

Dispute could keep Park City lifts idle

By Jack Healy, New York Times

PARK CITY – Can a ski town survive if the ski lifts stop running?

The question is gripping this mountain town where celebrities gather each winter for the Sundance Film Festival and summer days glide by as placidly as kayakers on the nearby reservoir. Beneath the calm veneer, a ski resort's eviction battle over land, leases and millions of dollars has erupted into a full-on civic crisis.

Businesses and town leaders worry that the festering dispute could, in the worst case, end up shuttering one of Utah's most popular ski resorts for this winter, crippling a tourist economy that needs the chair lifts to run. Instead, those lifts could be uprooted from the mountains.

"Park City prides itself on its comity," said Myles Rademan, a longtime resident and former town official who carried the Olympic torch when the Winter Games were held in Utah in 2002. "We worked hard to build our reputation as a place that gets along. This is all kind of a shock to our system."

The dispute centers on the Park City Mountain Resort, a popular ski mountain in the heart of town whose lifts practically whisk visitors from Main Street to the slopes. It provides more than 1,200 jobs, draws thousands of skiers and tourists, and is an anchor of Park City's postcard-perfect downtown.

For years, the resort had a lease that would make even a rent-controlled tenant in Manhattan jealous. While the proprietors owned the parking lots and much of the land at the base of the

mountain, they leased the actual ski slopes, paying \$155,000 a year for 2,800 acres of prime downhill terrain. It was an almost unimaginable bargain in a town where an unfinished house lot is on the market for \$1.9 million.

But in 2011, the Powdr Corporation, which runs Park City Mountain, made what the *Salt Lake Tribune* called “one of the most monumental blunders in Utah business history”: It failed to renew the lease on time.

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