

April 12, 2016

Dear Jackson Town Council and Teton County Board of Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Community Priorities Fund Policy Resolution.

Through intensive public engagement and many challenging and ultimately fruitful discussions, in the 2012 Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan we declared as a community that we value three top priorities: ensuring that at least two thirds of the people who work in Jackson Hole are able to live here; dealing with our traffic congestion by providing people with transportation choices through investments in public transportation, bicycling, and walking; and protecting the wildlife habitat and open spaces that define our valley while making it safe for wildlife to cross our roads.

But now, four years later, we're dealing with an even-worse housing crisis that's destroying our middle class and threatening the fabric of our community, transportation challenges that are tearing into our quality of life, rural development that is consuming the wildlife habitat and open spaces that define our valley, and nearly 400 animals that are struck and killed on our roads every year – endangering both wildlife and our families.

The Community Priorities Fund provides an opportunity to address these challenges by aligning our investments with our values.

In order to align the Community Priorities Fund with our values and the Comprehensive Plan, *the Alliance recommends the Policy Resolution focus on funding housing solutions, transportation choices and making it safe for wildlife to cross our roads, while allocating a small percentage to the permanent protection of open space and wildlife habitat.*

### **Housing Solutions**

According to the Comprehensive Plan, "Other resort communities in the Rocky Mountains facing housing affordability issues have identified the loss of a resident workforce as the primary indicator of their lost sense of community." This is why our community has established the shared goal of housing at least 65 percent of our workforce locally – we value staying a strong community. This is also why Policy 5.4.e in the Comprehensive plan calls for the establishment of a reliable funding source for workforce housing provision.

The Alliance supports our community's goal of housing 65 percent of our workforce locally and we believe that in order to maintain our community character, hard-working families should be able to live here.

Allocating a substantial percentage of the Community Priorities Fund towards the provision of housing affordable to people who work here would help address our housing crisis and align with the vision, goals, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Transportation Choices and Wildlife Crossings**

According to the Comprehensive Plan, “A transportation system oriented toward automobiles is inconsistent with our common values,” and our “community’s transportation vision is to create a multimodal transportation system by enhancing the current automobile oriented system to include a network of complete streets, transit, and pathways system.” This is why Policy 7.1.g in the Comprehensive Plan calls for the establishment of a permanent funding source for an alternative transportation system.

In addition, the Comprehensive Plan calls for a reduction in wildlife and natural and scenic resource transportation impacts through “improvements [that] should address wildlife permeability and identified wildlife vehicle collision ‘hotspots’ (Policy 7.3.b)” and the recently adopted Integrated Transportation Plan contains an entire section dedicated to wildlife protection.

A network of wildlife crossings in Teton County could reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by 90%. Additionally, making it safe for wildlife to cross our roads is good for habitat connectivity, which makes wildlife and habitat more resilient to the effects of climate change. This is why Teton County is working on a wildlife crossings master plan to provide an objective, systematic, data-driven blueprint for protecting wildlife and our families by making it safe for animals to cross our roads. This wildlife crossings master plan will be ready for implementation by the time Teton County would start collecting revenue for the Community Priorities Fund should the Fund secure voter approval in November.

The Alliance believes we have a responsibility to align our transportation investments with our community’s vision of people having the freedom to safely and conveniently get where they need to go on foot, bike, or transit, while not expanding the highways that divide our community, and making it safe for wildlife to cross our roads. This means we should focus on providing people with transportation choices and deal with our traffic congestion through investments in public transportation, bicycling, walking, and the implementation of the wildlife crossings master plan, along with strategic improvements to existing assets, before considering the construction of new auto-centric infrastructure.

Allocating a substantial percentage of the Community Priorities Fund towards investments in public transportation, bicycling, and walking, along with strategic improvements to existing assets and the implementation of the wildlife crossings master plan would align with the vision, goals, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Protecting Wildlife Habitat and Open Space**

The core vision of the Comprehensive Plan is to “Preserve and protect the area’s ecosystem in order to ensure a healthy environment, community and economy for current and future generations.” To accomplish this vision, Policy 1.4.c states “It is the community’s primary goal to permanently protect and actively steward wildlife habitat, habitat connections, scenic viewsheds and agricultural open space.” To achieve our community’s primary goal the Comprehensive Plan calls for “the establishment of a dedicated funding source for conservation easements and other measures that protect the wildlife habitat, habitat connections, and scenery valued by the community (Policy 1.4.d).”

The Alliance believes that if we, as a community, are developing a fund to address our community's priorities, we should ensure it addresses our community's highest priority. As Vice-President Joe Biden once famously quipped, "Don't tell me what you value; show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."

Therefore we suggest allocating a small percentage of the Community Priorities Fund, like 10 percent, toward the creation of a strategic wildlife and open space program that leverages and complements existing private land conservation efforts and works innovatively to achieve our ecosystem stewardship goals. Yes, let's prioritize addressing our housing and transportation challenges. Let's also address our core community priority to protect the wildlife habitat and connectivity that make this valley special. This small allocation would not significantly dilute our ability to address our housing and transportation challenges and would allow us to make significant progress on our highest community priority.

### **Appropriating Allocations**

As you deliberate the percentage allocations for the issue areas in the Policy Resolution, please consider language that appropriates the allocations over the length of the funding measure rather than an annual appropriation. This would allow for significantly more effective expenditures, as our community would have the flexibility to make strategic and timely investments in our priorities that balance out to the designated allocations over time.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Community Priorities Fund Policy Resolution and for your hard work to address the big challenges facing our community through investments that align with our values.

In order to fully align the Community Priorities Fund with our values and the Comprehensive Plan, *please focus the Policy Resolution on funding housing solutions, transportation choices and making it safe for wildlife to cross our roads, while allocating a small percentage to the permanent protection of open space and wildlife habitat.*

Should such a measure face voter consideration, the Alliance would welcome the opportunity to empower hundreds of volunteers to support its passage.

Thank you for considering this request. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns regarding this matter,



Craig M. Benjamin  
Executive Director