

Friends of Park County

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

Dear Friends of Park County

Last week we provided an update about the significant improvements to the Livingston Growth Policy. [\[click here to read the Part 1 email\]](#)

In this update you can read about:



- Our efforts to persuade the Park County Planning Board to take action to stop rural sprawl, (including the fable of the Jackalopes of Park County) and the growing chorus of concern about rural sprawl.
- The final deliberations on the Livingston Growth Policy – including critical discussions about how to turn an advisory policy statement into reality on the ground.
- Upcoming events.

You can always keep up with our activities and learn about upcoming education events [on our website](#).

County Planning Board minimizes the threat of rural sprawl and declines to act.

A little background first: From its founding, Friends of Park County has been an advocate for traditional zoning as the best means for stopping rural sprawl in Park County. This zoning can originate with the County Commission (called “Part 2” zoning because of its placement in the Montana statutory scheme) or it can be citizen-initiated zoning (“Part 1” zoning.) Park County already has several Part 1 zoning districts, but they apply to only a few small areas in the County.

Because we believe a county-wide approach is the best, we began appearing before the Park County Planning Board last Fall urging them to take action to stop rural sprawl through the adoption of Part 2 zoning.



Rural residential development in Paradise Valley.

In January Friends of Park County (FPC) presented written and online [testimony to the Park County Planning Board about the potential impacts of rural sprawl to Park County](#), basing that testimony on experiences in Gallatin and other counties around Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the fragmentary information available on development in rural Park County.

For the February 18 Planning Board meeting, FPC presented written testimony “On the Subject of Rural Residential Sprawl” which you can read [here](#). At the February meeting, Park County Planning Director Mike Inman presented information he gathered from the US Census Bureau, the County Sanitarian and other sources on the subject of rural residential development. Mr. Inman characterized that data as showing that rural residential sprawl was not a problem in Park County stating “But all in all, you know, growing by less than 1% annually is not a high growth rate...it is not even a blip on the radar when you compare it to Gallatin County...the predominate development type that is occurring in this county is public accommodation related.”

Mr. John Heidke, Chair of the Planning Board, agreed with Mr. Inman's position and disagreed with expert testimony present during the Future West webinar on Rural Sprawl expressing doubts that sprawl has any impacts on wildlife. He also questioned the propriety of limiting rural residential development as an attempt of current residents to close the door to new residents.

We followed up with **additional testimony** on the need for a comprehensive approach to rural residential development and reasons why that approach should not be included within the scope of the CMDZR at the County Planning Board's March meeting.

For now, Friends of Park County believes Park County will not act on rural sprawl through Part 2 zoning and so we will focus on other solutions which we will discuss in our next update.

Instead of managing rural sprawl, the Planning Board is focused on a case-by-case permit approval process developed for gold mines, tire dumps, asphalt plants and similar infrequent high-impact uses.

Instead of rural sprawl, the planning staff and Planning Board have been focused on a draft ordinance, that has been in preparation since November 2019, that would create a case-by-case permit approval process for gold mines, tire dumps and similar uses.

This is called the "Conflict Mitigation Zoning District Regulation Ordinance" ("Conflict Mitigation Ordinance" or CMDZR for short.) It creates a case-by-case review which was developed for certain high impact development, including the consideration of 42 (or more) possible "negative impacts" and requires mitigation of those impacts. "Mitigation" means "to lessen", so any amount of reduction in negative impacts would qualify as "mitigation." In its current form the CMDZR specifically exempts almost all forms of rural sprawl from review since agricultures

and residential development, as defined, are permitted uses. Review the current draft of the Conflict Mitigation Ordinance [here](#).



This kind of rural residential development would be exempt from review under the County's conflict mitigation ordinance – and each lot would be allowed two additional detached dwelling units and all accessory buildings.

In recent months, the subject of defining what is meant by the terms “residential” and “agricultural” as they appear in CMDZR has consumed a good share of the Planning Board meetings. Friends of Park County sees the attempts to define the terms as good news because it signals an awareness on the part of some Planning Board members that residential sprawl is indeed an issue in Park County. But we are wary and resistant that effective residential growth management or effective agricultural production protection, or genuine preservation of our environment and fish and wildlife habitat can be achieved by grafting such important measures onto the spindly stem of CMDZR

Friends of Park County has testified to the Planning Board and remains firm in our conviction that no matter what the subject of regulation is – whether gold mines or rural sprawl – traditional zoning is far more effective.

The draft Conflict Mitigation ordinance fails to meet one of ***Friends of Park County's guiding principles***: “Say what we mean and mean what we say in our policies and regulations so that no one needs to hire a lawyer to participate and so that everyone is treated fairly.”

In May Friends of Park County **is presenting a webinar on the County's draft Conflict Mitigation ordinance** to share our views about the draft ordinance and to begin discussing the appropriate tools for stopping rural sprawl in Park. Watch for the date and time ***on our website***.

Friends of Park County believes that rural sprawl is a serious threat to Park County, others agree, and it is the subject of several commentaries and presentations.

FPC has looked at the same data presented by the Planning Director at the March Planning Board meeting and has arrived at a different conclusion – ***rural sprawl is a serious problem now in Park County***.

Based on what is happening 15 miles away in Gallatin County it is almost certain to get worse. (If you want to know what FPC means by “rural sprawl” and “rural residential development” you can find that **here**.) FPC will be looking at additional data about rural development patterns in Park County and similar counties, in the coming months.

Citizens have spoken up addressing their concerns regarding rural residential development in Park County and in support of Friends of Park County's position that rural sprawl in Park County needs to be addressed now.

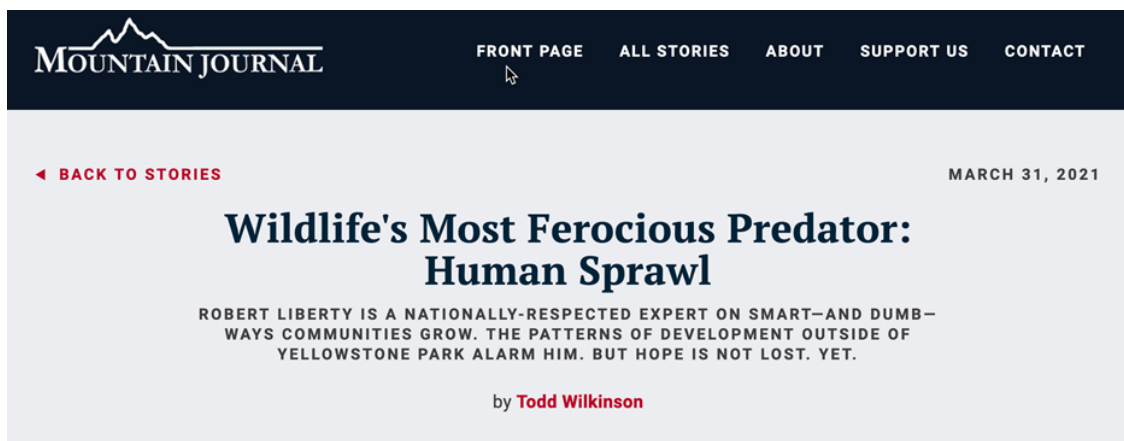
At the March 18 Planning Board meeting Shawn Hill, Director of Valley Advocates for Responsible Development in Teton County Idaho, testified to the Planning Board about the consequences of Teton County Idaho's failure to act in time to stop rural sprawl before it got out of control. (You can hear Shawn's testimony through **[this link](#)**;))

You might enjoy reading George Wuerthner's [letter to the editor "Rural Sprawl is the greatest threat to what we cherish about Park County"](#) which was published in the Livingston Enterprise.

Rural sprawl has been the subject of many recent commentaries, webinars and news stories, which we invite you to read and watch:

On February 16 **FPC hosted its first webinar on Rural Residential Sprawl: What is it? Can you stop it?** by its consultant Robert Liberty.

On March 10, Future West presented a [webinar on the impacts of rural residential sprawl on wildlife](#), part of its educational series Managing Growth in the New West which Friends of Park County co-sponsored. Over 100 people listened in from across Montana and the West.



Most recently, our professional land use consultant, Robert Liberty, was interviewed by Todd Wilkinson in the Mountain Journal.

Read the entire interview [here](#)

Friends of Park County will be exploring and discussing different ways of stopping sprawl over the coming months. You can read more about it in our next update.

Livingston Growth Policy: Planning Board's work drawing to a close with a focus on how to turn an advisory policy into the reality of a livable, compact city surrounded by farm and ranchlands and open space – not rural sprawl.

On April 7 the Livingston Planning Board's considered of three critical chapters in the draft Growth Policy – Public Facilities, Intergovernmental Coordination and Implementation. [According to the Board's most recent schedule, this meeting is to be the last when the Board considers the substance of the Growth Policy and therefore the last when it will be taking public testimony]

All of these chapters are important because they address how and when the advisory Growth Policy will be actually implemented. Implementation is what turns high sounding policy statements into the reality of compact, traditional neighborhood growth and protecting the ranchlands and wildlife habitat from rural sprawl.

As is our custom, Friends of Park County provided written recommendations on [Chapter 9](#), [Chapter 10](#), and [Chapter 12](#), all toward the end of improving the likelihood the Growth Policy will actually be implemented.

Watch [our website](#) (or [the City's](#)) for information on the City Commission's schedule for deliberations on the draft Growth Policy.

Upcoming Events!

Future West will be presenting the second in their series of presentations on the subject of "Managing Growth in the New West"

On April 14th at 11:00 AM MDT, Urban Planner Joe Minicozzi will be the featured speaker for a webinar entitled How Do Patterns of Growth Affect Our Wallets?

Attendance requires registration which can be accessed at

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_DE0_MRnASUyNkB5Cu5PYqw

Friends of Park County's second Education in Action webinar will be held in Mid-May. We will keep you updated when the specific topics and a final date are determined.

How you can help:

We are glad you are reading about our work but if you want to take the next step and take action, here are some ways you can help curb sprawl in Park County:

- Become an endorser for Friends of Park County
- [Make a contribution](#) to Friends of Park County
- Circulate this email to your friends.
- Write a letter to the editor.
- Sign up for our educational events.
- Testify in support of Friends of Park County's positions before the City and County Commissions and Boards. (We can help you if you have never done this before.)

Frank Schroeder, Chair & Co-founder

fschroeder@friendsofparkcounty.org

Jean Keffeler, Co-founder

jkeffeler@friendsofparkcounty.org

Ken Cochrane, Co-founder

kcochrane@friendsofparkcounty.org