



August 10, 2020

Please deny Gill up zone proposal

Dear County Planning Commissioners,

ShelterJH, the only independent housing advocacy organization in Teton County, builds grassroots and political support so that all our community members can afford to live where they work. Our housing market is not functioning for the vast majority of the people, particularly our essential workers who make this community function, including teachers, nurses, firefighters, cooks, dishwashers, housekeepers, fishing guides, and small business owners. Too many of our people are struggling to simply find an adequate place to live.

One of the main reasons we formed in 2016 was to support projects that provide homes for a diverse range of local workers. We specifically exist to say “yes in our backyard” and encourage community support for proposals that address our housing affordability challenge. Thus, it pains us to have to recommend “no” on the Gill proposal. Despite an impressive campaign to convince our community - and you and the County Commission - that this proposal will address our housing crisis, once we look behind the curtain, we find that this pitch is misleading.

Over the years, we have learned that unless there is a deed restriction tied to specific incomes and with an appreciation cap to ensure permanent affordability, only the most advantaged people working here can gain access to deed restricted homes. In this proposal, the “workforce” restriction does not assure permanent affordability making this up-zone available to the 3% of working households in Teton County that earn enough to purchase a home built on these lots which are estimated to sell for well over \$1M.

The proposed offer to give 30-40 lots to Habitat (~10%) is nice for Habitat, but if the other 90% of homes are \$1M, \$2M, and up... we are not serving our community well. And even if additional lots are sold through other employers, that doesn't assure affordability and creates employer-run housing which feels uncomfortably like a “company town” model. This is a false pretense of solving our housing affordability crisis.

That 10% must be substantially increased so that adequate housing created by an up zone would be permanently available and affordable to working residents earning median income or less. As a ballpark, that means home sale prices in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 range - far from current estimates of new home prices. To protect this community investment, the affordability should be required through foolproof and proven permanent deed restrictions, recorded on the lots at the time of the up zone. We support this “inclusionary” approach in all up zones, not just on the Gill proposal.

While we appreciate the Gill's desire to address our housing crisis by increasing the density on a portion of their land, this proposal would exacerbate our housing affordability problem over time. For this reason, we ask you to deny this request.

Sincerely,

ShelterJH

Clare Stumpf - Coordinator

Mary Erickson, Christine Walker, Mike Welch, Skye Schell, Ryan Nourai - Board of Directors