

Public Hearing Comments
Okanogan Planning Commission
Re: Draft Comprehensive Plan & Draft EIS Plan

August 19, 2019

Dear Planning Commissioners,

Let me begin by thanking the Planning Commission for allowing the citizens of Okanogan County the opportunity to comment on the current draft Comprehensive Plan and the draft Environmental Impact Statement Plan this evening.

I'm sure the planning commissioners present here tonight realize that developing a Comprehensive Plan is an important undertaking as we look to describe the future of our county. Though mandated by the State of Washington, this process has been unfortunately hobbled for years by efforts to delay and water down the results—much to the detriment of both the County and its citizens. These current draft plans should have been open for review several years ago but now that we've finally arrived at this point, it's apparent the County needs to upgrade them both before their adoption and your recommendations will be an important part of that process.

I'm certain others will point out that the current draft of the Comprehensive Plan does not meet the minimum standards required by law and fails to articulate the differences between alternatives. It should also be noted that the draft EIS doesn't fully analyze the impacts of the various alternatives on the county's population, environment or its economy. It's truly a shame that so much valuable time and considerable legal expenses have been wasted by not complying with these standards and formats in the first place.

The bulk of my comments tonight will be on land use issues pertaining to the Methow Valley. Presently, there is no Land Use Element playing a central role in guiding land use patterns and decisions for the County. Adding this Land Use overview would ensure appropriate uses are applied to specific areas on a map and not the other way around. Topography, water availability, fire safety, adequate protection for sensitive areas, fish passage and other important considerations should all flow out of the Comprehensive Plan's data and conclusions to the subsequent Zoning designations. A perfect example of how this approach has been disregarded can be found in the County's current District Use Chart.

Focusing on the Methow Valley, if we compare the land uses in the District Use Chart currently not permitted in Methow Valley School District (The Upper Methow Valley) but permitted in the Lower Methow Valley, the differences are striking and amount to what I've come to call "A Tale of Two Valleys"—even though the areas in question are contained in the same valley and, in many cases, are located only a few miles away.

Though located in the same watershed (the Methow River drainage), sharing a common roadway (State Hwy 153), similar terrain and historical rural practices, the list of uses contained in the current District Use Chart now permitted in the Lower Valley is alarming. Reading down the District Use Chart, those uses permitted in the Lower Valley include: Air Cargo Facilities, Aircraft Sales Repair and Services, Aircraft Salvage, Light Industrial, Manufactured Home Sales Facilities, Petroleum Service Stations, and Wholesale Establishments—none of which are



permitted in the Upper Valley. With the granting of a Conditional Use Permit, the permitted uses in the Lower Valley expand to even more disturbing categories including Acid Manufacturing, Air Passenger Services, Fertilizer Manufacturing, as well as Sawmills and Pulp Mills.

Common sense alone should dictate any Land Use Plan built on proper data and review would disallow these types of uses in the rugged and confined reaches of the Lower Methow River—but there they are, designated in black and white and derived from the flawed current draft of the Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan.

With the rest of my allotted time, let me urge including the entire Methow Watershed within the Methow Valley More Completely Planned Area (MVMCPA). I also strongly recommend the adoption of many of the elements included in Alternatives 3 and 4 which concentrate growth closer to towns, take a conservative approach to addressing water supplies, conserve natural resources and promote land uses that support local agriculture as well as minimizing conflict between residential and other uses of rural lands by creating different designations of land use.

One final but important plea would be to include the concept of affordable housing into the Comprehensive Plan. Forty and fifty-year-old manufactured homes are not the answer and certainly won't be 20 years into the future.

Thank you for your consideration,

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