

# Teton Meadows Ranch

## *A few key points*

- Teton Meadows Ranch is not a referendum on affordable housing. The decision is not as simple as supporting or not supporting affordable housing.
- The southern area of South Park has not been formally identified as a logical place for high-density residential housing. Development of the intensity proposed is not compatible with the community's vision.
- Opponents to Teton Meadows Ranch are not simply "opposed to change and watching out for their own needs." Opponents to Teton Meadows Ranch advocate in support of Teton County's Comprehensive Plan and compliance with its land development regulations.
- It's not a good idea to approve a development and rezoning of this scale at the same time our community is going through an update process of its Comprehensive Plan. Our community is scheduled to have a draft Land Use Plan by Fall 2008, not three years from now. It's worth waiting.
- The impacts of Teton Meadows Ranch on wildlife extend beyond the property itself. The indirect and cumulative effects of this development on wildlife throughout the valley have been inadequately assessed and underestimated.
- The property is important in terms of scenic resource protection in Teton County.
- Teton Meadows Ranch will significantly contribute to new population growth in and around Jackson Hole. Impacts will occur at the community-wide scale.
- The road system serving Teton Meadows Ranch and the vicinity cannot safely accommodate site-generated traffic.
- Approving a big development like Teton Meadows Ranch is not our best chance to get ahead in affordable housing.
- For a number of reasons, Teton Meadows Ranch will not help with our community's affordable housing problem in the long-term.
- Deed-restricted and affordable housing are not the same. "GAP" housing is not affordable and will not provide a great community benefit.
- Teton Meadows Ranch is not an affordable housing development that goes above and beyond to secure affordable housing in our community. To date, only in response to county planning officials' scrutiny, the applicant has agreed to "cause" half of the units to be built as affordable, but has not clarified whether or not costs of the construction will be covered, as required by our land development regulations.
- Teton Meadows Ranch fails to meet our land development regulations and requirements for a PUD-AH, the zoning upgrade requested - specifically in terms of road capacity and transit provisions.
- Teton Meadows Ranch has not been endorsed by the Yellowstone Business Partnership as an example of sustainable development. Teton Meadows Ranch has simply registered to participate in an exploratory Pilot Program of the Yellowstone Business Partnership, which is a 3-year process.

### Status & What's Next?

On May 7th, the Board of County Commissioners will continue to hear public comment on Teton Meadows Ranch – and it will perhaps be the last opportunity for public comment. It will take place at Snow King Resort's Teton Room at 6:00 p.m. A follow-up hearing has also been scheduled for May 13<sup>th</sup>, at 9 a.m. in Snow King Resort's Grand Room.

## A Few of the Many Myths, Facts and Opinions on Teton Meadows Ranch

Based on the developer's most current application, and public statements, as of May 1, 2008

**Myth: Teton Meadows Ranch is essentially a referendum on affordable housing. The decision is as simple as supporting or not supporting affordable housing.**

Fact: Teton County's land development regulations necessitate a benefit-cost analysis of any proposed PUD-AH (Planned Unit Development for Affordable Housing), including Teton Meadows Ranch. The decision should be based on whether or not the community benefit derived from the affordable housing produced by the PUD outweighs the costs associated with the density of the PUD, in terms of impacts to public facilities and services and impacts to the neighborhood and community. A responsible, comprehensive analysis includes far more than a philosophical stance on an issue; it does not support one side of the equation "at all costs."

**Myth: South Park has always been identified as a logical place for residential housing. Teton Meadows Ranch is compatible with that vision, and therefore makes sense for this part of the county.**

Fact: The southern area of South Park has not been identified as a logical place for *high-density* residential housing. The parcel in question is zoned rural, the lowest density character described in our community's Plan. The property owner is currently entitled to developing 8.23 units (1 unit per 35 acres) or 49 units (if a density bonus was awarded for 70% open space protection) on the property. While residential development has occurred in the South Park area, Teton Meadows Ranch has an average weighted density (units/acre) 6.5 times higher than developed adjacent properties, and 18.5 times higher than all adjacent properties. The parcel is adjacent to developed areas with significantly lower densities. The key factor in compatibility is not whether or not surrounding areas are developed, but rather the intensity at which they are developed.

**Myth: Opponents to Teton Meadows Ranch are simply opposed to change and watching out for their own needs.**

Fact: Opponents, throughout the process, have not called for a moratorium on development in the area. They continue to advocate for abiding by guidelines laid out in our community's Comprehensive Plan and for complying with its land development regulations. Opponents request that elected officials require the applicant to comply with existing regulations.

**Myth: It's a good idea to approve a development of this scale at the same time our community is going through an update process of its Comprehensive Plan. We have an affordable housing crisis, and we cannot wait for three years to address it. This is our last chance to take advantage of this opportunity.**

Fact: First, in early summer 2008, our community will evaluate a draft Land Use Plan for Teton County and the Town of Jackson. In Fall 2008, our community is scheduled to adopt an updated Comprehensive Plan, which will include a geographic depiction of preferred development patterns and intensities of development throughout the County. This critical piece of information will not take three years to complete. Second, County-recommended approval of a high-density development in an area previously not identified as appropriate for a "development node," strongly and prematurely influences possible outcomes of the community planning process. Third, recent analysis by Clarion Associates (2007) indicates that 30, 234 acres still have potential for development in Teton County, including 4,227 acres in the South Park area. This property is not the last chance to secure affordable housing and the density at which it is developed could set a precedent for future developable lands.

**Myth: The Teton Meadows Ranch property does not include crucial wildlife range; therefore wildlife impacts will be minimal.**

Fact: First, the impacts of a development the magnitude of Teton Meadows Ranch do not stop at the parcel boundary. Second, while the property does not include *crucial* habitat for wildlife species currently protected or monitored by our land development regulations, it is utilized by a number of species. Third, our land development regulations (with some exceptions) are limited in their capacity to ensure all impacts are assessed. For example, many species, such as raptors, are not included in formal assessments because they are not identified "species of concern." Additionally, indirect and cumulative effects are not evaluated as part of environmental assessments.

Not only will impacts to wildlife habitat result on the property itself, but also at the larger community scale of Jackson Hole. The magnitude of density proposed, and the population growth it will trigger, will cause increased indirect and cumulative effects on wildlife that utilize both the valley's private lands as well as surrounding public lands. Increased use at local public access areas, such as Game Creek and Munger Mountain are likely. Valley-wide, and at the site vicinity, increased vehicle-wildlife conflicts are likely. Additionally, traffic mitigation measures, such as road widening, can heavily impede wildlife movements.

**Myth: The area isn't important in terms of scenic resources in Teton County; Melody Ranch and other developments already ruined the formerly protected scenic characteristics.**

Fact: The Comprehensive Plan identifies South Highway 89 Scenic Area as a distinct area of scenic importance. The Seherr-Thoss property is a component of this area that is valued for its “open feel.” In addition, the west segment of South Park Loop Road is specifically identified as a scenic corridor, attributing its rows of cottonwoods as important in framing views in all travel directions.

In addition, as outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 4, “it is rare that one particular development would destroy an entire area of crucial winter range or an entire scenic vista. However, the net effect of several developments in close proximity to important scenic or natural resources may be the total loss of that resource.” Linked to that understanding, Teton Meadows Ranch alone would not be responsible for destroying the scenic or rural character of the area. However, the density at which the development is proposed would trigger secondary effects, such as the need for major road widening (rather than minor) to accommodate travel demands. Major road widening and traffic would necessitate the removal of cottonwoods along all segments of South Park Loop Road. Teton Meadows Ranch, given its density, would have proportionately higher impacts on the overall scenic area than developments of lower densities. The Comprehensive Plan identifies the South Park Loop Road as an important scenic corridor that “make(s) powerful statements about the community’s character and image.” The intensity at which development occurs in the area will determine whether or not it continues to function in terms of scenic preservation. On a practical level, a line of increasingly steady traffic on the road network would undermine scenic qualities.

**Myth: Teton Meadows Ranch will not contribute to new population growth by eliminating commuting and offering ways for people currently in affordable housing units to move up to other housing categories.**

Fact: Teton Meadows Ranch stands to add a minimum of 1,300 new people to the build-out population of Jackson Hole. New housing opportunities will be made and therefore additional growth will be accommodated overall. First, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that a significant number of commuters will a) desire housing products within Teton Meadows Ranch (over single-family home opportunities in outlying communities) or b) be able to qualify or afford specific housing products. Second, even if a portion of commuters returned to Jackson through this opportunity, (i.e., wishful thinking panned out), their vacated homes would be available for purchase for new, additional residents. Without overall growth management policies in place and high commercial growth potential in Jackson Hole, there is a great likelihood that new residents in the outlying communities will commute as well. In effect, the argument that the environmental effects of commuting would be offset (as a result of this development) falls short. Third, no evidence suggests the capacity for a significant number of households currently in affordable housing units to move up to “GAP” units. Only 6% percent of our *total* working households would qualify for these units. Fourth, market units alone in this development are double the current market unit entitlement, which contributes to overall growth.

Findings that new population growth will not result, and that an overall carbon footprint will be reduced, as a result of this development are based on flawed assumptions. Findings are only as strong as the assumptions used to arrive at them. In this case, the assumptions are weak, narrowly focused, and fail to take into account the big picture. High-density residential growth afforded by Teton Meadows Ranch is additive (not substitutive) growth. Oversimplifying the linkages between Jackson Hole and outlying communities can lend to the formation of unrealistic and false projections.

**Myth: The development will generate only 88 employees and will house 680 employees; therefore the net community gain afforded by Teton Meadows Ranch is clear. The development will help with our community’s long-term affordable housing problem.**

New residential and commercial developments add to the community need for affordable housing. So, it’s critical that each new development “does its part” to not worsen the affordable housing shortage. In order to not worsen current conditions, developments must address, at a minimum, their own impacts in terms of elevating the need for additional affordable housing. In other words, they must “keep up” with the demands that they generate. If Teton County sets a policy to house 60 percent of the workforce locally, developments would have to provide above and beyond that percentage of affordable housing to help with the community’s current affordable housing *shortage*. The Teton County Housing Needs Assessment (2007) states “for communities facing comparable pressure on the housing inventory, the (mitigation) rates range from 40-60 percent.” To date, Teton County has adopted an interim mitigation rate of only 25 percent.

In order to alleviate concerns raised about the net community benefit of Teton Meadows Ranch, on March 10<sup>th</sup>, Teton County Housing Authority (using a 2002 County study) presented findings that Teton Meadows Ranch would generate the demand for 88.4 employees and house 680 employees, indicating a strong net community gain. Importantly, this information constituted just one element of what should be a more comprehensive analysis. Specifically, this count of “employees generated” represented “construction and operation and maintenance employees” only. These calculations did not include other forms of employee generation such as increased demand for fire, school, medical, public lands staff, and other service personnel. In a nutshell, the true fiscal costs of Teton Meadows Ranch, as well as its potential to increase the need for affordable housing, have been underestimated. Studies have consistently demonstrated that residential development rarely pays for itself, and that true impacts are repeatedly underestimated.

Increased mitigation rates, particularly given the flaws of the PUD-AH as a planning tool, are likely to be the best chance to secure affordable housing in a way that achieves compatibility with other community goals. Requiring units of affordable housing to be built within current levels of development potential is a good alternative, given the ability of excessive residential development to exacerbate the affordable housing problem. The same housing study (2002) states “the more homes that are built in Teton County, the more the affordable housing problem is aggravated.”

**Myth: Because GAP housing is deed-restricted and will provide opportunities for households earning above 120% area median income (AMI), it provides a great community benefit.**

Fact: Deed-restricted workforce housing is not synonymous with affordable housing. “Deed-restricted” means that the use of the property is in some way controlled through a restriction. Affordable housing includes restrictions based on affordability of the unit, which is set in place to control initial and long-term affordability. Specifically, Teton County defines affordable housing as “housing units for lower- and middle-income residents earning no more than one hundred seventy-five (175) percent of the median Teton County income at the time the unit is rented or purchased. Such housing shall cost no more than thirty (30) percent of the occupants' total monthly income. Affordable housing can include owner-occupied dwelling units or rental dwelling units.” GAP housing is an example of a deed-restricted product that is not affordable – initially or in the long-term. GAP housing is proposed to have no income or asset restrictions, and a higher appreciation allowance than affordable housing.

The claim that GAP will provide options for those earning above 120% AMI doesn't provide a clear picture. GAP units, as originally proposed, would start at 200% AMI. A more accurate, transparent description of GAP units would include the 200% AMI as a start point (not 121%). Importantly, GAP housing does not represent a category of high community need. Affordable housing deficits are greatest at the lower level incomes\*. In a recent study (2007), only 5% of those interested in affordable housing exist at the 175% AMI and above. And, only 4% of our workforce could afford *any* of the GAP units, lowest category included. GAP housing, originally proposed to constitute 70% of the deed-restricted units, only benefits 4% of the community (needing housing) at best. The applicant's GAP product doesn't respond proportionately to community need.

**Myth: Teton Meadows Ranch is an affordable housing development that goes above and beyond to secure affordable housing in our community. The developer's generosity is hard to come by, therefore we need to say yes to “Housing Now!”**

Fact: Both the original application in August 2007 and the revised application in January 2008 failed to meet our community's minimum requirements for an affordable housing development. The PUD-AH Zoning designation, (which the applicant seeks) requires 50% of the units to be built affordable housing. The applicant had never proposed to meet this requirement. Only with the pressure of the Teton County Housing Authority and County planning staff, through a condition of approval to provide half the units as affordable housing, did the applicant suggest complying with this regulation. To date, the applicant has agreed to “cause” half of the units to be built as affordable, but has not clarified whether or not costs of the construction will be covered.

**Myth: Traffic impacts as a result of this development are minimal overall and have been adequately assessed.**

Fact: Traffic impacts have not been adequately assessed by the applicant for the following reasons: 1) no consideration was given to traffic generated by “pipeline” developments previously approved by Teton County, and 2) no analysis was made to address the impacts on all facilities that site traffic will use, including the Indian Trails Connector and Highway 22. Consequently, future traffic volumes have been underestimated, future intersection delays are underestimated, and future impacts are understated.

Independent traffic analysis confirms that there is limited transportation system capacity in the vicinity. In order to be in compliance with the land development regulations' road capacity standards, the development should not be approved.

**Myth: Teton Meadows Ranch is a model of how development should occur in Teton County. It has been endorsed by the Yellowstone Business Partnership (YBP) as an example of sustainable development.**

Fact: The project is under review for the YBP GY- Framework Pilot Program. No projects have ever been certified through the YBP program. The YBP program is in its preliminary stages, which includes a three-year process that can lead to certification. YBP has in no way endorsed the Teton Meadows Ranch project, nor completed an official review of the project. Teton Meadows Ranch has simply registered for an exploratory Pilot program of the Yellowstone Business Partnership Project to explore potential to achieve eventual certification. Only minimal criteria must be met in order to register for the program.

Teton Meadows Ranch is a high-density development that would exist over 5 miles from the nearest grocery store, and even further from key working opportunities. Borrowing wise words heard, “green suburban sprawl is an oxymoron.”

**Get involved by voicing your questions, thoughts and concerns and by attending public hearings. Reach out to:**

**Board of County Commissioners: 733-8094 or [commissioners@tetonwyo.org](mailto:commissioners@tetonwyo.org)**

**Andy Schwartz, Leland Christensen, Ben Ellis, Bill Paddleford, Hank Phibbs**

*This information has been compiled by South Park Neighbors and the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance.  
These groups and individuals are not aligned and may have different desired project outcomes.*