January 30, 2022

Dear City Councilmembers:

As you consider adoption of the Northpoint Small Area Plan, per City Code section 2.06.035.C.2, I am submitting a letter for your consideration. Section 2.06.035 allows the city administration to provide a different recommendation than the Planning Commission by submitting a letter outlining the mayor’s position as part of the administrative transmittal. The Northpoint Small Area Plan is such a case.

On December 14, 2022, the Planning Commission recommended the City Council approve the Northpoint Small Area Plan with two modifications. First, to remove Planning Staff’s recommendation to limit distribution land uses in the plan area; and second, to increase the development buffer from wetlands from 200 feet to 300 feet. I applaud the Planning Commission for their dedication to preserving and protecting wetland areas by increasing the buffer width; however, I am concerned that removing the limit on distribution land uses will negatively impact the existing rural characteristics of the area, potentially increase the amount of air pollution generated by the future use of land in the area, and expand the amount of land in the City that is available for warehouse and distribution uses.

The Northpoint plan boundary is unique within Salt Lake City and any future planning should be sensitive to the existing context and rural nature of the area. While development of the area is ongoing and that pressure will likely continue in the future, planning should promote an appropriate transition of land uses that can coexist with the existing rural residential and agricultural uses, as well as minimize impacts to the environment and natural habitat. Planning must also consider appropriate land uses to reduce exposure to air pollution created by airplanes taking off and landing from the Salt Lake City International Airport, especially as the airport considers lengthening existing runways that will further impact the Northpoint area.

There are nearly 17,000 acres of land in Salt Lake City that are currently zoned M-1 Light Industrial Zoning District. It is the largest zoning district in the city in terms of acreage, while also one of the least restrictive in permitted and conditional land uses. There are no limitations on warehousing or distribution uses. If more area is allowed to develop with these uses it likely increases the amount of air pollution generated in the city through an increase in semi-truck traffic and requires more resources to maintain city streets.

I recommend that the City Council consider Planning Staff’s recommendation to limit distribution land uses to prevent the area from becoming primarily a warehouse and distribution center. This could be achieved by limiting the development of such uses where they are not currently allowed by zoning. This is a vital step to implementing the city’s vision – one that respects the existing residential and agriculture properties, the environment, and wildlife, while allowing for appropriate light-manufacturing development.

This vision can be achieved through prioritizing and expanding the recommended Northpoint specific development code, which is identified as a critical action item in the plan. Expansion of
the code recommendation could include limiting building footprints, lot coverage, and building height to encourage a greater mix of land uses and prevent large scale buildings that are only suitable for distribution. Additionally, the Council could consider restricting or limiting the uses in the land use tables within the Northpoint development code.

In addition to my recommendation above, please consider the Northpoint Small Area Plan guidance for zoning assignment of annexation in the area. In future review of annexation petitions, I request that the Council also consider the recommended Northpoint Small Area Plan policies and development code in any development agreement to ensure the vision for the area is respected and realized.

Thank you for your consideration,

Erin Mendenhall
Mayor