

# *Friends of Park County*

P.O. Box 23, Pray, Montana 59065

*Promoting thoughtfully planned growth in order to protect and enhance Park County's vibrant communities, sustainable working lands, and healthy natural resources.*

## **Friends of Park County's Response to the February Testimony of Park County Environmental Council**

March 16, 2021

Prior to your February meeting, the Park County Environmental Council submitted written testimony. We did not have time at that meeting to respond to that testimony, but we do so now.

PCEC's testimony to you is reproduced in Times Roman italics, and our position is show in un-italicized text, in this font.

### **Rapid growth is coming to Park County and threatens its resources and communities**

*Increasingly, the threats facing Park County aren't just coming from industrial sources. Instead, they're coming from population growth and increased visitation. Neighboring Gallatin County is the fastest-growing micropolitan community in the United States. Four million people visit Yellowstone National Park every year. Their impact is drastically changing the makeup of our community. The community we love is at risk.*

*Growth can mean a lot of things: Habitat fragmentation. Water quantity and water quality issues. Increasing inequality in gateway communities.*

Friends of Park County agrees and identified those same threats from rural sprawl in our prior testimony. We add to that list of impacts the loss of farm and ranch land and increasing demands taxes to pay for new rural roads, services and facilities, that are expensive to provide to serve low densities. We would also include the degradation of resources that support the tourism industry.

### **On the Conflict Mitigation Zoning District Regulations (CMZDR).**

*We applaud the proposed Conflict Mitigation Zoning District as a first step in the right direction and support the planning board moving forward with more in-depth discussions, both as a board and with the community. We believe it will be important to solicit more public input on the proposal and look forward to participating and encouraging our members to participate in a public comment process.*

Our organizations differ on the relative importance of conflict mitigation as a priority for action given the infrequency of the high impact land uses (tire dumps, mines, etc.) that are its inspiration.

But given that the planning staff have already spent 18 months on this effort and that the Planning Board has made the CMZDR their top priority, we support moving forward expeditiously to complete this project so that you can turn your attention to rural sprawl.

As noted below, that does not mean the Planning Board should not give some concurrent attention to the challenge of rural sprawl.

**Rural residential development is a serious issue that the Planning Board should address.**

*We also believe that residential development is a serious issue that needs to be explored by the Planning Board.*

*We share the concerns expressed by many Park County and Livingston residents about unregulated residential development in Park County.*

Curbing unregulated sprawling residential development, including recreational improvements and residences, is the primary reasons we were founded.

**Do not include rural residential development within the scope of the CMZDR.**

*However, we do not believe the two issues should be conflated, and the Planning Board should move forward working on both issues concurrently.*

This is an important point of agreement. Like PCEC we urge the Planning Board to continue to focus the scope of the CMZDR on high-impact industrial types of uses.

Friends of Park County believes scattered residential and recreational sprawl development can be addressed effectively only through traditional zoning and not by a laborious case-by-case review of permits for each home.

Furthermore, by identifying the few types of rural residential and recreational development that you include within the scope of the CMZDR, you may inadvertently imply that all the other types of rural sprawl are not of concern.

We also agree that the Planning Board should concurrently consider how to address rural sprawl and not wait until the end of the CMZDR review and adoption process.

**A comprehensive approach to rural residential development is needed.**

*We believe an incremental, comprehensive approach to addressing unregulated residential growth will be the most effective approach in the long term.*

*We urge the Planning Board to consider the wide-range of options for regulating residential growth: ....*

- *Ensure the Park County Subdivision Regulations are top-notch with innovative opportunities for planned unit developments, clustered developments, boundary relocations that enhance development options.*
- *Investigate opportunities for additional citizen-initiated zoning districts and strategies like transfer of development rights.*
- *Amend the Park County Growth Policy to help further direct residential growth to appropriate areas.*
- *Embrace use of voluntary land use options like conservation easements.*
- *Investigate feasibility of a county-wide open space bond measure.*
- *Engage in interlocal agreements with local communities that effectively help steer growth to our more populated town centers.*

We agree with the need to explore and then deploy a wide range of strategies to save Park County from rural sprawl, including these. Whether or not this approach should be incremental depends on whether such an incremental process would allow rural sprawl to continue; if so interim zoning would be required.

**Learn from growth management successes elsewhere.**

- *Continue to learn about successful growth management strategies from other locales.*

Along with Future West, Friends of Park County has shared and will continue to share information about successful growth management strategies from other places.

**Consider interim zoning.**

- *Consider adoption of an interim zoning district to help allow time to discern the political and practical appetite for a comprehensive, county-wide zoning district.*

We agree and proposed this step in prior testimony.

**The value of a comprehensive county-wide zoning district.**

*We wholeheartedly agree that a comprehensive county-wide zoning district, if done right, could be effective in helping Park County manage residential growth and useful in implementing the full range of planning tools like transfer of development rights.*

The need for a comprehensive county wide zoning district has been our position since our founding.