

October 21, 2011

Re: Action Needed to Achieve a Shift in Development Patterns

Dear County Commissioners, Mayor, Town Council, Planning Commissioners, and Planning Staff:

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance greatly appreciates that many of you took the time to attend the presentation by planning expert Mark White to discuss potential tools to achieve a shift in development patterns in Teton County. I am writing now to provide you with a summary of the presentation, links to the full PowerPoint presentation, and a radio interview with Mr. White. I strongly encourage you to review these materials to refresh your knowledge of the many tools that can be used to achieve our shared goals.

Achieving a meaningful shift in development patterns is a top priority for the residents of Teton County, and we have heard this point consistently reaffirmed by more than one hundred people in neighborhood discussions all over the county this week. Finding ways to achieve this goal has clearly been a top priority for our community for years, and as planning staff and elected officials, you have all claimed that this is a top priority for you as well.

Action is needed now to achieve a real shift in development patterns, and to regain the trust of the people you represent. We currently have a limited set of tools to shift development, but they have not fully met expectations when we look at the results of development in recent decades. We need to strengthen our existing tools, and develop a new set of policy tools.

As we interviewed leading national planning experts on this topic, all of them emphasized that many communities develop Comprehensive Plans that state shifting development patterns as a goal, but in practice, very few communities actually achieve this goal. In his presentation, Mr. White strongly recommended that we begin work on this keystone of our Comp Plan now.

If we are serious about shifting development patterns in Teton County, we need to begin work now. For years community members and elected officials have floated ideas on tools that might work here, but there is no real consensus, and no meaningful progress toward selecting and developing tools that can do the job. As we near your planned completion date of the Comp Plan, this level of vagueness, and the lack of a plan for how to proceed, is not acceptable.

The research and writing of consistent, functional, legally defensible regulations that shift development patterns will not be easy, especially given the relative land values in Teton County. It will likely take years of hard work by a firm with expertise in regulatory frameworks and coding. But this goal is achievable, and it should be a top priority. Other communities similar to Jackson have successes that we can learn from, and adapt to meet our situation here. We have the opportunity to become leaders on how to best achieve real shifts in development patterns.

We are aware that you have said for years that beginning work on this complicated subject doesn't need to begin until after the adoption of the Comp Plan. As an expert in the field, Mr. White strongly disagreed, and for years the Alliance has also strongly disagreed with this postponement. Finally, the residents of Teton County seem to overwhelmingly disagree with the idea that they should trust you to figure all of this out later.

If you do not begin research and development of tools to achieve your vision now, you will end up adopting a Comp Plan in March, and then have to rely on the same inadequate tools that we have had for years. We will fail to achieve our objective on development patterns until we have a complete set of cutting edge policy tools. We need to stop putting off this vital work if you want to see real change during your tenure.

Perhaps more importantly, significant action is needed on this topic to regain the trust of the public you represent. In our recent neighborhood discussions, we consistently heard from residents that they support shifting development patterns, and they might even be willing to allow increased residential density in some areas, if that was offset by permanent conservation of critical wildlife habitat. But many of your constituents don't trust that this tradeoff will actually happen. They fear that you will zone some areas for increased density, and then fail to counterbalance that with conservation easements in rural areas. This could actually *increase* the overall entitled development potential in the county, which most residents clearly oppose. Given years without progress toward developing at least a consensus on the tools we will use, and without making a plan for when and how we will research and develop detailed regulations that are appropriate in Teton County, their mistrust seems justified.

In the current Character District process, residents are now asked to identify where they could live with redevelopment and increased density, and where they would like to see conservation and rural character. Residents rightfully ask how you intend to achieve the vision they can draw for you on these maps. You urgently need a more concrete answer than what you have offered so far.


The Alliance strongly urges you to begin this process now. Create a Request for Proposals on a regulatory framework to shift development patterns in Teton County Wyoming. Publicly commit to selecting an expert firm for this important work before the end of this year.

The Alliance will help you in this process in any way we can. We are committed to the same goals you have reaffirmed for the future of Jackson Hole, and we want to make sure we actually achieve them.

We hope that the presentation the Alliance organized on shifting development patterns was useful as an illustration of the many tools that are available to us, and as an indication of the sheer volume of important work that remains before us.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further with each of you.

Sincerely,



Trevor Stevenson
Executive Director

The Executive Summary, PowerPoint presentation, and Interview with Mark White are all on our website at the following addresses:

Summary of Shifting Development Patterns Presentaion:

<http://www.jhalliance.org/Library/Alerts/2011/MarkWhiteSummary.10-21-11.pdf>

Direct link to 10/12/11 "Comp Plan Uncomplicated" radio interview with Mark White:

<http://www.jhalliance.org/Library/Audio/2011/CompPlanMarkWhite.10-12-11.16kbps.mp3>

Direct link to the PDF of Mark White's 10/6/11 PowerPoint presentation:

<http://www.jhalliance.org/Library/Alerts/2011/MarkWhitePresentation.10-6-11.pdf>