



April 10, 2020

Teton County Board of County Commissioners

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for your leadership during this public health crisis and for putting the health and safety of our community members first. Coronavirus has put all our lives on hold and thrown into question the future of our local businesses and what services our government will be able to provide with looming budget shortfalls. We sympathize with concerns about where to continue and where to press pause, and we know that this time of crisis can also be a time of change, a time to consider what elements of “normal” are worth returning to.

We are disturbed by the idea of pausing the Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) update but moving forward with other planning and development projects. We have heard a proposal to abandon the inclusive Comp Plan update, but to still make an expedited decision for Northern South Park. That doesn't make sense. If coronavirus is the reason to delay finalizing the almost-finished Comp Plan update, then coronavirus is just as much reason to delay *all* planning decisions, especially huge upzones.

But if coronavirus *doesn't* require stopping everything, now is precisely the time to focus on long-range planning. Planning is first and foremost a tool for dealing with uncertainty. As the economy and development slow, we should take advantage of the extra time to strengthen our foundation and prepare for better times ahead. Moreover, the Comp Plan outlines goals for all the issues that matter to our community, including housing, transportation, climate, and water quality. Pausing the update would pause work on all those goals – goals with huge community buy-in.

If you believe the current crisis allows, please make every effort to engage our residents online and finalize the Comp Plan update. But if you believe we must delay the Comp Plan update, please apply that same principle to Northern South Park and all development applications.

Even if you want to start a Northern South Park master plan quickly, please finish the Comp Plan update first. The draft update provides needed clarity and outlines the parameters for a successful partnership between the community and landowners. A Northern South Park master plan should implement our community values by requiring mostly deed-restricted workforce housing, and also providing significant open space conservation. Those parameters are in the Comp Plan already and are further clarified in the new draft. Adopting the new Comp Plan will make South Park master planning easier and faster by establishing clear direction up front.

Planning Northern South Park (or anywhere) takes no more and no less time than the time it takes to do it right. Planning is about steadfastly pursuing a shared vision for the future, even in the face of changing economic pressures, political will, and developer interests. As a community, and as a group of elected representatives, we identified a shared vision for Northern South Park. Now, we are being tested. But planning is about shaping development to meet our community vision, not the other way around.

Luckily, the Comp Plan update is almost done. Throughout the past year, over 900 people commented in the Comp Plan update / Growth Management Program. The current draft includes all that engagement. The point at this final stage is to confirm that the draft incorporates the input well, and to adopt it efficiently, even if a vocal minority shows up wanting to change policy at the last minute. If you

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are unsure that the draft is ready, please take the time to efficiently move through it, because these high-level discussions are the critical foundation that underlies any specific location master plans.

Please don't jettison a good process because you're feeling pressure to advance a project. Northern South Park is not a new conversation, and it will still be there on the other side of the Comp Plan update and this public health crisis. Any decisions you make now will be lasting, with resounding impacts for both the town and the county, for the better or the worse.

Please finish the Comp Plan Update first and quickly.

Pausing a joint town/county process in favor of a moving ahead with development in one jurisdiction would be a problematic shift away from joint planning. The County and Town have an impressive legacy of joint planning and decision-making that has earned us national acclaim, especially in a place where the stakes for development are so high. For more than 50 years, our community has participated in joint planning – not because it was easier or more efficient, but because it was better. The true challenge is not joint planning but joint leadership.

Please invest the time and energy to identify and heal the challenges in your joint work with your colleagues at the town – it's worth it, and our future as a community depends on it.

Sincerely,



Brooke Sausser
Community Planning Manager