

January 15, 2020
Teton County Board of County Commissioners



RE: Please do not prematurely approve sketch plan SKC2020-0001

Dear Chair Macker and Commissioners,

We are glad the County has begun a holistic neighborhood plan to develop Northern South Park (NSP) in response to landowner interest. We were thus surprised to see a subdivision sketch plan that seems inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan goals for Northern South Park, required findings, and the community values the landowner has espoused.

The sketch plan is inconsistent with the landowner's and community's stated values. Last year, the landowner's representative outlined "two choices" – either an 83-unit subdivision ("Option 2") or an upzone allowing hundreds of additional units across this and additional land ("Option 1") – and described why the 83-unit proposal was less desirable:

Under Option 2, the current Suburban zoning on the 26 acres of land owned by the Gill family on the north-west corner of South Park Loop Road and High School Road already allows the family to develop 83 units with 12,000 square foot lots. A Suburban-zoned lot of this size would allow a 4,200 square foot house, which is similar in character to the houses in Indian Trails and H-H-R Ranches. This option is permitted by right with no request for additional density and **would produce a housing product that is out of reach for much of the local workforce.** Under County regulations, no deed-restricted workforce housing units would be provided on site as part of Option 2; rather a fee in-lieu would be collected at the time of each individual Building Permit application. Although the by-right development on existing Suburban zoning would be the most expedient option, **the Gill family understands that it would not make an appreciable dent in our community housing problem and would not provide the housing product needed now and into the future.**ⁱ (our highlighting)

"Option 1" was a 300+ home upzone on their holdings in NSP. Although you did not approve that exact option, you did modify the Comp Plan and start the neighborhood plan that will enable an upzone of at least that size and profitability.ⁱⁱ Given that the landowners will almost definitely get the results of "Option 1," albeit not as quickly as they wanted it, we believe it is not appropriate to pursue the alternative and problematic "Option 2" at the same time.

In fact, we expect that the neighborhood plan will provide *even more* density than the landowners requested, providing more affordability *and* more landowner profit. The plan could still include 83 "out of reach" homes, but if integrated into a holistic plan they would be less problematic. We believe the neighborhood plan will be a win-win.

Turning to the LDRs: it seems two required findings for approval cannot be made. As the Town pointed out, the sketch plan isn't consistent with the community's vision, and it significantly impacts public facilities.ⁱⁱⁱ

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The sketch plan is inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Both the 2012 and updated Comp Plans are clear that NSP needs a neighborhood plan, which is not yet complete. The Comp Plan also identifies NSP as a Complete Neighborhood, yet this sketch plan lacks key elements (sidewalks, parks, connections to the rest of NSP), ultimately detracting from rather than contributing to the future NSP vision.

The sketch plan would negatively impact public facilities. With respect to public services, this sketch plan poses a direct threat to potable water, an unresolved issue from the original upzone request.^{iv} Although this subdivision would sit on top of a sewer line, the sketch plan proposes a vague standalone system. This contradicts the EPA's recommendations for "areas of greatest environmental sensitivity," especially sole source aquifers.^v And simply because a separate system can be permitted does not mean it will protect our groundwater or the people drinking it. Consider the all-too-recent example of Hoback RV Park, or the failures of similar (and expensive) facilities, including those at the Airport, the Village, and Brooks Lake Lodge, all once thought to be safe. Down-aquifer homeowners have already raised the alarm.^{vi} We need a safe water and wastewater plan. *If and when you approve a sketch plan for this area, please condition its approval on connection to municipal wastewater treatment.*

Approving this proposal threatens the success of the neighborhood plan.

The landowner's previous upzone request inspired significant rewrites to our Comp Plan and then a major public investment in the NSP neighborhood plan. We are investing \$400,000 and 8 months to holistically plan 200+ acres for the future of our community – an investment that comes at the expense of other community priorities. Prematurely approving this subdivision would impact what else can be achieved in NSP, from affordability and transportation to quality public spaces and community character. Worst-case, it could end with the landowner choosing to *only* build this simple subdivision, quit the neighborhood plan, and not provide any community benefit such as homes that are affordable to local workers.

The Town and County have a responsibility to safeguard the community's investments, Comprehensive Plan vision, and access to clean drinking water. Please do not approve this sketch plan unless and until it can meet all the findings, including consistency with the already-underway neighborhood plan.

Sincerely,



Brooke Sausser
Community Planning Manager

ⁱ Letter from Susan Johnson, dated January 27, 2020, giving the County “two choices.”

ⁱⁱ The language describing Subarea 5.6 identifies that the density will be similar to surrounding subareas.

ⁱⁱⁱ Per 8.3.1.C of the Land Development Regulations.

^{iv} Joint letter with the Wyoming Outdoor Council and Protect Our Water JH, August 21, 2020.

<https://jhalliance.org/2020/09/10/wastewater-planning-needed-first/>

^v Environmental Protection Agency. (2003). *Voluntary national guidelines for management of onsite and clustered (decentralized) wastewater treatment systems*. See page 16.

^{vi} See letters from Melody Ranch and Rafter J, dated September 21, 2020, and September 24, 2020.