

Valo Refuge - Application for Conditional Use Permit

Narrative

Conference/education center. The term "conference/education center" means a facility designed for the purpose of conducting meetings for consultation, exchange of information and/or discussion which results in enhanced personal, business and/or professional development. A conference/education center may provide office facilities and schedule a range of business related and/or leisure activities (e.g., training workshops, seminars, retreats and similar type meetings). Such a facility may serve meals and offer day use and/or overnight lodging facilities.

We are seeking a conditional use permit of the Weber County Code pursuant to Chapter 101-2-4 c, for a conference/education center, in the forest zone F-5.

Our retreat center would be called Valo Refuge, and would be used for the purpose of conducting meetings as above, to result in enhanced personal development. It will include leisure activities, specifically retreats and similar type meetings. We seek to offer day use and overnight lodging facilities.

Our goal for years has been to create a quiet place to introduce, educate and exchange information on the benefits of communion with nature through meditation, yoga, silence (silent retreats), sauna, and sound baths, to assist the mind and body with healing and personal growth. We believe tapping into these methods in this serene natural environment is an optimal way to help folks rebuild and grow stronger.

We have been searching for the right location, and believe we found it in this quiet canyon, with minimal development, dark skies and Beaver Creek snaking through. For the last twenty years our family has visited Causey Reservoir to paddle board and canoe. We think it is a very special area that is also very accessible to the urban areas of Ogden and Salt Lake City.

The site is along State Road/Highway 39 just North of the Causey Reservoir turnoff, consisting of 10.03 total acres along Beaver Creek, located in the Forest Zone F-5 area. There are multiple compacted crushed rock RV sites along Beaver Creek, with utilities stubbed to each.

Each of the Northern sites feed into a 1500 gallon permitted septic tank on the North parcel. There is also a 1500 gallon permitted septic tank on the South parcel. Both septic systems have been evaluated by Nathan Bseiso at Johanson Engineering and approved by Summer Day at the Weber Health Department.

Two permitted artesian wells are on the property, one on the West and one on the East side of Beaver Creek. A full panel was ordered and completed for both wells by the Weber Health Department (Summer Day, Ryan Klinge) and passed on all metrics. The State Division of Drinking Water also performed a site visit and deemed the use is too small to be classified as a public system. The well on the East side of the creek also has a pump house and 1500 gallon water storage tank with small kitchenette for one employee.

There is also a converted shipping container we intend to house a bathroom. We have a four person sauna on the East side of the creek with no on-site plumbing. This is simply a dry sauna with water poured over the rocks from a pitcher. There is also a sixteen by twenty foot

converted shipping container on an old crushed rock pad on the West side of the creek, also with no on-site plumbing. This room we want to use as a place to move indoors as needed to conduct our retreats of meditation, yoga and sound baths. This room can only house ten occupants (space for ten mats including the instructor). We plan to conduct most of the gatherings outside as the sounds of the creek and fresh air will be an integral aspect of our retreats, but will also use this space with when conditions are right and depending on seasonality.

We purchased the property in February of 2023. It had up until our possession been used as a private family RV campground, with grounds sprayed with harmful pesticides to create a non native grass, field environment. We knew it was special as early on we had a young moose bedding down on the grounds and witnessed a bald eagle soaring over the creek.

We are seeking a conditional use permit to ensure that any impact to the environment and our neighbors is mitigated and our business operations are done legally, safely and properly.

Traffic concerns:

Our silent, meditation, sound bath and yoga retreats for day use will be limited in scope, given that our shelter/retreat room can only house room for ten yoga mats at most and no showers will be available to daytime attendees. For overnight guests, we have only three RV mirror homes (eventually four), and each 220 sq. ft. unit contains only one (king size) bed, meaning three vehicles max for overnight guests, someday four at full build out. The fourth unit for now (currently a plexiglass dome) is for the caretaker to sleep in to supervise retreats and overnight guests. This keeps in line with our goal to minimize our impact to the site and the native flora and fauna. Therefore, we are looking, at max capacity, having four vehicles for overnight guests and six vehicles for day use visitors. We plan for these retreats to happen primarily on select weekends when our instructor friends are available and interested and the people are able to visit. The cadence for day use/retreat visitors is expected to be monthly - and more feasible/common in the warmer months.

Per our call with UDOT, we will have a metal sign at the gate entrance at the 2630 N parcel entry gate. When budget allows we would like to have have a large boulder out front to clearly and more aesthetically delineate the entrance.

Also per UDOTs request our entry gate has now already been expanded in width from twelve to twenty eight feet. We have deleted the southern access gate per another UDOT request.

Sign lighting will consist only of a light to illuminate the entrance signage and drive into the large parking lot on the south side of 2630 N, which lies east of Highway 39 and West of Beaver Creek. We have been instructed to pave the entry gate area as well as the parking lot, and can do so, though we feel strongly gravel is not only more economical but also more environmentally friendly. It is also what appears to be utilized one mile down the road at the entry for the four very similar yurts at Dancing Moose. Though we recognize their conditional use permit is agritourism we think the ultimate use is very comparable and crushed gravel works great for us as well as them. We have been plowing for the last two winters over gravel and even raw dirt with no issues as we have a neighbor four miles up the road with a plowing service.

We have two electric vehicle charging stations in place in our parking area just inside the fence on the Southwest portion of our property along the chain link fence line, that is eighty feet from Beaver Creek, and can accommodate the ten vehicles at max occupancy (one for each of four tiny home/RVs and 6 additional day use guests during retreats).

Fire and safety concerns:

In light of the tragic fires in California this is a key priority for us. Our three (eventually four) RV tiny homes are constructed off site of floor to ceiling steel and glass on three sides, with the fourth side consisting of thermal treated ash.

Our understanding is that wood decks can be a very flammable combustion source and we have decided at this point to therefore omit them altogether, which also helps our budget considerably. We will have a set of steps leading up to the unit, likely utilizing metal or composite. This also will allow us to move the units from the site altogether if absolutely necessary. None of the mirrored structures concentrate light due to the angle of each of the panels and presents zero fire danger.

Our other buildings are a combination of non flammable metal roofs and metal shipping containers. Our access bridge is a rail car, rated when constructed to hold in excess of 140,000 lbs. To be absolutely certain we had it inspected by Kim Johansen of Johansen Engineering, structural engineer, and he has signed off that it is sufficiently strong to hold in excess of 80,000 lbs, which meets the specs needed by the fire department (75,000 lbs).

There is also abundant space on both sides of the creek to accommodate emergency vehicles and turnarounds as we have cleared out all of the deadfall we found when we acquired the property.

The existing fire pit that was once in the middle of the grounds has been moved, now away from foliage and reconstructed with large rocks and gravel on the perimeter as fire barrier. Our rolled steel containment cylinder is four feet deep. We have a hydrant nearby and have custom fabricated a thick steel manhole cover to extinguish oxygen when folks are done and move on for the evening.

Flood risk:

We are utilizing existing RV sites on the East side of Beaver Creek, and one pad on the west side where the meditation/yoga room is situated. These long established sites have been there for decades and have never been at risk of flood, even in the historic record breaking flow of 2022/23, only months after we closed on the property (which was a great litmus test on what to expect). Crazy as the torrent of water was flowing through, not for a moment was any part of our entire creek frontage in jeopardy of flooding. The only flooding witnessed that season was on the property to the south of us which we have been told lies in the flood plain. As an added precaution, each of our RV mirror tiny homes are elevated thirty six inches off the ground, and to go even further, they are on wheels. Simply put, none of our structures are in any way exposed to flood risk.

Noise levels:

Our guests will be required to observe quiet hours from 10 pm until 7 am. Overnight silent retreats will, obviously, be silent. Conference/education retreats for yoga and mindfulness are by their very nature quiet in scope and principally during daytime hours (depending on season). They are for introspection and resetting. Loud music will not be permitted at any time. We want to preserve quiet not just for our neighbors but also for our guests and wildlife. We want this to be a place for serenity, for us as well as the visiting animals that take refuge in and around Beaver Creek. Partying and loudness will not be tolerated. Alcohol will not be permitted as it does not align with our values nor our wellness focus.

Environmental concerns:

The code specifies certain standards necessary for mitigation of harmful impact to which the proposal must adhere. We have a keen desire to be custodians of wild places, and feel that this starts with what impact we can have on the land we care for. Preserving, repairing and fostering a collective stewardship of the fragile riparian ecosystem here is of utmost importance to us.

When we took possession of the land, we had a strong interest in returning the habitat to its native state. The previous owners cared deeply for it, but had been heavily watering and fertilizing non native grass in an effort to alter the landscape from the original riparian habitat. We feel this was not only a waste of water but also didn't like the idea of harmful pesticides leeching into the creek, affecting water quality downstream, and putting local wildlife at risk. We understand that with all development comes with it stressors on our environment. We are addressing this wherever possible - from prefabricated RV/mirror home construction off site to sparse and downward lighting to preserve our dark skies. We have left a dead cottonwood tree stump of no danger to occupants as we noticed a great horned owl nesting in it. We have deleted the irrigation system, opting instead for low water use native plants. Our lawns we inherited will give way with the aid of drylands pasture mix, meadow lawn blend, great basin wildflower mix, annual wildflower mix, and Rocky Mountain wildflower mix, to restore native flora that can feed and sustain native fauna. We have seen badger, moose, elk, beaver, osprey, whooping crane, fox, skunk, bald eagle, and of course deer already during our brief stewardship and recognize our responsibility.

We intend to plant additional pine trees this Fall- blue spruce and Austrian pine primarily, to supplement the beautiful natural riparian landscape and native flora that we inherited.

We selected the mirrored prefabricated RV homes as we believe they seamlessly blend into nature, reflecting our surroundings seamlessly and the steel and glass units are constructed off site to minimize impact of exterior construction. These mirrored panes of glass are treated with special stickers to prevent bird strikes.

As applicants we are seeking a general layout that allows for a harmonious development of the parcels with nature, a symbiotic relationship to educate and inform about wellness and coexist with the landscape.

Waste Management and Water:

Our retreats may on seldom occasions serve healthy food. If so, the protocol will be for each guest to bring a dish to share. Likewise, usage will be far below what would be used within an actual camp experience. If something needs to be heated, we have a microwave for that. For those guests that stay overnight in our 3 (eventually 4) mirrored RV tiny homes, each are supplied with water from our pump house/artesian fed permitted and Weber Basin Water District - tested well. Each unit has a small kitchenette (microwave, sink, and mini fridge) as well as toilet and shower. Our north septic system is 1500 gallons. Our septic needs on the north lot with the four tiny homes will utilize this tank.

The stand alone kitchen/pump house and external bathroom empty into the preexisting second (South) septic system, which is also 1500 gallons. This tank will be functioning for the caretaker using and maintaining the site as well as occasional day guests using the sauna or meditation/yoga room for retreats.

The wells and septic tanks were both fully permitted and the water tested by Weber Basin water plant as well as the Weber Health Department.

We are long time backpackers and believe in adhering strongly to the "leave no trace" wilderness ethic. We are familiar with the danger unsecured food and garbage poses to wildlife as well as the general public. Garbage generated during retreats will be hauled away by our caretaker, or by housecleaning for overnight guests. Given the small scope of our retreat center, we do not anticipate needing a dumpster, but it is on our radar and we do foresee eventually needing one if occupancy ramps up. We will place the dumpster behind a screen just inside and left (North) of the entrance gate. If this need shall arise we will be using the services of Waste Management which services the area (Econo does not),.

Guests will be prohibited from bringing dogs on site to prevent any contamination of water supply and the creek.

Lighting:

We also may on some occasion hold a retreat consisting of a night viewing event in association with the Salt Lake Astronomical Society, of which my wife and I are members, again with five to

ten vehicles at max occupancy. "Valo" means "light" in Finnish, and we think this name captures the aim for folks to come and observe starlight and planetary objects from the cosmos with telescopes.

One of the drivers for our vision of Valo was to have a place to regularly see fainter stars. We are cognizant of the need to keep light pollution at bay and keep the Ogden Valley dark sky compliant. We do have concerns about recent development and what that will do to the night sky over our property.

With that in mind, our lighting choices we now have less light pollution than when we inherited the land from the previous owners. The Stansbury Park Observatory Complex ("SPOC") already is encountering issues of light pollution and its days may be numbered. We don't want that to happen up here at our retreat center.

Lighting at Valo will therefore be limited to what is needed for safety and will consist of downward facing fixtures with minimal lumens. We presently have only a few lights on the property, along pathways as needed, and we very much like it that way. We want enough luminosity for safe navigation, nothing more.

As mentioned, the RV homes are designed to blend into the environment (with a coating on the glass to protect birds), and we have noticed the heavy glazing makes this the case after dark, as one can barely see in. They have a dark tint to the mirrored finish. In keeping with the dark sky objective and our mission to provide a good venue for our friends at the Salt Lake Astronomical Society and other user education groups, we are adhering closely to creating an atmosphere of very limited lighting.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our application to create a safe quiet space in a natural environment to educate about various aspects of wellness, mindfulness and nature. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mark and Michelle Overdevest