

Luncheon Speaker – Thoughts on Local Planning and Growth.

Welcome to the Utah Land Use Institute Conference session featuring Stephen Snow — a deep dive into the real challenges shaping Utah’s rapid growth, land use policies, and housing development.

In this session, you’ll hear firsthand insights on how Southern Utah evolved from a small rural town into one of the fastest-growing regions in the country — and the planning, zoning, and political challenges that come with it.

From historical growth patterns to modern-day development conflicts, this conversation highlights what’s working, what’s broken, and what needs to change as Utah continues to expand.

Timestamps

- 00:00 – Introduction & speaker background
- 01:19 – Early history of St. George & founding vision
- 03:29 – How public works shaped early growth
- 04:49 – Population growth over time
- 07:14 – Shift in perception of Southern Utah
- 08:40 – Key drivers of growth (AC, golf, migration)
- 11:07 – Rise of golf communities & development expansion
- 15:03 – Economic growth & second-home demand
- 15:34 – Major development challenges in Utah
- 17:13 – Real estate cycles & economic risks
- 17:56 – Case study: hillside development conflict
- 18:57 – Desert tortoise controversy & land restrictions
- 21:23 – Conservation efforts & land preservation
- 22:40 – Flooding risks & environmental challenges
- 23:08 – Growth vs quality of life discussion
- 24:32 – Hillside development & urban planning concerns
- 26:31 – Infrastructure challenges from rapid growth
- 27:18 – St. George becoming a major Utah city
- 29:01 – Legal and zoning challenges in small towns
- 30:57 – Issues with leapfrog development
- 31:49 – Importance of strong zoning laws
- 33:50 – NIMBYism vs development realities
- 37:07 – How small towns should approach growth
- 38:50 – Housing affordability & changing demographics
- 40:00 – Shift toward smaller lots & urban living
- 42:08 – Generational differences in housing demand
- 43:38 – Balancing development with open space
- 44:10 – Conservation easements explained

46:19 – Debate: Should land restrictions be permanent?

47:33 – Funding conservation efforts

50:31 – Closing thoughts & community impact

Why This Matters

Utah is one of the fastest-growing states in the U.S., and this session breaks down:

- The real impact of zoning decisions
- Why NIMBYism is slowing development
- How housing demand is shifting across generations
- The balance between growth, affordability, and preservation
- What cities must do to avoid long-term planning mistakes

If you're involved in real estate, development, city planning, or investing — this is essential insight.