

Same Old Pro-Growth Excuses

The joint housing department is pedaling as fast as they can, all the while chasing the unachievable.

Town and County Planners say we need another 280 housing units a year just to keep from falling further behind. That's fairy-tale thinking, unrealistic, unachievable and unsustainable.

Our community would be unrecognizable if it was achieved. Ask yourself: Are we a community or just an incubator for business expansion? We need to wake up; another 280 units a year will destroy Jackson as we know it. It's an additional 700 residents a year on top of our normal growth rate.

Our elected officials keep drinking the pro-growth Kool-aid; they won't acknowledge the obvious: We can't house everyone that wants to live here. They won't even consider Teton Valley and Star Valley as places the Jackson workforce might choose to live.

Employee housing is an employer problem. Voters don't want to subsidize massive business growth.

We need to hit the brakes. Higher mitigation will help to cool our overheated tourism, real estate and construction based economy. Requiring new or expanding businesses to house all rather than just some of their employees is a start.

Ever since our electeds voted to pursue 100% mitigation, the pro-business, pro-growth community has been applying their considerable political pressure. They turned out en masse last week to publicly beat away at our local government, challenging their resolve.

First, the town and county planning commissions

both voted to reduce the 100% figure. Next, coalitions like Jackson Hole Working began pouring money into PR firms that pressured government leaders to buckle. And it's working.

At last week's meeting, town and county leaders were suddenly talking about 73% mitigation instead of 100%. By the end of the meeting, after being bullied by big business advocates, even that number was tentatively reduced to 55%.

*Mitigation has been
too low for too long.*

Pro-growth advocates all sing the same tune: "High mitigation rates will unfairly burden us and stifle any new development. Nothing will get built, including housing," they threaten.

One councilman was brave enough to speak up. Jim Stanford said he was proud of the town's effort to hold the line in the "face of political headwinds." And he rightly dismissed the arguments of developers and retailers as 'sky is falling' propaganda we've all heard before.

Stanford quoted a March 13, 1996 article in this very paper that cited the business community bemoaning the hike in mitigation rates — then in support of the 1994 Comp Plan. "It will stifle growth," they cried more than two decades ago. "We will build our own affordable housing if we are not so heavily burdened with mitigation," they added. It was nonsense then and still is today.

"The fears were unfounded," Stanford said. Neither happened. The business economy has flourished and sufficient housing has not been built. "We were too timid back then," Stanford warned.

We should be learning from the past. Mitigation has been too low for too long. Today's housing deficit is the result of 24 years of missed opportunities.