

Cortney Ingle

From: Alan Fahnestock <fahnestockalan@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 14, 2019 9:47 PM
To: Cortney Ingle
Subject: Comp Plan comment
Attachments: comp plan.odt

Please see attached.

Commissioners:

After years of avoiding my responsibilities as a citizen of Okanogan County, I just read the most recent iteration of the long overdue Comprehensive Plan. It's atrocious: badly organized, difficult to read, and, on the whole, not remotely fit for purpose. While I am not a land-use professional, nor, indeed, particularly well-versed in this sort of thing, I'm reasonably adept at detecting garbage, and, well, that's what we've got.

As I understand it, a Comprehensive Plan, within this context, is theoretically intended to represent a framework for development within a given jurisdiction. As such, it ought to be easily comprehensible to law-makers, planners, and laypersons, and should, one would think, establish a general picture of what sort of environment citizens of the jurisdiction might wish and expect to inhabit going forward. Assuming that this is the case, it seems clear that the framework should take into consideration the major vectors affecting said citizens. I would like to submit that, in Okanogan County, these are as follows, in no particular order:

- water
- land
- air
- recreation
- fire

Water, in our area, is effectively the *sine qua non*. Without it, there can be no development, indeed, no life. And, unless I am sorely mistaken, the water that we currently enjoy is under serious threat from a number of directions, a threat largely resulting from the same issue that has led us to live without a Comprehensive Plan for so long: the unwillingness of County government to face facts and, by the way, abide by State law.

Fact is, maintenance of in-stream flows is non-negotiable from both a legal and an existential perspective. I'm not a hydrologist, and don't pretend to know a lot, but it seems pretty straightforward: if our river water is not protected, whether from pollution, from export via sale of water rights, or simply from excessive draw-down affecting underlying ground-water reserves, we're in a world of hurt. Willful failure to undertake reasonable measures to ensure compliance with both the law and with well-established science is, in a word, misfeasance.

Abuse of the land also deserves attention: at present, landowners can do pretty much what they want with their property, without regard to the potential for destruction: erosion, irremediable pollution, what-have-you. This "freedom", while attractive, is incredibly short-sighted. Simple regulations with respect to grading, clearing, etc., are the norm in most jurisdictions, what makes us special? In addition, it seems clear that current regulation with respect to critical areas is ridiculously deficient: we need far better control over the development of wetlands, riparian zones, slopes, ridge-tops, and other vulnerable areas.

It seems odd that, this far from any "real" city, we should have air-pollution problems, but we do: smoke from elective but uncontrolled burning, combined with the inversions that occur so frequently, makes our air quality lower than in many an urban environment. Once again, our "freedom" is messing with our health and that of those (human and otherwise) around us. While it may be difficult to regulate outdoor burning, poorly-designed wood-burning stoves, etc., it doesn't seem unreasonable, in a "comprehensive" document, to call for development of such regulations.

It's not clear to me how a Comprehensive Plan for Okanogan County can entirely ignore recreational use of the land. A huge part of the County budget comes from people who own recreational properties here; and another significant portion must certainly arise from sales tax on recreational purchases, hotel taxes, etc. Please do better.

But my favorite is fire: I've spent a good bit of the past decade fighting fires in my backyard, and fighting my neighbors to get them to pay attention so their mistakes won't burn my house down. I don't expect Okanogan County to adopt the Wildland Urban Interface Code in its entirety, as a good bit of it isn't necessarily applicable, but it's crucial that the Comprehensive Plan incorporate at least some of the more obvious best practices developed to inhibit ignition and spread of wildfire, as well as those designed to protect both citizens and citizen-firefighters. Building houses of match-sticks and painting them with gasoline in the era of more frequent and more intense wildfires simply makes no sense. Allowing development on one-track dead-end roads is a recipe for death. And the list goes on, and there is no lack of local people well-versed in how WUI can be adapted to our circumstances.

If this all seems a bit harsh, simply color me irritated. I've watched Okanogan County government fritter away tens of thousands of dollars in land-use and environmental litigation while mostly twiddling their thumbs since I moved here 15 years ago. With Perry Huston's departure and the apparent "awakening" of the Planning Commission, it seems that it might finally be time for some action on this front. Hire someone who knows what they are doing and let's have a Comp Plan that finally makes sense and passes muster with the State.

Regards,

Alan Fahnestock