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Residents' input vital to next phase of Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan has been a work in progress since 2007, and we're finally approaching the home stretch.

After so much time, you may be feeling burned out about the plan, or may not trust that your input now will make any difference. Maybe you believe that you don't know enough about planning for your ideas to matter.

Despite whatever reasons you may have for being silent, the fact is that this month is nearly your last chance to speak up about the plan and to help create a better future for Jackson Hole. Your voice matters for the future of your neighborhood, and for the future of the community as a whole.

The town and county elected officials have approved the first half of the Comp Plan – the vision and policies section. This section reaffirms that our community wants the plan to protect the valley's wildlife, scenery and community character. However, there's no clear action plan in place to accomplish these priorities, and it isn't clear what our specific goals are for different areas of Jackson Hole.

Now is the time to get specific, and to make the community's vision for the future a reality. That's why the second half of the Comp Plan – the Character District Maps – are so important. This month, we're entering the "Future Character" phase of the Comp Plan process, in which participants will help figure out how they'd like their neighborhoods to look in the future.

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance believes that this is a crucial phase for your input, and Teton County Planning Director Jeff Daugherty agrees. In a recent interview with the Alliance, he explained that "The reason this is important, and the reason that people should show up, is because this effort – these character districts – will form the basis of the zoning map and eventually the land development regulations, which are how you put your policies into effect."

Town and county planners intend to hold these Future Character workshops at the end of this month, and will post times and locations at www.jacksontetonplan.com as they are finalized. To help citizens prepare for this critical opportunity, the Alliance is organizing neighborhood meetings throughout Teton County in mid-October. Our objective is to facilitate conversations among neighbors to exchange ideas, identify shared concerns, and strategize about how to be effective in the official county meetings. Please call (307) 733-9417 or visit www.jhalliance.org to join us for a conversation in your neighborhood.

Next up will be an official December workshop, where we should see what the planners have developed in response to public input. Although it's not clear what will happen at that workshop, the Alliance believes December should be the time for the community to evaluate how well the planners have incorporated public input, and to provide feedback

about whether the new maps and the expected population growth accurately reflect the desired future of Jackson Hole.

Beyond that, if our community wants to see its vision become a reality, we need to implement effective policies and regulations. However, to date, few tools have been identified to achieve the community's goals.

For instance, the recently approved policies section of the Comp Plan says that to protect our wildlife and scenery, we should move future development away from rural, sensitive areas to places in the county that are already developed. This would help preserve the important wildlife habitat and scenery of Jackson Hole, while encouraging any new development to occur in already developed areas that have infrastructure to support it.

However, the Comp Plan doesn't address how to actually accomplish this goal. That's why the Alliance is bringing leading planning expert Mark White to the valley to share his expertise on tools to shift development patterns that other communities have used successfully – and that could be used here, too. White will be in Jackson tomorrow, Oct. 6, for a 2 p.m. technical meeting with town and county elected officials, planning commissioners and planning staff, as well as interested members of the public, followed by a public forum at 6 p.m. Both presentations will take place in the County Commissioners chambers at 200 S. Willow.

Our elected officials need to commit to continuing research into the most promising mechanisms for shifting development patterns, or all of our work on visioning and mapping won't lead to real change.

As caring residents of Jackson Hole, please do your part by urging your elected officials to continue to research the unresolved issues identified in the Comp Plan, and to implement regulations that will allow our community to achieve its goals of preserving the valley's wildlife, scenery and character. The input of residents from all walks of life is vital to planning the future of the area that we all love.

Trevor Stevenson is a fourth generation Wyoming native, and grew up in Jackson. He has an advanced degree in environment and community development, and has worked extensively in sustainable community development in many countries. He is the Executive Director of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance.