



December 31, 2020
Teton County Board of County Commissioners

RE: Northern South Park steering committee should be open & transparent

Dear Chair Macker and Commissioners,

We are disturbed that the Northern South Park (NSP) steering committee met without public notice, a published agenda, allowing the public or press, or publishing minutes. This steering committee is charged with important public work and funded by \$400,000 of taxpayer money and should be open to the public at every stage.

Secret committees and secret decisions are a troubling new pattern for our public business, including the public safety task force, the process to fire a library board member, or the secret discussion of appointments to the NSP steering committee to begin with. We believe the County must keep democratic processes open to the public to maintain the public trust.

Open public meetings do not threaten privacy for landowners. Open meetings need not betray sensitive family circumstances or detailed financials. What open meetings will do is illuminate the landowners' perspectives, needs, and goals, just as they will clarify those of the community. Our community is investing \$400,000 and 8 months in this process with the hope that we can design a neighborhood that works for the landowners *and* for the community, so we all need full information.

Steering committee members should not be afraid of being quoted in the paper. Theoretically, steering committee members were selected for their expertise and their insights, which should be shared. Providing for a healthy debate in the public square will only improve the process. Undoubtedly, the neighborhood plan will yield hard conversations, values tradeoffs, and opportunities to change our minds – but let's not let secrecy be what makes it controversial.

Though the steering committee will not make formal recommendations, it is anything but a routine internal matter. If the committee had no influence, then it wouldn't exist. The committee will work shoulder-to-shoulder with planning staff and the consultant team, shaping what is included in the neighborhood plan, which will be evaluated by the Commission, voted on, and eventually built.

A transparent, good faith, authentic public process will ensure public buy-in and thus aid speedy adoption and implementation of this plan. A black box will erode the public trust and sabotage hopes for a successful plan. Please re-start the steering committee in a fully open and transparent manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brooke Sausser".

Brooke Sausser
Community Planning Manager