

Balancing Actions

Solutions and tools to help manage growth are there if we look.

The 1994 Comprehensive Plan did a lot of things right. It established urban, suburban and rural character districts; increased the minimum lot size in undeveloped areas from one home per 3 acres to one home per 35 acres; laid the foundation for Natural and Scenic Resource Overlays to help preserve wildlife and views; and set goals for affordable housing and transportation. But data from an analysis of the '94 plan, available at www.jacksontetonplan.com, shows that although the plan has had some successes, a lack of enforcement – plus Teton County's rate of growth since '94 – have far outstripped its ability to manage that growth.

Here's a roundup of planning tools that could be used in combination to ensure that our community will "Grow Slow, Grow Smart." All have advantages and disadvantages, and all should be explored as our community goes through the Comprehensive Plan update process. Visit www.jhalliance.org/issuesgrowth.htm for more information.

Development Caps

A development cap is a technique that sets an upper limit on the total amount of development or population buildout within a community. Development caps usually follow one of two methods. One quantifies the maximum buildout of a community, based on the ability of its infrastructure and natural resources to absorb growth without degradation, and it restricts development from exceeding that level.

The second method restricts annual growth to a predetermined percentage. For instance, Boulder, Colo., adopted residential growth limits in the 1970s that capped permits for new homes at 450 per year to keep its annual growth rate below 2 percent. More recently, Boulder sought to limit its amount of commercial growth because jobs were growing faster than population. A drawback of caps is that they could cause more pressure on outlying communities, such as Star Valley and Teton County, Idaho, to grow.

Infill Strategies

Since the type and location of growth are just as important as the amount and rate of growth, many communities are devising infill and redevelopment programs to combat sprawl. In Teton County, this translates into the "Jackson as Heart of the Region" or "Town as Heart" concept, under which denser residential and mixed-use development is encouraged in town in the hope that it would limit sprawl in the county. Adding density in Jackson, where infrastructure and services already exist, makes sense. But what good is it to grow "up" in town without restrictions on growing "out" into the county? Jackson and Teton County must coordinate their planning efforts to gain the most benefit. Here are some common infill strategies:

- **Community and Urban Growth Boundaries:** This strategy uses infrastructure and urban service extension policies to define areas where new development will or will not have access to municipal services, like sewer and water, thus steering new development toward designated growth areas. Jackson has public lands blocking development to the north and east, so the pressure to grow is to the south and west. Where to draw the line is the rub.

- **Transfers of Development Rights:** TDRs are the process by which development rights are transferred from a parcel in a "sending district," where land conservation is sought, to a parcel in a "receiving district," where property development is desired. This strategy works with a Community Growth Boundary: Areas outside the boundary are downzoned, but, while

losing rights to develop their properties at formerly permitted densities, property owners in the sending districts get development rights that they can sell to landowners in the receiving districts. Planners are currently exploring whether TDRs are legal and feasible under Wyoming statutes.

- **Zoning and Overlay Changes:** Overlays, such as the Natural Resource and Scenic Resource overlays, designate areas that rate special protection (see Page 8 for more about overlays). Zoning regulations are the nuts and bolts of implementing smart growth plans. Both must be evaluated often – and enforced fairly – to make sure they're working as intended. For instance, this past fall, the Jackson Town Council approved a zoning change to allow residential uses on the second and third floors of buildings in districts zoned commercial. More amendments that would increase density in town are being considered, but again, to avert costly sprawl, upzones in town must be balanced by downzones elsewhere in the county.



Open Space Protection

Some communities have raised funds through special taxes, such as a 1 percent real estate transfer tax, to preserve open space by buying development rights from property owners. When a landowner sells his or her development rights, the right to develop or subdivide that parcel is permanently relinquished, and the restriction is recorded in a conservation easement attached to the property deed. In this area, the Jackson Hole Land Trust, Teton County Scenic Preserve Trust, The Nature Conservancy and willing landowners have been the leaders in securing easements. As of August 2007, the Land Trust had helped protect about 20,440 acres, or almost 27 percent of private land in the county.

Community and Environmental Impact Statements

For developers to be granted an upzone (an increase in density from existing zoning), they must show that the community benefits from the upzone and proposed development will outweigh the costs of its impacts. Some counties require a community and environmental impacts analysis as part of the application process for any development proposal that asks for a major upzone. That way an informed, intelligent decision can be made.

Impact Fees and Mitigation

Impact fees are paid by property developers to local governments for infrastructure to support new development. In 1996, Jackson and Teton County considered, but did not adopt, impact fees. Mitigation of the impacts of development, such as an increased need for affordable housing and degradation of wildlife habitat, is discussed on Pages 6 through 8. Requiring developers to help relieve the community costs caused by their developments is yet another way of managing growth. ■