

Planning or plotting?

No one loves a study more than Jackson/Teton County. When faced with critical issues of the day, we love to throw money at a lip service solution: The Study. Stakeholder groups are formed, public open houses are scheduled, and thousands upon thousands of dollars are spent on a plan to look into the situation. Plans that are rarely put into action.

When faced with out-of-control growth in the mid-2000s, our electeds launched an update to the 1994 Comprehensive Plan—a grinding, very expensive process that is now more than a decade old. All to find out what we as a community said in 1994 and continue to say today: We've got to protect wildlife and natural resources, and stop making this place more and more unlivable. Quality of life matters most of all.

In the end government produced a dazzling report full of pretty pictures but lacking any real substance and authority. Our new Comp Plan is merely an advisory document, almost 400 pages of powerless paper so vague that any elected official can use it to support their claim, "See, this is what the people want: more four story hotels," or just as easily, "Citizens support a 'Save our Wildlife' campaign."

Appeal for funds: We feel news coverage in the valley is decidedly skewed in a manner congruent with and supportive of local government's love affair with START and affordable housing (as just two examples).

It's a big reason why voters keep "surprising" electeds when they say no at the ballot box.

It's junk jurisprudence, sometimes treated like 'bible,' sometimes ignored, depending on what a developer wants. The teeth of the Comp Plan—things like land development regulations and affordable housing mitigation—are still incomplete five years after the plan's adoption.

Why? Because the endless Groundhog Day cycle of studying, conceptualizing, and planning allows development to continue unregulated.

When do we get planning and zoning tools that reflect the will of the people?

Town/County planners say "The Comp Plan sets the foundation for all land use decisions, from broad policy to detailed site design and development." But it's so non-specific as to support most anything. When do we get to the planning and zoning tools that reflect the will of the people?

We have the Housing Action Plan, the Integrated Transportation Plan, the Natural Resource Overlay Plan, the Wildlife Crossings Plan, the Town Parking Study—every crisis facing Jackson Hole is examined and analyzed while traffic worsens, commercial building crowds out the sun, and our precious wildlife and habitat are destroyed.

It's beginning to feel like 'delay and deny' may be the actual plan.

This column has been an expensive but worthwhile effort to provide a more well-rounded message—an alternative take on today's issues—shared by a great many citizens who value a livable community.

We need funding to continue. Please consider sending a check to the address below.