



PARK COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL
— COUNCIL —

TO: County Planning Board
FROM: Park County Environmental Council
DATE: February 12, 2021
RE: February 18th Planning Board meeting

Dear Members of the Park County Planning Board:

Thank you for your work serving the people of our unique county. As you all recognize, your service comes at a time of significant challenges, as we grapple with big issues like wildfire and floods, urban and rural divisions, and a pandemic and corresponding in-migration. There is much to consider as we discuss how we want to grow as a community and work together to define our best path forward.

We believe Park County residents are united in our vision expressed in our county growth policy:

Park County's strongest bond is its people ... and it is a place where people work together.

We believe in the power of our community, and all of you, to identify a cooperative and inclusive approach as we move forward. We believe this is how we build durable community-driven solutions. There are many stories of success found in our county of people working together towards a common goal. We may not always agree, but we have better outcomes when we give it our best shot, and we respect the views of our neighbors.

We are writing with comments on topics for consideration during your Feb. 18th board meeting: **conflict mitigation** and **residential development**.

I. Background

Park County Environmental Council (PCEC), is a local grassroots environmental group with more than 500 members and 3,000 supporters. We appreciate your time and consideration on this important matter.

PCEC has been working to protect and preserve Park County's vast natural resources since 1990. We are a county-wide environmental group focusing exclusively on issues

affecting Park County. PCEC works with residents to safeguard and advocate for the county's world-class rivers, diverse wildlife, landscapes, and outstanding natural beauty, while protecting the health and wellbeing of people who live and work here.

Increasingly, the threats facing Park County aren't just coming from industrial sources. Instead, they're coming from population growth and increased visitation. Neighboring Gallatin County is the fastest-growing micropolitan community in the United States. Four million people visit Yellowstone National Park every year. Their impact is drastically changing the makeup of our community.

The community we love is at risk. Growth can mean a lot of things: Habitat fragmentation. Water quantity and water quality issues. Increasing inequality in gateway communities.

PCEC has invested considerable time in community planning in recent years, including spending countless hours working to engage our members in Park County's 2017 Growth Policy update. PCEC members submitted a letter encouraging the planning board to focus on Goal 16 as the first step to implement the growth policy. Goal 16 directs the County to: Take an active role in the land use and development process. We have supported measures like zoning for billboards in Paradise Valley and the development of a decay ordinance. Our members are eager to stay engaged with these important public conversations.

We applaud the proposed Conflict Mitigation Zoning District as a first step in the right direction and support the planning board moving forward with more in-depth discussions, both as a board and with the community. We believe it will be important to solicit more public input on the proposal and look forward to participating and encouraging our members to participate in a public comment process.

We also believe that residential development is a serious issue that needs to be explored by the Planning Board.

However, we do not believe the two issues should be conflated, and the Planning Board should move forward working on both issues concurrently.

Here are our comments on each of the issues:

II. Conflict Mitigation Zoning District

Like many of our fellow residents and business owners, the Park County Environmental Council has spent considerable time and resources over the years fighting large-scale industrial uses. These uses, from gold mines to tire pits to gravel pits, with impacts threatening our air quality, our water quality, our property values, our livelihoods, and our agricultural heritage, typically require state and/or federal permits. In most cases,

since the majority of Park County remains unzoned, these high-impact, disruptive uses escape review by local officials. Without zoning, we lose an opportunity for local control over some of the most potentially noxious industrial uses threatening our county.

The proposed Conflict Mitigation Zoning District remedies this lack of local control by establishing a permit system for high-impact industrial and commercial uses. After fighting battle after battle, each requiring great effort and expense, we think adding **local control** over these types of uses makes great sense. Local control over these types of high-impact uses would allow us the opportunity to mitigate such things as dust control, hours of operation, appropriate systems for transportation, reclamation, water quality, setbacks from the Yellowstone River and more.

When it comes to how large-scale commercial and industrial uses operate in Park County, we think it is foolish to place these important decisions in the hands of state and federal regulators. Our County Commissioners are elected by the people of Park County to represent our interests for the betterment of our county. We would rather have our local elected officials hold local public hearings and decide the merits of a proposal in a local setting, over the current system that leaves such consequential decisions to state and/or federal administrators who may not understand a thing about Park County.

Local control of large-scale commercial and industrial operations makes sense, and we suggest that you move forward expeditiously to review and approve the proposed Conflict Mitigation Zoning District.

In addition to making sense and adding local control, we believe that adopting the Conflict Mitigation Zoning District within the near term, has great potential for success. It is a strategy that has the support of our county commissioners, our local planners and the majority of residents.

After more than a year of starts and stops, we think it's time to move ahead with the Conflict Mitigation Zoning District.

III. Residential Development:

We share the concerns expressed by many Park County and Livingston residents about unregulated residential development in Park County. We have worked very hard in recent years to help the City of Livingston adopt a growth policy that focuses on and prioritizes in-fill and redevelopment over sprawl and the further expansion of the City limits into rural County lands. We believe we should encourage residential development in our urban areas, close to schools, stores and other infrastructure. We believe that

development should happen in compact, efficient patterns, which saves taxpayers dollars on extending services, maintaining roads and providing emergency services. Additionally, we should incentivize a variety of housing types that meet the needs of our varied population.

We agree that research into best methods for addressing residential development is needed, and we will continue efforts to explore and better understand feasible opportunities and options we believe the County should consider. Park County is adjacent to one of the country's fastest-growing regions. While we may be growing in a different manner than neighboring Gallatin County, it is imperative for us to understand the threat of unmanaged residential growth in and around the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

We believe an incremental, comprehensive approach to addressing unregulated residential growth will be the most effective approach in the long term.

We urge the Planning Board to consider the wide-range of options for regulating residential growth:

- Ensure the Park County Subdivision Regulations are top-notch with innovative opportunities for planned unit developments, clustered developments, boundary relocations that enhance development options.
- Investigate opportunities for additional citizen-initiated zoning districts and strategies like transfer of development rights.
- Amend the Park County Growth Policy to help further direct residential growth to appropriate areas.
- Embrace use of voluntary land use options like conservation easements.
- Investigate feasibility of a county-wide open space bond measure.
- Engage in interlocal agreements with local communities that effectively help steer growth to our more populated town centers.
- Continue to learn about successful growth management strategies from other locales.
- Consider adoption of an interim zoning district to help allow time to discern the political and practical appetite for a comprehensive, county-wide zoning district.

We wholeheartedly agree that a comprehensive county-wide zoning district, if done right, could be effective in helping Park County manage residential growth and useful in implementing the full range of planning tools like transfer of development rights.

Because of the urgency of tackling the challenges with residential development and the time it will take to do so, we strongly encourage that the Planning Board undertake this work in parallel with work on the Conflict Mitigation Zoning District.

IV. Upcoming Community Conversations:

All options listed above require time and expertise. PCEC remains committed to participating in these important discussions and engaging our community to learn more about planning principles through our ongoing Community Conversation program.

Upcoming conversations include:

February 24: Our Housing Affordability Challenge

March 10: A Discussion on Climate Change

March 24: Dan Burden and Creating Walkable Communities

April TBD: Best Practices for Residential Development Design

Everyone is welcomed to join these Conversations which are being conducted via Zoom, noon-1 pm.

Thank you again, for your ongoing commitment to Park County's future. Please contact either or both of us if you would like to discuss anything in person.

Sincerely,

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