

DATE: September 10, 2019

TO: Okanogan County Regional Planning Commission
123 Fifth Avenue North, Room # 130
Okanogan, Washington 98840

FROM: Leigh Ann Robinson
162 Old Twisp Highway
Twisp, Washington 98856

RE: Comments for the 2019 Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan

Dear Okanogan County Regional Planning Commissions and Planning Director, Courtney Ingle,

I am a 16-year resident of the Methow Valley, small-business owner, and parent. Please consider the enclosed comments regarding the Comprehensive Plan. These issues are of specific concern to me and my family. The Signal Hill/Rising Eagle fire burned to about 800 feet from our home and left several friends homeless. We have a family history of lung issues, and even after wearing a mask during inversions and poor air quality times, I have suffered from a persistent cough through the winter and into April and May, always worsened by smoke in the air. We run air filters in our home fall through spring, and summer during fires. My children are students of astronomy, and we clearly see the difference in our night skies when neighbors have outdoor property lighting on - ~~at~~ as lights become more prevalent, our telescope is less useful!

Thank you for your consideration,

Leigh Ann Robinson

Title: Air Quality

Is it in the Comp Plan? No

Where should it be in the Comp Plan? New part of Chapter 12 Natural Environment

New proposed language:

Objectives/Rationale:

The Okanogan and Methow valleys regularly experience impaired air quality caused by wood stoves and open burning. These impairments are felt most heavily by the elderly, children, pregnant women, individuals with cardiovascular impairments and those with compromised immune systems. Poor air quality is most apparent in the winter from uncertified wood stoves, and in the spring and fall from open burning. While the Department of Ecology maintains regulatory jurisdiction over air resources in Okanogan County, County government has an important role in reducing particulate as well as informing the public of risks associated with wood smoke. It is important to reduce man-caused particulate because smoke from wildfires is expected to increase due to climate change and other factors.

Goal: Protect the population of Okanogan County by reducing particulate emissions from woodstoves and open burning.

Policy:

Okanogan County will actively work with the Department of Ecology and NGOs to reduce exposure to man-caused particulates through incentives, fees, building code enforcement, burn bans, and information dissemination.

Recommended implementation Measures:

New Homes: Okanogan County will examine planning and building codes to seek incentives and disincentives to encourage new homes to heat with devices other than wood stoves, especially in the airsheds that experience poor winter air quality. For example, wood or pellet stoves could have an impact fee assessed, and that fee could then help with replacing uncertified wood stoves. Incentives to forgo wood stoves in new homes might include relief from certain building code requirements, and providing information on the air quality problems and safety (chimney fires, indoor air pollution) associated with wood stove emissions.

Existing homes: Work with the Depart of Ecology to encourage programs that assist low-income residents of the airshed to convert from inefficient uncertified wood stoves or fireplaces to pellet stoves, propane, certified stoves, or other affordable heat sources that have fewer particulate emissions.

Open Burning: Open burning of yard and forest debris is a poor practice, especially during atmospheric inversions. The County should support alternative such as neighborhood chipping. Burn bans should be imposed not just for fire danger, but during inversions.

Title: Dark Skies

Is it in the comp plan? No

Where should it be placed in comp plan? Natural Environment (Ch.12), under a new section that could also house the Air element

Could be included in the Methow MCPA, but there are other parts of the county and other reasons people may be interested in the Dark Skies overlay (e.g. neighbors of cannabis operations, areas where Star Parties are already providing economic benefits)

New proposed language:

Rationale: Okanogan County largely maintains a rural atmosphere, where lighting does not impair views of the dark night sky or glare into the homes of others. Increased development in towns and rural areas has brought an increase in light pollution, and the problem will only worsen with increased development unless modern lighting standards are encouraged.

The Dark Skies initiative, which has been embraced by the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative, is a good way to increase awareness of and reduce light pollution. A group of interested citizens in the Methow valley is exploring the additional option of achieving International Dark Sky recognition at a scale yet to be determined.

A reduction in light pollution would result in the following benefits (to the Methow Review District or other areas that adopt the overlay):

- (1) Preserve a clear view of the stars for all residents, now and in the future;
- (2) Improve the health and quality of life for residents presently afflicted by bright lights at night;
- (3) Reduce the continuing harm caused to local wildlife by bright lights at night; and
- (4) Attract astro-tourists during the shoulder seasons.

Goal: Preserve and protect the night sky through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting.

Policy:

- Provide for an ordinance allowing overlays that require buildings and other developments to achieve Dark Sky compliance

Implementation Measures:

This policy will be implemented by Overlay in the Zone Code. Communities can "opt in" to the Overlay by a process to be determined.

In the event that the citizens of the Methow More Completely Planned Area (MVMCPA) choose to pursue International Dark Sky Association recognition for all or part of their District as a Dark Sky Reserve (which if successful could create the largest Dark Sky Reserve in the United States), adoption of the Overlay will facilitate such a desire in those areas that are controlled by the county, and facilitate discussions with appropriate state and federal agencies that manage tracts of land within the district to obtain their consent.

For each town within the MVMCPA that chooses to pursue International Dark Sky Association recognition as a Dark Sky Community, provide a "Zone of Influence" surrounding the community within which the community's local lighting ordinance shall apply.

Title: Wildfire

Is it in the comp plan? Yes, but it does not include these recommendations. Chapter 12 Natural Environment, page 48

Where should it be placed in comp plan? Chapter 12, Natural Environment. The references to escape routes might be added to the objectives for the Transportation Element (p. 35-39)

Objectives/Rationale: Wildfire will continue to threaten and destroy homes in the county, and especially in the Wildland Urban Interface areas. The insurance sector may refuse to insure some dwellings or raise rates so high that homes become uninsurable. While personal responsibility is an essential part of fire prevention, county government has an important role in land use planning so that risk to homes, families and first responders is reduced.

Goal: (from existing Plan, p.48) To prioritize the protection of people, structures, infrastructure and unique ecosystems contributing to our way of life and the sustainability of the local and regional economy.

Policies: Existing narrative (p.48) can be reorganized into goals/policies, and these can be added:

- Adopt an appropriately scaled modification of the International Wildland Urban Interface Code, to address new subdivisions, new roads and building materials for new building permits.
- Support programs that provide incentives to retrofit and “harden” existing homes and subdivisions in high-risk areas.
- Update the Community Wildfire Protection Plan with meaningful actions to reduce risks to life, property, critical areas and natural resources.
- Areas with one-lane roads or only one way in and out, and areas where the fire districts do not have the ability to serve more development, shall be designated and zoned for the lowest rural densities or as Natural Resource lands.
- Primitive and remote gravel road rights of way will be retained by the county and designated for fire escape routes and public land access. ****Also add this provision to Recreation or Transportation?***

Implementation Measures:

These policies will be implemented through the Zone Code, Subdivision Ordinance, Building Code, Transportation Element, Road Standards, All Hazards Mitigation Plan, Community Wildfire Protection Plan