

The Methow Valley Citizens' Council

February 26, 2016

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To: Okanogan County Regional Planning Commission Chair and Commissioners
Phil Dart, Dave Schulz, Marlene Rawley, Tamara Porter, Mark Miller

CC: Ben Rough, Perry Huston

Re: Draft Zone Code

Dear Mr. Chairman,

The purpose of this letter is to provide information to the Planning Commission (PC) regarding the proposed Zone Code that is now before you. We recognize that the official public comment period has not yet been announced. However, we want to ensure that the PC receives the full range of information regarding the potential consequences if the proposed Zone Code is adopted as written.

To that end, we are enclosing the comments from the Methow Valley Citizens Council (MVCC) in response to the Planning Department's request issued in the fall of 2015 for Scoping comments on the proposed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This letter summarizes and updates some of the main points of that earlier letter and we ask that you give both documents your careful attention. We also enclose the Scoping comments submitted by Futurewise, because they are relevant to your deliberations and we support the contentions therein.

While we are not aware of any changes that may have been suggested since the version of the Zone Code sent out for EIS scoping, we believe that "tweaking" the code will not be adequate because of fundamental flaws in the document that will have far-reaching and negative consequences for Okanogan County.

What follows are the key points from our scoping letter. Our primary recommendations are shown in bold.

TIMING

As you know, MVCC and Futurewise have brought a legal challenge on the Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan upon which the Zone Code is based. Judge Culp has indicated that he will render his decision by the end of February or soon thereafter. While no one can predict the outcome of that decision, should MVCC/Futurewise prevail on all or some of the issues under contention, the Comprehensive Plan could be remanded to the County for revisions. This would potentially put a hold on your work, or require substantial revisions. If either Okanogan County or MVCC/Futurewise appeal the Superior Court decision, that would also prolong the uncertainty surrounding adoption of the Zone Code.

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Code. We have recommended that the Comprehensive Plan incorporate the 2013 Community Wildfire Protection Plan in the Comprehensive Plan. Instead, we have been told that "fire would be handled through zoning". However, the draft Zone Code appears to be virtually silent on the topic of fire. We therefore assume the County will rely on future individual homeowners and developers of subdivisions to voluntarily do the right thing to protect their families and first responders.

Surely we have learned from the past two tragic fire seasons that reliance on purely voluntary fire prevention measures can lead to very tragic consequences. There is a critical connection between local planning, zoning, and building codes in lessening the effects of wildfire in the future. ***The PC should insist that the Zone Code include provisions that account for wildfire hazard.*** Such provisions are readily available, and have already been adopted by a number of counties in Washington and across the West.

WATER QUALITY

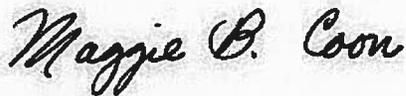
MVCC believes that the densities proposed, especially in the Rural High Density zone, will pose a risk of too many septic systems on one acre lots that threaten to contaminate groundwater needed for domestic drinking water wells. This groundwater contamination will inevitably negatively affect surface water quality.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, ***we ask that the PC obtain answers to the issues we raise from the Planning Department.*** MVCC believes that there is considerable support in Okanogan County and the Methow Valley for a Zone Code that enables future development to occur in keeping with the ability of our natural resource base to sustain it.

Thank you for the time and effort each of you put into the important work of the Planning Commission.

Sincerely,



Maggie Coon, Board Chair
Methow Valley Citizens Council

Enclosure (Zone Code Scoping comments from Methow Valley Citizens Council and Futurewise)