real estate, clearly the vision that "concerns" Craig the most. Their website opens with "Inquire for exclusive access." (I'm waiting for my "exclusive" password so I can get in.)

"The project is intended to become a real community — a variety of units across multiple price points, including significant workforce housing. That mix is intentional, so full-time residents aren't competing with the vacation market for a place to live."

There is no mention of their actual amount of workforce/ low-income housing. Are they talking just about housing their own staff, which would have no impact on Moab's current workforce housing needs?

Regarding second home buyers, he said, "New property tax revenue, including from second homes, will help fund schools, libraries, emergency services and healthcare without placing additional burden on existing residents. The economic case is straightforward: increased tax revenue from those who aren't consuming many of those same resources."

Oops — the cat's out of the bag. He can't help himself from pointing out the important increased tax revenue would come from his real clientele, second home buyers, who won't be "consuming many of those same resources" because they won't be living here. They can afford to buy a second home here, but they can afford to live elsewhere. That's not a model for building a "life in a community." Echo Canyon, as proposed, has no resemblance to a "community," but all the trappings of a luxury resort.

Regarding "existing infrastructure," he said, "We take concerns about water seriously. Echo Canyon includes a closed-loop wastewater system sited above existing infrastructure."

The only "existing infrastructure" in place is 8 to 10 feet of river cobble fill, up to 10 inches in diameter, which, according to their own engineer, "will result in difficulties associated with utility installation. The increase in acceptable material size will result in sloughing and may potentially undermine constructed improvements. This material size adjustment will result in increased construction costs associated with utility installation and future repairs." Will the rest of their infrastructure have similar "difficulties"? Can their buyers simply afford the "future repairs"?

Regarding community growth, he said, "The question isn't whether growth will happen on the limited private land that remains, it's whether that growth is guided by people who care about this place or left to chance. I'd rather it be guided, and I'd rather it serve the community."

The existing "community," who actually does "care about this place," is trying to "guide" it away from careless exploitation by outsiders. The developers went to great lengths to avoid community guidance by exploiting administrative mistakes to bypass the normal public zoning process.

Regarding the people of Moab, he said, "Echo Canyon is part of that conversation, not dictating the future but contributing to it alongside the people who call Moab home."

To my memory Craig Weston and his partners haven't yet shown their faces "alongside the people of Moab." They have, though, sent a high-priced lawyer to threaten our town with a lawsuit.

So, unlike Henry Hill in the musical "The Music Man" (another questionable promoter who came to another "River City" and was almost tarred and feathered), we can still hope that the Echo Canyon boys will just recognize the impropriety of their scheme and move on to less tasteless ventures.

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Moab