

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS on June 2008 Draft “Themes & Policies”
THEME FIVE
Meet Our Community’s Housing Needs

Big Picture:

This “theme” provides a positive conceptual goal to house workforce locally, but doesn’t necessarily lay out details that are critical in understanding how such a goal could predictably direct land development regulations and land-use decisions. This is not constructive. Housing goals must be comprehensively addressed within broader community priorities – protecting wildlife and managing growth responsibly. Why? It’s pretty safe to say that the demand for such housing will always exceed the supply. In order to effectively address housing needs, we have to think in the long-term. This will require us to sort through some difficult questions and issues. Ultimately, it’s critical to acknowledge that a community can’t grow itself out of growth-related problems, such as workforce housing shortages. In order to effectively address this issue, our community must commit to addressing both the “demand for” and “supply of” workforce housing. Issues of capacity must be recognized.

At the heart of this theme is establishing a quantitative goal for maintaining 65% of the workforce as residents in the community. Given the high cost of housing, the accelerating pace of low-income job creation, and an imbalance between commercial and residential development potential, our community is increasingly challenged to address housing needs. While some elements of housing demand are assumed to be “out of our control”, it is critical to recognize that many key factors are within our control. If we are strategic in our land-use decisions, overall pressures can be lessened. For example, we can limit not only resort development, but also other forms of commercial development. Policies that direct the conversion of some commercial development potential to residential development potential could also be effective. Policies that direct the reduction of excessive commercial development need to be included.

In general, it is problematic to identify a quantitative goal (to meet a certain target) without any understanding of the target. If you have a policy to maintain at least 65% of the workforce as residents, it is critical to simultaneously identify an estimated number (range at a minimum) for total workforce based on commercial potential. This idea of an estimated total workforce is absent. This is why data on residential and commercial buildout ranges and a clear vision of an “end state” is so critical. **How can we have a policy to house 65% of a target (total workforce potential) when we haven’t identified the target (total workforce potential)?** As an example of such a policy for a different theme of the Plan, how effective would it be to have a policy to “conserve 40% of historical moose winter range in Teton County” if we haven’t identified an estimated historical range? One would need baseline data (numbers of acres, etc.) to identify a target, quantitative conservation goal. It is helpful and desirable to have quantitative goals, but in order to predictably direct land-use strategies in the long-term, it is essential to have an adequate and strategic understanding of the overall target. Again, we recognize that the calculations of “exact numbers” are difficult, but believe that an analysis based on probable ranges is feasible and essential.

Key Issues:

- **“Housing needs” needs to be clarified in terms of ownership versus rental opportunity.** This is a very important issue, and one that must be addressed at the “big picture” level.
- It’s unclear how both regulatory measures and incentives (to produce workforce housing) will be utilized in a way that still ensures overall predictability in buildout. How will housing backlog be addressed?
- The current draft has several inconsistencies in regard to future resort development. Policy language needs to be clear, such as “No new resort developments will be approved and no existing resorts will expand.”
- Terminology needs to be clear and strong. For example, “Require” needs to replace “promote” in principle 5.4, “Promote workforce housing as part of redevelopment and infill.”
- In many cases, “will” must replace “should” in the policy language. Language is too weak.
- The community did not voice support for four-story buildings. However, Policy 5.6b includes the use of “mid-to high-rise apartments”. This language should be removed. This language appears to be an artifact of a “boiler-plate” document.
- Criteria for developments to be located “near services” should clearly emphasize “near existing services.”
- In general, the theme doesn’t always reflect an objective analysis of the potential impacts of increased development intensities within the context of other community priorities. For example, the language broadly states, “maintaining a resident workforce and social diversity strengthens the integrity of our community and benefits the environment.” However, the truth of these assumptions lies in the details. For example, when not kept in check with comprehensive community goals, it can trigger actions that harm the environment in the long-term. Local housing production alone will not reduce commuting rates.
- Commercial development potential needs to be addressed. New development should be fully responsible for the housing demand it generates. Also, overall job generation could affect commuting rates.