

# *Friends of Park County*

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



## **November 2022 Update to Supporters**

[Take a look at our refreshed website!](#)

### **News in a nutshell:**

- Poll shows broad support among Park County voters for key growth management principles including protecting farms, ranches and forests, water quality and focusing new development in existing communities.
- Mountain View Commercial subdivision that would have facilitated commercial sprawl at west entrance to Livingston rejected by Livingston City Commissioners.
- County officials defer considering the impact of short-term rentals on housing affordability.
- Presentations of *Our Future Our Choice* continue, describing the various challenges of growth in Park County and how they can be met.
- Livingston has a new city manager and a new planner to tackle implementing the Growth Policy.
- Friends of Park County welcomes its new Board members Jen Vermillion and Kathy Foote.
- “Pollution in Paradise” is an educational presentation about Fish Creek Wyoming that reveals the risks of pollution of the Yellowstone River, other streams and drinking water, from septic systems.

## ***Scientific Poll Reveals Park County Voters' Support for Key Growth Management Principles.***

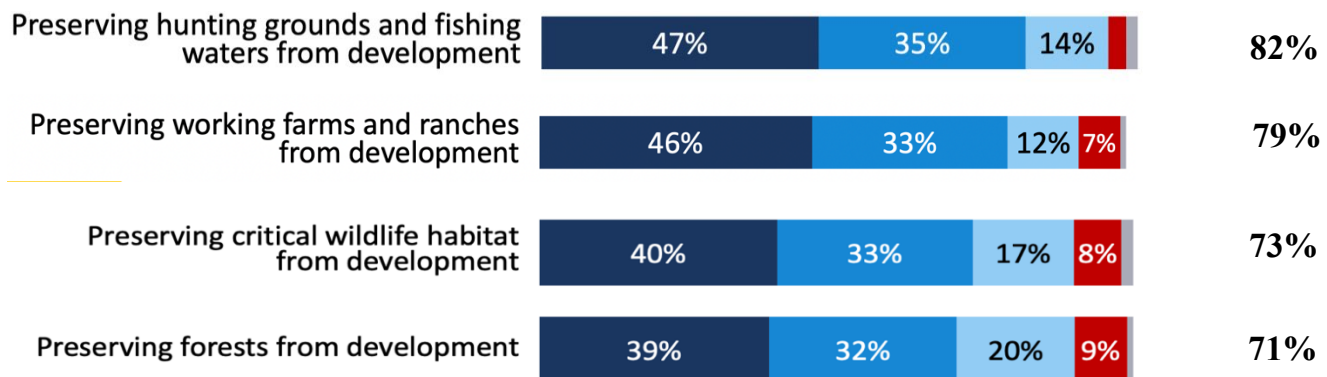
A scientific poll of Park County voters commissioned by Friends of Park County in 2022 revealed broad support for various growth management principles. Here is how the question was posed and the answers.

*I'd like to ask you about some principles that could be used to guide decisions about growth in Park County. Please tell me how important each principle is to you personally: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.*

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know

### **Protecting Working Lands and Wildlife**

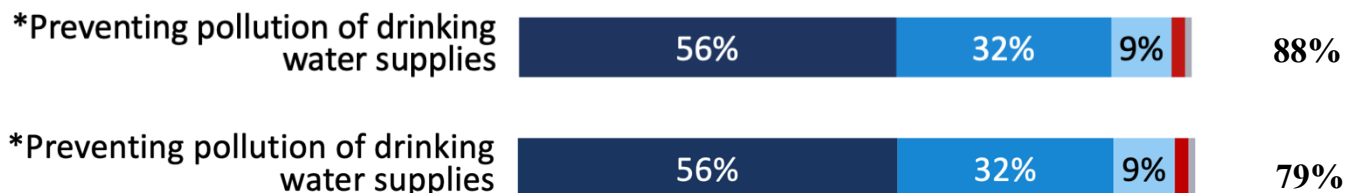
**Extremely & Very Important**



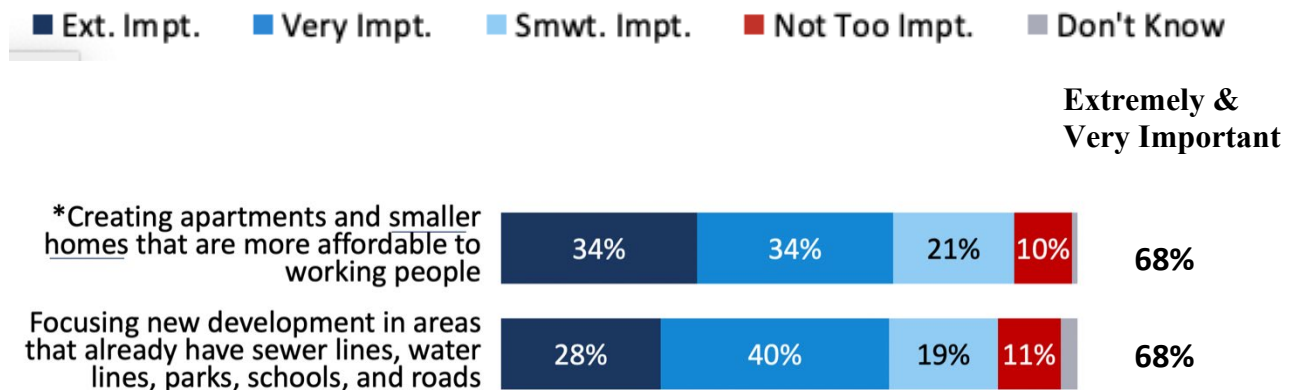
### **Preventing Pollution of Drinking Water & the Yellowstone**

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know

**Extremely & Very Important**



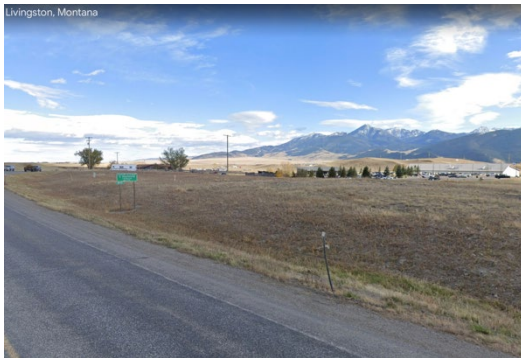
## Focusing Development, Building More Affordable Housing



\* Split sample.

**About the research:** The voter opinion research was carried out by FM3, a nationally respected opinion research firm with extensive experience in Montana. The survey of more than 300 voters was a representative sample, as measured by age, gender, income, political party (Republican 36%, Independent 38%, Democrat 26%), geography (53% outside Livingston, 47% inside Livingston) and length of residency in the County from recent to life-time.

### *Mountain View Commercial Subdivision Proposal Rejected*



Today



Not tomorrow, for now...

In October, the Livingston City Commission voted 3-2 against approving an application to subdivide 64 acres around the Printing for Less plant into 39 lots that would facilitate commercial sprawl at the western entrance of Livingston. Their decision followed a recommendation by the Planning Board, in a motion passed 6 to 2, against approving the subdivision.

Friends of Park County testified before the Planning Board and the City Commission against the proposal because, under existing city zoning, anything from hotels and motels, restaurants, professional offices, gas stations, convenience stores and casinos could be allowed on the property. The subdivision would facilitate the creation of another commercial core potentially as large or larger than the historic downtown core.

Friends of Park County also testified that the city staff was mistaken to assert that the city's 2021 Growth Policy (which favors compact growth and focusing commercial development downtown) should be ignored. Friends of Park County also identified potential adverse effects on wildlife and nearby agricultural operations.

Instead of commercial sprawl, Friends of Park County expressed support for light manufacturing and warehouse uses on the property, consistent with the existing businesses.

### ***Park County Planning Board Refuses to Consider Regulations, Fees and Limits on Short Term Rentals as Part of the Housing Action Plan***

Friends of Park County has noted the impact of the conversion of existing homes into short term rentals on both the cost and supply of housing for residents. Buying or building short-term rentals (STRs) is a newly lucrative form of real estate investment. The impact in increasing housing cost and reducing supply is obvious in communities near Yellowstone National Park, especially in Gardiner in Park County.

Here are three key conclusions of a study of AirBnB by the Economic Policy Institute, a highly respected, nonpartisan think tank:

***The economic costs Airbnb imposes likely outweigh the benefits. While the introduction and expansion of Airbnb into U.S. cities and cities around the world carries large potential economic benefits and costs, the costs to renters and local jurisdictions likely exceed the benefits to travelers and property owners.***

***Rising housing costs are a key problem for American families, and evidence suggests that the presence of Airbnb raises local housing costs. The largest and best-documented potential cost of Airbnb expansion is the reduced supply of housing as properties shift from serving local residents to serving Airbnb travelers, which hurts local residents by raising housing costs.***

***City residents likely suffer when Airbnb circumvents zoning laws that ban lodging businesses from residential neighborhoods. ....Many Airbnb rental units are in violation of local zoning regulations, and there is the strong possibility that these units are indeed imposing large costs on neighbors.***

You can read the study [here](#).

In addition, STRs can reduce community identity and cohesion as permanent residents are displaced by short-term visitors. Those visitors can contribute to crowding at outdoor recreation sites and put more pressure on natural resources, like wildlife.

The County's 2017 Growth Policy called out the question of short-term rentals for additional consideration when the Growth Policy was next updated because of these concerns.

The [2022 Park County Housing Action Plan](#) proposed two modest steps to address the impacts of STRs: Establish standards and fees on STRs "to balance the potential negative impacts of displacement with positive benefits to the community by generating revenue for an affordable housing fund. Targeting a maximum percentage of STRs per community would help maintain available homes for long-term residents."

Friends of Park County supports these proposals in the Housing Action Plan.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, when the County Planning Board was asked to add the Housing Action Plan to the 2017 Growth Policy, they heard vigorous opposition to these ideas from short term rental owners. As a result, the Planning Board recommended that the County Commission approve the Housing Action Plan, but to modify the language in the plan to highlight and emphasize the plan as "non-regulatory," modifying the section on short term rentals, and to recommend the Commission "add language that guarantees that any future consideration involving short term rentals will include individuals that own and operate short term rentals. ..."

The County Commission will take up the Housing Action Plan this month.

### ***Presentations of "Our Future Our Choice" continue***

Friends of Park County's video presentation and discussion platform, *Our Future our Choice* has had several viewings by persons sharing our concerns about the need to manage growth and development in Park County. The 50 minute video describes the major growth management challenges in the County, the risks they pose and action steps that can be taken to limit or avoid impacts from poorly managed development. The video incorporates many pauses to allow the viewers to discuss and comment on the problems and the solutions. Contact Ken Cochrane at [ken.cochrane@friendsofparkcounty.org](mailto:ken.cochrane@friendsofparkcounty.org) if you are interested in seeing or hosting the program.

### ***Livingston has a new city manager and planner.***

Livingston has a new city manager, Grant Gager. Gager comes to Livingston from Ketchum Idaho, a city of similar size also experiencing unaffordable housing and the challenges of new development. During his job interview on October 18 City Commissioner Lyons referred to the Mountain View subdivision as highlighting the need to bring the city's regulation into conformity with the new Growth Policy – a top priority



for Friends of Park County (along with some adjustments to the land use designations in the Growth Policy.)

Livingston's new planner is Jennifer Severson, whose previous position was with Boulder County, Colorado where she worked on a variety of issues including flood recovery, stream restoration, drainage and transportation access.

***Friends of Park County welcomes its new Board members, Kathy Foote and Jen Vermillion.***



Kathy Foote is a fourth-generation Montanan, raised on a ranch south of Bozeman. Kathy moved to Park County in 1988, and lives with her husband, Jonathan, on a ranch east of Livingston, where they raise and show award-winning cutting horses. Kathy is a top amateur rider and a past president and director of the Montana cutting Horse Association. She is a past board member of Big Brothers and Sisters of Park County. Kathy is a CASA with the Park County Casa Program, and currently works with the Park County Attorney's Office. Kathy has seen the significant changes in the Gallatin Valley during her lifetime. She believes that she has insights as to how Park County may avoid some of the negative impact from sprawl and development.



Jen Vermillion grew up on a family farm in the West. She pursued her love of tackling complex grassland restoration issues by earning an MS in Land Reclamation and Rehabilitation from MSU Bozeman. Jen served on the Montana Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council for six years, was an active board member on the Park County Community Foundation for nine years and is the Secretary/Treasurer for their local canal company. Jen and her husband Pat, a fishing guide, are raising their two daughters on their farm in the Shields Valley, producing hay and high-quality pastured pork. She values a strong community and working to support the success and well-being of everyone within it, including addressing the challenges of rapid development in Park County.

Jen and Kathy join Frank Schroeder, Jean Keffeler, Ken Cochrane, Tom Blurock and Heidi Barrett on the Board.

***“Pollution in Paradise” will be available for viewing on our website in December.***

*Pollution in Paradise* is a short educational video hosted by FPC Director Heidi Barrett. Matt Bambach of Protect Our Water Jackson Hole tells the story of Fish Creek Wyoming, a stream contaminated by human sewage as a result of the approval of too many septic systems and other factors. Fish Creek is a cautionary tale for Park County, where County officials are approving about 100 new septic systems every year. On average, those 100 septic systems will generate a combined total of 2.5 million pounds of water contaminated with human sewage. *Pollution in Paradise* describes what happened and what we can do to prevent it from happening in Park County.

