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Revised land-use plan short on details, some say **Those who've read latest update like emphasis on wildlife.**

By Kevin Huelsmann and Cara Rank, Jackson Hole, Wyo.

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The recently released proposed update of the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan has been greeted with a mixture of trepidation and skepticism.

Those who have read it seem to agree generally that it is an improvement on the draft that was released in April 2009.

Those same people, however, have a lot of questions about how the broad policies and goals included in the plan will be implemented, how the rest of the review process will play out and when planning commissioners will tackle those kinds of questions.

"There are some good intentions, but without additional clarification, the plan doesn't provide much of the certainty that people were expecting," Kristy Bruner, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance community planning director, said in a written summary of the plan provided to the News&Guide.

Initial reactions from residents, public watchdog groups, conservation organizations and others have run from complimenting planning staff for emphasizing the protection of wildlife and natural resources in the new draft to asking questions about how that general policy actually will be implemented. Some are skeptical about the lack of detail included in the plan as well as about the review process itself.

Those responses come about a week and a half after the release of the updated version of the plan with all the changes recommended by town and county planning commissioners over the past year.

Although the document basically memorializes recommendations approved by planning commissioners, it affords the chance to review those suggestions as they relate to the entire document.

In the draft, planning staff tried to place greater emphasis on the stewardship of wildlife and natural resources and more clearly defined the town as the primary area for growth.

Just as significant were the things that were not included in the plan.

Planning commissioners eliminated the idea of development nodes outside the town. They barred accessory residential units in the county. And they recommended that there be caps on the amount of new development that would be allowed in the town and county.

Despite those changes, Bruner raised questions about the level of ambiguity still in the plan.

"While we understand that not all of the details should be worked out at this point in the process, at some point the discussion will need to be narrowed," Bruner said in her summary. "Some of the hard questions should be researched prior to the

adoption of very detailed future land-use maps, narrative and tables.”

One example, she said, is the policy to focus development to certain areas, such as the town.

“It’s good to include a goal to confine overall development footprints and pursue the ‘Town as Heart,’ but at some point, we need to take a comprehensive and closer look at how much capacity exists on the ground within this confined area,” Bruner said in her summary. “Can we provide parking for the proposed level of development potential in certain districts? What does this extra development potential mean in terms of local and systemwide transportation infrastructure and capacity, impervious surface coverage and expected runoff? Making sure we have outlined solutions to some of the challenges associated with new land-use is important.”

Christine Walker, executive director of the Teton County Housing Authority, had a similar take on the plan.

Walker said she thought votes taken by the planning commissions supported work force housing. And while she was generally pleased with the document, she had some questions about how the draft relates to those votes.

For example, Walker said the planning commissions seemed to want to provide density bonuses or incentives for building work force housing, but chapters of the document seem to go the other direction, particularly with the planned unit development for affordable housing now revoked.

“I don’t know how that will work, practically speaking,” Walker said.

She said the plan needs to be clarified on questions such as locations where work force housing should be built and how many units are appropriate in one development.

“I think there needs to be some general direction in the comp plan so you create the predictability and you understand where the community wants to place that housing,” she said.

Bruner said she is also concerned with some of the build-out numbers that have been floating around.

“It can be confusing for people when all these different numbers are published in different places,” she said.

Bruner specifically was talking about estimates for the total number of potential dwelling units allowed under the latest version of the plan.

According to statistics released by town and county planning staff, planning commissioners recommended that the total potential number of new dwellings in the county be capped at 7,207, with the caveat that county planned residential development potential has not yet been determined.

The 7,207 would be in addition to the 9,644 existing dwellings in the valley.

Without a cap on residences, town and county planning staff members estimate there is the potential for a total 21,354 dwellings in the county under the new plan.

That number is closer to what Bruner came up with when she was working with planners for an article for the alliance’s newsletter.

Bruner said that after talking to planners, she left with the assumption that she needed to factor in planned residential developments at a rate of nine units per 35 acres.

Although there is skepticism about how many of the policies in the plan will be whittled into specific land-use regulations, many say they agree with the general direction of the plan.

Rich Bloom, a Melody Ranch resident who's been active in the process, said he thinks the draft shows improvements from the first document released one year ago.

"They've prioritized wildlife and scenic values as our community's highest priorities," Bloom said.

The second priority limits growth to the current potential as the second highest priority.

Posing questions about a major land-use document is not a new phenomenon among valley residents, but the clamoring that surrounded last year's release of the plan has largely subsided.

Kelly Lockhart and Tim O'Donoghue, both of whom served on a group that planning staff members conferred with as they formed the plan, said they had not yet delved into the latest draft.

Friends of Pathways Executive Director Tim Young, who attended all of the meetings in which planning commissioners discussed transportation issues, also had not read the latest draft of the plan.

"I think everyone is taking a breath and enjoying the break," he said.

Others who had already pored over the new document said they still have plenty of questions but felt that the latest iteration was headed in the right direction.

Armond Acri, executive director of Save Historic Jackson Hole, agreed that some questions still need to be answered. Save Historic Jackson also doesn't agree with everything in the plan, even though it is a "big improvement" from where it started a year ago.

Maybe that's a good thing, he said.

"If no one person is happy, maybe it's getting toward the kind of compromise that is needed," he said. "If one group is totally happy and one totally unhappy, then is that a really balanced document?"

Still, Bloom noted that only half of the plan has been revised. With 65 pages of future land-use maps still to be reviewed, there is more work ahead.

"Those are where the policies will be put into place," he said. "Those maps, what they give us is predictability."

That predictability is supposed to come from the future land-use maps, detailed descriptions and renderings meant to explain visually some of the the proposed policies.

The review of those maps, however, was delayed by planning commissioners until after elected officials finish their initial review of the plan.

"It appears that the [future land-use plan] is intended to be the predictable piece of the plan to guide future development," Bruner said. "It is what is designed to move us away from, in many cases, the vague and broad polices of the themes and policies section. So, it's difficult to evaluate the plan, overall, without a clear understanding of how the [future land-use plan] section of the plan will play out."