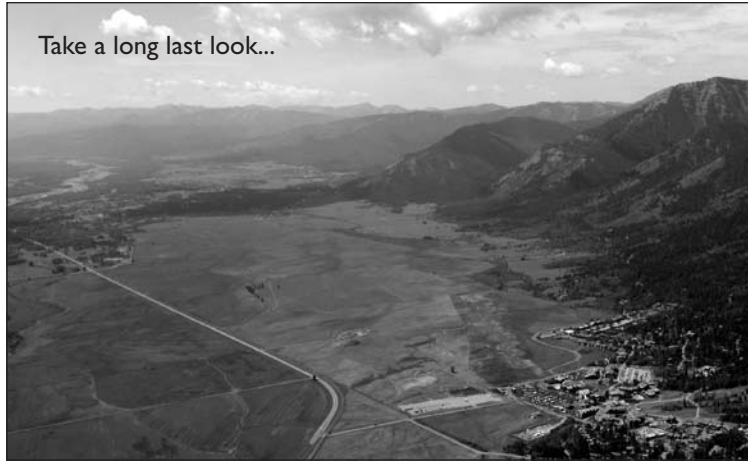


Take a long last look...



Franz J. Camenzind

As soon as the Snake River Associates announced plans in 2000 to develop 456 acres adjacent to Teton Village, the community

took notice. The proposal was presented as the first phase of SRA's long-term plans to expand Teton Village. Instead of dealing with each phase separately, the Board of County Commissioners asked SRA to provide its plans for the entire area to allow for a comprehensive review of the proposed development. Thus, today's SRA Resort Zone expansion plan was born.

The Conservation Alliance monitored the process from the beginning. Resort Zones allow maximum use and density with few limiting factors and no obligation for mitigation in the form of open space. As developer-friendly as the Resort Zone is, it also enables the county to attach conditions to mitigate impacts and benefit the community. The Conservation Alliance pursued this approach and pushed for open space comparable to what would be expected if development occurred in a more conventional Planned Residential Development.

At our and the community's insistence, the open space offered by SRA increased from an initial 42 acres to 1,319 acres. In addition, affordable and employee housing units were increased, while deed restrictions were placed on much of the core commercial area. Short of having no development at all, we felt minimum community standards were met. Specifically, we, the Alliance staff and board, and I believe the majority of county commissioners, felt comfortable with the outcome: 1,319 acres of open space containing no more than 59 single-family dwelling units.

The application was given final approval on July 12, 2005, by a 3-2 vote of the Board of County Commissioners. The commissioners attached 66 conditions to their approval. Several of those conditions dealt with the open space and the agreement to restrict development to no more than 59 clustered dwelling units on the 1,319 acres of open space.

Countless times in public meetings and in the local press the development was summarized as "In exchange for resort zoning, the family (Snake River Associates) offered to preserve open space by limiting development to 59 units on 1,302 acres of SRA land south and east of the village." (The 1,302 acres has since been recalculated to be 1,319 acres.) Between April 25 and July 12 of 2005, at least nine local newspaper stories reiterated versions of this same statement. SRA's own summary document "Teton Village Expansion Resort

Master Plan, PUD" (July 12, 2005, p.14) states: "This covenant permanently restricts 1,309 acres to a maximum of 59 free-market units." One would

assume that these words represented the truth—the expected future for those 1,319 acres.

That was the cornerstone of the deal the Conservation Alliance worked for; that was the deal the majority of county residents thought was made; that was the deal I believe most of the county commissioners thought they negotiated; that was the deal spelled out in the press numerous times. If that wasn't the deal SRA made, then they had an obligation of fairness to the community to set the record straight. But they neglected to do so. Unfortunately, SRA's vision of the future of the 1,319 acres came to light only when the draft Conservation Easement was submitted to commissioners in September.

Unfortunately, the commissioners unanimously approved the September draft Conservation Easement with few changes. While an initial proposal for 90 acres of commercial space was dropped, as it stands, the conservation easement still allows for up to 55 additional affordable units IF the county so requests. It allows up to 66 acres of impervious surface, although about half that would accommodate the 55 home sites (reduced from 59 to 55 by SRA's choice). The easement allows roads and accessory buildings, and it still allows for barns, stables and other horse-oriented structures to be placed anywhere in the open space except near the highway – and they can be of any size! It allows for tennis courts, patios and swimming pools to be built in the open space and for the extraction and processing of gravel for use on site AND off site. It remains to be seen if any land trust organization will accept the conditions and uses allowed in the Conservation Easement.

Although all these activities will have to go through the county permitting process before gaining final approval, the mere fact that they are allowed uses is tantamount to approval. Should a future board of commissioners refuse to permit any or all of these uses, the courts might view the refusals as "takings." Quite frankly, there is little reason to believe that these activities would ever be denied.

Call it a lack of full disclosure or a development shell game, every group, agency and organization involved with this project should feel taken advantage of or steam-rolled, if not deceived.

Yes, we thought we bought a reasonably cleaned up, albeit plump, open space porker and only now find what we have is a pig in a poke. ■

SRA — From A to Z

By Franz Camenzind, Executive Director