

An International Destination



Mayor Williams with some future leaders of Park City on Community Cleanup Day

An Interview with The Honorable Dana Williams, Mayor, Park City, Utah

EDITORS' NOTE Dana Williams became Mayor of Park City in January 2002. He ran his family's farm in Utah until 1990 and in 1984 received the Farmer of the Year award for Summit County. In 1990, he became a realtor with Coldwell Banker and subsequently earned his Lifetime Achievement Award from the Park City Board of Realtors. Williams has worked on land preservation and responsible growth and, in 1999, was named Rotary Citizen of the Year. He has also been a strong advocate for affordable housing and quality of life issues. He championed the city's new skateboard park and continues to play and sing in the highly popular Motherlode Canyon Band.



The Hon. Dana Williams

What drew you to public service and excited you about running for Mayor of Park City?

During the 1990s, Park City was heavily divided on growth issues. A small vocal group of residents formed a nonprofit called the Citizens Allied for Responsible Growth. Our goal was to get our community to participate in local government. We attended hundreds of council and planning commission meetings and tried to influence the outcome on numerous developments. This became a stepping stone to my later running for office. My family had been active in Park City since the '60s and I thought that bringing in a new perspective might work well. The election of 2001 was about looking at fundamental change in the way local government interacted with the community. In my first 30 days in office, we had the Sundance Film Festival and the 2002 Winter Olympics.

What makes Park City so special?

Park City is an amazing sociological experiment. While we invite the world to experience a unique mountain town, we also feel the need to maintain the "funk." Most of us moved here to live in a beautiful setting, but we stayed because of a strong sense of community. While we are known as an international destination, we also cherish our diversity, history, and preservation.

Would you highlight your key initiatives for Park City?

Some of the main initiatives have included the addition of thousands of acres of open space and developing a trail system that would not only improve the quality of life for residents but also be an attraction and economic driver for

the city. While our history as a silver mining town seems romantic, it has left us with numerous environmental problems. We have made the clean-up of our community a major priority.

How has Park City fared during turbulent economic times?

The recession hit us with several new challenges. As a town that is dependent on visitors and their disposable incomes, we have been forced to tighten our belts on expenses while not cutting services. We are, however, fortunate to have staff that planned for the

down times; we actually did \$70 million in capital improvements and put 700 people to work. We are also lucky to have a business community that offers a range of affordable activities, so we still had a fairly high visitor count. Our numbers have started to climb again, which is a result of the unique relationship of government, nonprofits, and the business community.

Would you highlight your local housing project efforts?

One source of pride for Park City is the socioeconomic diversity of our town. While we can never house our total workforce, most residents feel that maintaining our diversity is essential to keeping Park City as is. Our affordable housing includes over 600 of mixed-use units. Several are rentals but we have also increased the ownership product. Our newest project was 13 homes that had ground source heat pumps, no natural gas, solar power, and solar hot water heating systems – these homes had 40 prequalified applicants on the first day. Also, the city has partnered with the developer on a new property to ensure that prices are affordable.

What are you doing in regard to environmental protection?

Our economic sustainability is centered around our environment. The fact that the preservation of open space and the creation of trails has become a major draw to our city is unique. We have developed a department of sustainability in city hall that creates a balance among environment, economy, and community. We have several green programs including carbon footprinting for households, car share, free bus system, solar incentives, etc. We believe that climate change is real and that we can reduce our impact on it. We are ground zero in terms of seeing firsthand what has happened to our snowpack over the past 25 years.

You have worked with other leading mayors on issues related to immigration and gun control. Would you highlight these efforts?

One of the greatest parts of serving as mayor has been meeting and working with other mayors across the country. We are committed to several groups that share some of our goals as a city including ICLEI (International Sustainable Government Program), Carbon Disclosure Project, United Nations Charter on Mountain Communities, and Western Adaptation Alliance, as well as Mayor Bloomberg's initiatives on illegal use of weapons and the national discussion on immigration.

What do you tell young people about the value and benefits of public service in order to attract the talent you need?

Attracting new talent to the city is a constant process. Park City has a leadership program that is now in its 19th year. The class is by application and is limited to 25 people. The year-long program teaches not only how we operate but also why we serve. Each class chooses a project – in 2012, the focus was on compiling all services available to the Latino community to be printed in Spanish.

The greatest outreach, however, has to do with the culture of inclusiveness. We currently have hundreds of residents on local boards and commissions. While it is not government's job to make citizens participate, it is our responsibility to provide opportunities for citizens to participate. Part of our vision is planning for 20 years out and we need young forward-thinking people to achieve that goal. Working towards getting young people to realize that they have an obligation to make their communities better and showing them how one person can make a difference has been very rewarding.

What do you enjoy most about your role as Mayor of Park City?

The interaction with the people of this community; I am honored to serve them. I'm in a nonpartisan position and my obligation is to the betterment of the whole. While I might not always agree with someone's position, I am still intrigued and respectful of that position. Park City is a high-profile place with an international reputation. The greatest compliment I have received from people who visit us is that they see the pride that our residents feel for their city. ●