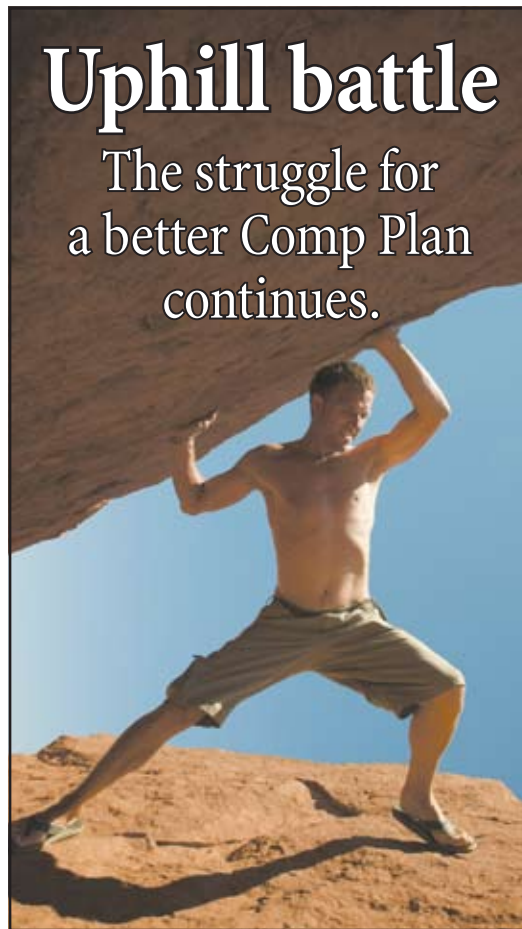


By **Kristy Bruner**,
Alliance Community Planning Director

When asked “How’s it going with the Comp Plan?” I wish I had a simple answer. Unfortunately, I don’t. The Comp Plan revision process, which began in the summer of 2007, has been a roller coaster. In many ways, this stems from the fact that our community didn’t get what we were expecting or signing on to – we got a complete rewrite of a document that we had been told was just going to be “updated.”

While there was consensus that some things in the 1994 Comp Plan needed improvement, many believed it was essentially sound and that the main problems stemmed from faulty land development regulations and a lack of enforcement.

Many also saw that our community’s support for a plan that would protect Jackson Hole’s wildlife, open spaces and community character remained strong. Polls confirmed this, so the “update” was primarily intended to refine our existing plan to bring more predictability, measurability and accountability into land use decisions.



Instead, in April 2009, nearly two years after the process began, our community got a fundamentally different document.

It had some changes for the better, but also many omissions, as well as changes for the worse. Plus, with the root issue of a rewrite never having been fully addressed, it’s no surprise that the revision process has been problematic or that it’s taking longer than expected.

Another reason the answer to “How’s it going” can’t be simple is that it’s still too early to tell. The joint planning commissions are now only about halfway through their first review of the April 2009 draft plan. And, while they are making positive strides in a number of areas, the review process often appears to be a case of one step forward, two steps back. (See the sidebars below and at right for examples.)

As always, we encourage people to stay involved, even though it’s frustrating at times. Visit www.jhalliance.org for links to background and current information and to our comments, or call Kristy Bruner or Becky Tillson at (307) 733-9417 for updates. ■

Pluses...

- The planning commissioners recently moved forward with an improved version of Theme Two, “Managing growth responsibly,” that acknowledges that the overall amount of growth in Teton County matters.
- They also okayed the revised Theme One, “Practice stewardship of wildlife, natural resources and scenic vistas,” which is an improvement over the April 2009 draft.
- Given the enormous task to review a “rewrite,” volunteer boards continue to invest a lot of time and effort to clarify and improve the draft plan. And they’ve taken some votes for the better. (See Page 15.)
- Many other citizens are making a difference by continuing to write letters and provide verbal comments throughout the months of public hearings.
- The planning commissions have confirmed the importance of data to good decision-making by establishing Buildout and Employee Generation task forces. (See Page 16 for more about them.)

And minuses...

- The jury is still out on whether we’re really heading toward having a better product than our existing 1994 Comp Plan.
- The overriding vision of the draft plan is still unclear, especially since protection of community character is apparently no longer going to be the basis for future land development regulations like it was in the ’94 plan.
- The purpose of the revision process – to add predictability, measurability and accountability to the community’s new plan – has yet to be met. (Although flawed, the draft’s Future Land Use Plan section was intended to be the key element of predictability, but its role in the plan is still up for debate.)
- Some of the planning commission votes have been so simplistic, and at such broad levels, that it’s too early to tell how they will be interpreted and incorporated into the theme revisions. (This is a result of the commissioners considering only the planning staff’s questions instead of reviewing the draft itself.)
- In an effort to be concise, some of the policies in the draft plan are so abbreviated that they’re unclear and open to interpretation, which takes a step away from predictability.
- There’s still resistance to adequately incorporating existing data into the plan.
- Since the planning commissioners are no longer doing careful line-by-line reviews, who will do them and when will they happen?
- The planning commissioners are considering each theme in isolation and say they intend to reconcile inconsistencies and conflicts between themes only at the very end of the process. This approach may prove problematic, since it means that all the votes taken and recommendations made throughout the planning commissioners’ initial review could essentially be reopened for reconsideration at that time.
- People are worn out. Much of the week-to-week decision-making is now far removed from the earlier phases of energized community input. ■

Win some, lose some...

What's been the result of eight months of Comp Plan hearings and more than 230 votes? As one planning commissioner has commented, "mediocrity is the price of consensus," and we agree that the revisions to date aren't all we were hoping for.

Several factors have contributed to uneven results. For instance, in general, the county planning commission as a whole has been more willing than its town counterpart to support changes to the draft that would uphold the community's stated priorities to protect wildlife, open spaces and community character. However, since only those recommendations that pass *both* boards make it into the revised themes, the outcomes have been hamstrung by many split votes.

Other elements contributing to an inefficient process are the ongoing struggle over what level of detail the review should get into, and the fact that there's been a fair amount of turnover (almost half) among members of both boards since they began reviewing the draft plan this past summer.

Despite these challenges, there have been a number of positive joint votes, including recommendations that the new plan should:

- Apply wildlife protection policies throughout Teton County, not just in the Natural Resources Overlay.
- Add community character and quality of life to the plan's vision statement, and consider "least growth" solutions.
- Make conservation of agricultural land use a priority throughout Teton County, and provide incentives for permanent open space and continued support for a Scenic Resource Overlay.
- Recognize that any and all growth in the valley impacts both wildlife and natural resources.
- Eliminate Wilson, South Park, Teton Village and the Aspens as nodes "appropriate for increased development potential," leaving only the Town of Jackson as an area "appropriate for town-level densities."
- Cap residential and commercial development in town at current base rates, with exceptions for residential development increases linked to commensurate decreases in the county and density bonus incentives for converting non-residential to residential uses.

Following are some recommendations we supported that failed to pass. In each case, the county planning commission voted in favor, but the town did not.

- Hold a workshop on possible Planned Residential Development multipliers and bases, with planning commissioners, staff and community groups.
- Add a statement in the draft plan's Vision chapter text about a "sustainable community, not dependent on growth," similar to what is in the 1994 Comp Plan.
- Ensure that Theme One, "Promote stewardship of wildlife and natural resources" incorporates comments from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.
- Make wildlife protection the primary consideration in all land use decisions.
- Determine an end state for buildout and implement it through a defined land use plan.
- Include a rate-of-growth cap as one of the plan's concepts.

(Visit www.jacksontetonplan.com/2009/08/planning-commission-review for a list of all the planning commissioners' votes to date, and to make comments.)

However, all of the above is subject to change when the planning commissioners make their final review, and afterward, when our elected officials conduct *their* review. We'll keep you posted at www.jhalliance.org. ■



1 In the early '90s, our community spent a lot of time and money on a Comprehensive Plan to protect the things we like about Jackson Hole. We're still using the result - the 1994 Plan.

2 In 2007, the town and county started a process to update the 1994 Plan. Somehow, this turned into a complete rewrite, which left out many key elements of the earlier plan.

3 In April 2009, a second draft of the new plan was released. Since this past summer, the town and county planning commissioners have been reviewing and making recommendations for changes to this new draft. They're about halfway through. When they're done, our elected officials will take a shot at it.

4 On Feb. 18, the joint planning commissions are set to review the latest version of the draft plan's "Theme Two" chapter dealing with growth. This revised chapter, called "Managing Growth Responsibly," is much better than the April 2009 version, which is a good sign that officials are listening. But it's still missing many of the protections included in our current Comp Plan from 1994.

You're probably wondering...

Is our community headed toward a better Comp Plan, or not?

We don't know yet. But we do know that we won't get a better plan unless we all work for one that will protect Jackson Hole's wildlife, open spaces and community character.

What you can do to help:

- Review the "redline" version of Theme Two at www.jacksontetonplan.com
- See the Alliance's comments at www.jhalliance.org/library.htm#comments
- File your written comments by 8 a.m., Feb. 16, at jacksontetonplan.com
 - Speak up at the Feb. 18 public hearing, 5:30 p.m., 200 S. Willow

Questions? Give us a call at (307) 733-9417.

 Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance
Partnering for a wild & beautiful valley since 1979
(307) 733-9417 • www.jhalliance.org

We ran three series of Comp Plan ads this winter and past fall to encourage people to stay involved.

Taskforces muster data for commissioners to make informed decisions.

By **Kristy Bruner**,
Alliance Community Planning Director

In a welcome move, the joint town and county planning commissions created two volunteer task forces this past fall to come up with information needed for their review of the draft Comp Plan.

The Buildout Task Force’s job was to establish base-zoning buildout numbers allowed under current regulations. In short, these numbers show how much more residential and commercial development could occur in Teton County in the future if there are no changes to the land development regulations.*

The Employee Generation Task Force’s mission was to make projections of how many more jobs – and therefore demand for more employees and more housing – might be generated by this buildout potential.

As a member of both task forces, the Conservation Alliance continues to promote the use of the best available data to inform land use decisions.

Another important task, yet to be completed, is estimating the existing “effective population” of Teton County, as well as projecting this population at buildout. Gaining an understanding of our effective

population (which includes visitors, permanent and seasonal residents, and transient and commuting workers) is particularly important for planning in communities like Jackson Hole, where extensive seasonal fluctuations are common.

The planning commissioners recently asked the Alliance and the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce to help figure out this piece of the puzzle, so that the new Comp Plan can take it into account.

Summaries based on the task forces’ research are provided below. Visit www.jacksonholecompplan.com for full reports. ■

Buildout Findings

In a nutshell, *even with limiting development to base allowances that exist today*, Jackson Hole is headed toward the following:

Residential Development (Town and County combined):

<u>Total Number of Existing Residential Units</u>	<u>Possible Total Number of Residential Units at Buildout*</u>
10,972	21,888

What this means: Jackson Hole could end up with about twice as many residential units at buildout as what’s on the ground today.

Commercial Development (Town and County combined):

<u>Total Amount of Existing Commercial Space</u>	<u>Possible Amount of Existing Commercial Space at Buildout**</u>
8,050,669 sq. ft.	14,666,762 sq. ft.

This represents: An 82 percent increase in Jackson Hole’s amount of commercial space at buildout.

*These figures include base units, planned residential development units, short-term rental units, employee housing units, and accessory residential units (i.e. guest houses), but do not include accessory units associated with potential residential development in the county.

**These figures do not include additional development possible using density-option tools, such as the Town of Jackson’s planned mixed-use development tool. *If the development potential using density-option tools were included, the buildout numbers would be much higher.*

Employee Generation Findings

Number of Jackson Hole employees expected to be generated due to above increase in <i>residential</i> development.....	6,924
Number of employees expected to be generated due to above increase in <i>commercial</i> development.....	10,335
Number of public-sector employees expected to be generated due to increased need for public services.....	2,243
Total number of additional potential Jackson Hole employees expected to be generated upon buildout.....	19,501
Number of existing Jackson Hole employees.....	22,693
Total number of Jackson Hole employees estimated upon buildout	42,194
Number of additional residential units added to local demand due to increased number of potential employees	10,834

What this means: Jackson Hole’s existing base development potential could result in a demand for 86 percent more employees than we have today, which would in turn create a demand for about the same number of residential units that exist today.

In short, the demand for this workforce housing will not be met, especially considering that workers are often priced out of local market-rate homes.

Note: It’s important to keep in mind that many assumptions went into compiling all these figures. Changing even one assumption could affect them. For instance, the demand-for-employee-housing calculations were based on assuming that each household has 1.8 employees, which may not be accurate.

Throughout the Comp Plan revision process, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance will continue to work for a plan that will preserve and protect our ecosystem, wildlife, natural resources, quality of life and community character in a sustainable and predictable manner. ■

In addition to the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan revision discussed on previous pages, the Conservation Alliance keeps an eye on numerous other community planning matters affecting our valley.

We've featured two of the major ones below; please check www.jhalliance.org/allianceaction.htm, or contact Kristy Bruner at (307) 733-9417 or Kristy@jhalliance.org for current info on others.

Discussions, decisions on transportation are just around the bend

On March 23, transportation consultants Carlos Hernandez and Rob Bernstein will kick off the joint planning commissions' first hearing on Theme Six of the Comp Plan, "Develop a Multi-Modal Transportation Strategy." We anticipate that discussions regarding transportation will lead to the crux of many issues of the draft plan and will keep you posted at www.jhalliance.org.

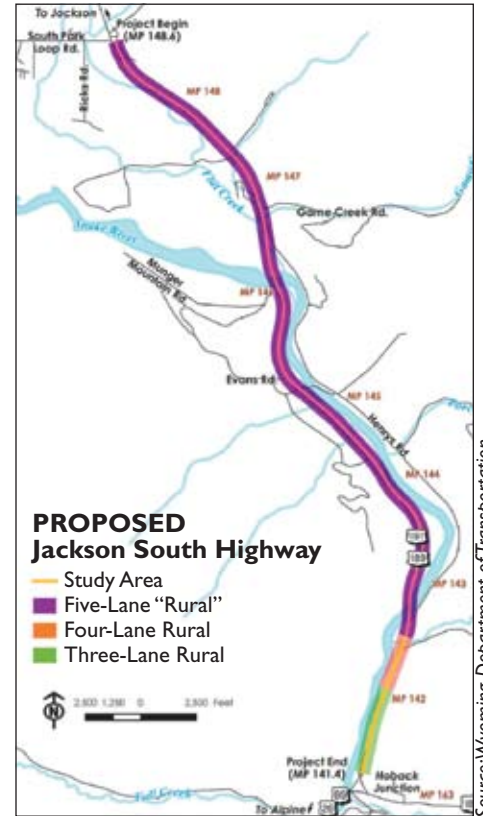
Also relevant to these discussions – particularly as our community identifies and commits to future transportation-related goals – is the extent to which local input is or isn't being factored into Wyoming Department of Transportation projects. A recent case is "Jackson South," where WYDOT has proposed two disappointing alternatives for road expansion in the 7-mile section of Hwy. 26/89/289/191 from southern South Park Loop Road to Hoback Junction. (See map.) From the time this project was first proposed many years ago, the Alliance has opposed making the highway five lanes wide, given the impacts it would have on wildlife and community character. (We have supported a modified 3-lane alternative.)

A final environmental impact statement is due out in May and the odds are not good that it will include acceptable alternatives.

Moving forward, the Alliance will work to ensure that the best possible wildlife mitigation measures are incorporated into this project's design. We'll also continue to question the need for a five-lane highway throughout this section. Importantly, the impacts won't be restricted to "Jackson South" alone; the project stands to set a bad precedent for future road "improvements" and expansions in the county.

The following are key issues that need to be further explored to evaluate the purpose and need of such a massive road expansion:

- Potentially questionable assumptions for socioeconomic projections, including estimated population growth.
- Choice of "logical termini" for the project and how this affects estimates for the "level of service" for different alternatives.
- Lack of a scientific basis for the assumption that five-lane roads are the only improvement option to increase driver safety.
- Lack of attention to mitigation measures for wildlife, particularly given that nearly half of the vehicle collisions in this stretch of highway are wildlife-related.
- Lack of serious consideration of context-sensitive solutions and local government and citizens' input. ■



Source: Wyoming Department of Transportation

WYDOT has proposed two alternatives for reconstructing the 7-mile stretch of highway south of Jackson – the one above, and one that's five lanes the whole way. The project's final environmental impact statement is due out in May.

Proposed Environment Commission a necessary step for our community

Teton County sits in the midst of incredible natural resources, from breathtaking scenery to valuable but dwindling wildlife habitat.

Some policies to protect these resources are already in place. For instance, developments proposed in certain sensitive areas must have their environmental impacts assessed before they're approved. However, our community hasn't had a good way of ensuring that decision makers have the best scientific information on which to base decisions, or a way of assessing the cumulative impacts of multiple development projects over time.

An Environment Commission could change that. As proposed by the Sustaining Jackson Hole Environment Group in 2008, and in the April 2009 draft Comp Plan, this appointed volunteer board could provide

the public and officials with a comprehensive, science-based understanding of the health of the Teton region's ecosystems.

In September, the joint planning commissions recommended to our town and county elected officials that this commission be established as soon as possible, so that it could help inform decisions regarding the Comp Plan revision. But, as of the end of February, it's still in the electeds' hands.

Because our wildlife, open spaces and natural resources are our most prized community assets, public policy in Jackson and Teton County should be guided by the most comprehensive and best available scientific information. The proposed Environment Commission could coordinate ecosystem-wide data collection, identify future research

priorities and facilitate the incorporation of that data into public policy.

Each decision that this community makes regarding development amounts and patterns has impacts not only on building sites, but also on the surrounding lands and environment. Whether it is a displaced mule deer herd or the interruption of the natural flow of a creek, the indirect "downstream" impacts of our decisions are very real. Knowing all that we can about our ecosystem, and the impacts that we are having on it, will lead to an increased understanding of the environment that we live in and a better ability to plan for our community's future.

After six months of discussion, we hope that electeds will soon make the Environment Commission a reality. ■