

The other side of the story...

Help on Overcrowding, Mitigation

Okay, 'mitigation' isn't the easiest topic, but it's vitally important. What's mitigation? It's the 'housing' a new building project must provide in order to gain approval. And our local requirement is pitifully low.

Let's say a developer wants to build a new hotel that will need a staff of 80. Our current 25% mitigation means the developer must provide housing for just 20 of those employees. The other 60 employees add to our housing deficit, while all of them create more traffic, congestion and frustration for everyone.

In our Mountain Ski Town peer group, one high-end town requires almost 100% mitigation. At 100% that same hotel developer must house all 80 employees. It's a much better system.

At a recent meeting of town and county electeds, there was a tenuous vote to raise local mitigation to 100%. Led by the Mayor and the Chair (Pete Muldoon, town; and Mark Newcomb, county) the measure was approved 3-2 by both town and county electeds.

Here's what it means. A developer of a commercial project would have to provide housing for all of their employees. That includes fulltime, year-round workers as well as seasonal hires.

How important was that vote? Housing director April Norton said the process underway now "will define what Jackson [Hole] is for the next 20 to 50 years." It doesn't get more important.

We applaud the vote. In the words of the Conservation Alliance, "Our housing mitigation program should generate enough units to actually keep up with new jobs created."

Because we haven't been doing that, our quality

of life has suffered. You can bet the 'Bigger and Grander' coalition will fight this.

If a 'livable Jackson Hole' is important to you, this issue is priority #1. Going to 100% mitigation won't solve the housing backlog, but it will help limit future problems.

100% mitigation is a big step in the right direction.

The measure will be revisited in December. And it's critically important this proposal pass again. If it fails, we're soiling our own nest.

We've been on the 'Bigger and Grander' path for decades. Our current mitigation rate isn't even a real 25%. It's just imposed on 'seasonal' employees. Year-round employees are ignored. So if you have no seasonal employees you have no mitigation requirement, zero.

A 'real' 100% mitigation requirement is a huge step in the right direction, so detractors already are claiming the high mitigation rate is onerous to developers and will stifle commercial growth.

We say thank goodness. It's about time!

Some of our electeds feel slowing commercial growth for a few years wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. It would help ease the increasing strain on the housing market.

Developers have had it too easy for too long. They're used to getting their way and reaping outsized profits. Higher mitigation rates will put the burden of housing lower-income employees squarely on developers and big business owners where it belongs, instead of on taxpayers.

We need to better manage growth, and this is an excellent start. Our hats are off to the courageous electeds that voted to increase mitigation rates.

Going to 100% helps preserve what's left of the Old West. It's a vote for a 'livable Jackson Hole.'