



Valley Advocates for Responsible Development

Regional Issues Call for Regional Cooperation

The more Teton Valley grows, the more interconnected and interdependent the communities within the valley become as well as the more our fortunes are tied to those of our neighboring counties. As the cities grow and add neighborhoods, they push out against the boundaries of the county, where in turn developments line up along the city boundaries, in many instances clamoring for annexation and the density bonuses that come with city services. The City of Victor recently requested an expansion of their area of impact, a measure taken in part to protect themselves from the high densities allowed in the unincorporated county. The fact that all jurisdictions are considering sewer upgrades and that development follows the sewer lines signifies the pressing need for regional coordination. This approach to planning is not novel, many communities similar to ours, such as McCall and Valley County, Idaho, have started down the path of regional planning.

We've all experienced the fact that Teton County, Idaho, and Teton County, Wyoming,

are inextricably linked. Grand Targhee and Jackson's reliance on Idaho for labor are just the two most obvious examples of issues that make communication and cooperation imperative. In a kind of domino effect, Teton County, ID growth is now a question to be grappled with by our Idaho neighbors. Workers who cannot afford to live in Teton Valley are commuting from as far away as Rexburg and Idaho Falls. Madison County recently considered rezoning rural agricultural areas along the Teton County border because of pressure to develop being exerted by dense developments across the line in Teton County. And now Fremont County to the north is also feeling the pressures of growth.

Shared growth means shared growth benefits and challenges. It only makes sense that regional coordination will help all of the stakeholders make the most of growth while preserving what we love about our communities.

Although at times it may seem like there is a newcomer/old-timer cultural divide in

rapidly changing communities like ours, underneath we share many of the same values: clean air and water, good schools, choices in employment and housing, economic vibrancy and a farmer's ability to retire with dignity. I truly believe we are in an incredible time of hope – we not only have the ability to confront the challenges facing our communities, but the gumption to make the uncomfortable decisions to do so.

In this newsletter we touch on some of the most pressing issues facing Teton Valley that point to the need for a coordinated regional response, whether on a local level in Teton Valley or between counties in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In a short publication like this, we cannot attempt an in-depth exploration of these issues, but simply highlight them in the hopes that a deeper exploration can happen through the public process with full citizen involvement.

—Kathy Rinaldi,
Executive Director



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Growth by Numbers

A year ago we ran a newsletter headlined *The Perfect Storm* in which we presented evidence of accelerated growth in Teton Valley. One year later, the data shows continued growth with a significant increase in the number of lots or units pending approval in the county. We can see all the new construction in the valley, which is significant, but there is no visible evidence of the thousands of new lots that are currently awaiting approval or haven't begun construction. Changes in the character and landscape of this valley are incremental and it is hard to see them until the cumulative effect of our zoning manifests itself on the ground. For this reason we'd do well to heed the story the numbers tell us.



	Jan '06	Jan '07	% change
Number of platted subdivisions	265	278	+5%
Subdivision applications pending.....	30	58	+93%
Total units/lots in subdivisions	6114	7025	+14.90%
Total acres in subdivisions	17,199	23,667	+37.60%
Units/lots pending in Teton County	1057	2780	+163%
Current population (approx) of Teton County	7,000		
Population that current zoning will allow	192,943		

Source: Teton County, ID Planning & Zoning Department

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Valley Advocates for Responsible Development

MISSION: To advocate for the private, public and civic actions that will result in the responsible development and sustainable use of natural resources (water, land, wildlife and air) in Teton Valley.

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LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE.

Densities – the how and how much of development

Density – where development is concentrated and how concentrated it is – touches every aspect of our daily lives in Teton Valley. Sometimes this interconnectedness is inconvenient – we’d rather not think about the big-picture consequences of our land-use choices. But the reason that state law requires local land-use planning is because decisions about land use have a ripple effect on surrounding property owners and ultimately on the entire community.

Some believe that the more development the better, and that it all pays for itself. This school of thought enabled Teton County’s land-use policies and allowable densities to open dramatically for development. The majority of new developments are being proposed at the maximum density allowed, which is proving to be out of step with the goals of the comprehensive plan and having negative impacts on the community as a whole. Additionally, this approach is short sighted and fails to recognize where Teton Valley’s comparative advantage lies. If you glance through local real estate ads, you’ll see some recurring themes: *mountain views, adjacent to open space, rural setting, mountain retreat* and *abundant wildlife*. All of these assets are threatened by the densities allowed in the rural parts of the county. If we want to keep our competitive edge, especially in a cooling national housing market, we need to identify what is drawing people here and do what we can to preserve that.

Under our county ordinances, a developer could build 400 homes on a 1000-acre rural parcel – a subdivision approximately the size of Driggs. Using that formula, let’s follow the impacts of that subdivision as it would affect the county.

- 400 lots x 2.9 persons (avg household size) = 1160 people
- 400 x .9 children (avg number of children per household) = 360 children
- 400 houses x 2 vehicles = 800 vehicles
- 400 x 9 vehicle trips/day = 3600 vehicle trips
- 400 x 1 dog = 400 dogs
- 1160 people x 80 gals of water/day = 92,800 gals
- 400 wells
- 400 septic systems
- 1160 people x 4.54 lbs of garbage/day = 5266 lbs

Sources: School District, EPA, USGS

These impacts are dramatic, but the clincher is that not all development patterns carry the same costs. In fact, this type of pattern has been proven to be the most expensive to the taxpayer. The further development is from the towns, and the more spread out it is, the more it costs to provide services to those outlying areas: bus routes are longer, emergency response times are greater, more miles of roads need to be maintained and built, more sewer lines need to be built and maintained, and fire and police departments need more equipment and personnel. Study after study has shown that sprawling residential growth does not pay its way, and we are growing ourselves into a very expensive situation. In addition to these costs, studies have linked numerous health problems to sprawling development, such as respiratory problems as a result of air pollution caused by increased traffic.

There is an alternative to this development pattern: the more development that is placed close to the services it needs, or the more clustered the development is, the better. This is where another well known real estate maxim comes into the growth dynamic: *location, location, location*. Many second-home owners want a secluded rural retreat. But equally many residents such as elderly citizens, working folks and young families would like to live in town to be closer to the amenities and convenience of town. Kids can walk to school or to the park. Stores and other amenities are close at hand, and in many cases the cost of living is cheaper. For example, since there is less driving, many households can make do with one car. Unfortunately there are few housing opportunities in town and what is for sale is often priced too high for this population. Discouraging suburban densities in the rural areas and encouraging dense development in town would alleviate both of these problems. Increasing supply obviously makes more town housing available, but should also decrease price pressure. However, as a resort community with a lot of real estate investment and speculation, market prices may not come down with infill development. Nevertheless, downtown areas are certainly the place for affordable housing developments.

The duty of our local government is to protect the “health, safety, and welfare” of its citizens. Auto-dependent, sprawling development has been linked to myriad health problems. Our

towns’ economic vitality and lifestyle depend on responsibly managed growth. Yet, the economic and social viability of our community is threatened by dense development scattered throughout the rural parts of the county. For these reasons, our current development pattern borders on fiscal irresponsibility and is not sustainable. As a community we need to support a movement towards a more responsible land-use pattern: lower densities in the county and higher densities in our municipalities. By doing that we can keep this valley a great place to live as well as move in a fiscally responsible and prosperous direction. **VARD**



School Funding – new development needs to contribute

Last August, interim Governor Jim Risch changed the way Idaho schools pay for basic operation and maintenance costs. Prior to August 2006, local schools were funded through a combination of state and federal funds and money generated through local property taxes. The share of school funding paid through property taxes acted as an anchor for our local school district, ensuring that in rough times, our schools had a stable source of funding that would not fluctuate as drastically as the

economy. Prior to August 2006, the booming housing market in Teton County was beneficial to the local school district.

Starting with the 2007 school year, school funding is independent of property taxes. Now school funding is dependent on a statewide 1% increase in sales tax. Whereas before new growth helped pay for schools, now it is a liability. School superintendent Gordon Wooley has asked the county commissioners to look into ways new development can help contribute towards the

costs they incur to the school district. This is just one more example of how growth doesn’t necessarily pay for itself. It will take action by our community leaders to ensure that the quality of public services, such as our schools, rises with growth. Since the school district encompasses the cities and unincorporated county, and it is in the interest of the entire Teton Valley community to have quality schools, the crisis in funding our schools is a priority issue for regional cooperation. **VARD**

• putting all the pieces together

Sewer Solutions – success requires regional planning

There is probably no better argument to plan regionally than the recent results of the Driggs sewer study. Nelson Engineering recently released the draft of the study, which was commissioned by the City of Driggs to evaluate the current system, determine future wastewater needs, evaluate alternatives and prepare a conceptual design of the preferred alternative.

In 1999, Driggs and Victor entered an agreement that Victor would become a customer of the Driggs sewer system and built a sewer line along Highway 33. Now the Driggs sewer plant is nearing capacity while Driggs and Victor annex developments and the area between the two towns continues to be platted for development at a rapid pace. In the sewer study draft, the potential build-out population within the service area was estimated at 41,000 residents based on existing land-use regulations. Currently there are 7484 existing or pending platted lots in the service area. Nelson also examined an alternative projection based on the average number of building permits issued since 2000 of 186 residential units. The alternative projection estimates 16,158 residents.

The costs of the sewer expansion are large, ranging in price from \$18 to \$25 million dollars for the plant and almost \$18 million dollars for sewer improvements. Part of the potential funding mechanisms to pay for the expansion and improvements is hook-up fees – one-time fees assessed to new users. This approach relies on a certain amount of growth in order to pay for the new infrastructure. A growth-management plan is needed to make sure that the need to pay for the

sewer line is not the only thing taken into account when approving development along the sewer line. The location of the new hook ups is key in determining that the other costs associated with those residences do not outweigh the benefit of their hook-up fee. In addition to concrete monetary costs associated with service provision, such as roads and emergency services, there are also less easily quantifiable – yet nevertheless very real – costs. The air pollution resulting from increased traffic is one example. The Driggs sewer study stated that Teton Valley is susceptible to inversions, as cold air traps pollutants in the valley. This winter, Salt Lake City suffered one of its worst inversions in history, trapping pollution along the Wasatch Front for over two weeks. Maureen Card, a Salt Lake City resident, stated it so clearly in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, “It’s so important to have air quality so we can breathe.”

Save Money, Pay Less

A paper published by the Brookings Institution, *Investing in a Better Future: A Review of the Fiscal and Competitive Advantages of Smarter Growth Development Patterns*, makes the case that more compact development patterns and investing in projects to improve downtown cores saves taxpayers money and improves the overall regional economic performance of the area. The academic research this paper reviewed confirmed that “smart growth holds out significant potential savings to governments on one-time infrastructure outlays by comparison with the spending required by low-density sprawl.” Ad-

ditionally the paper examined the savings on service delivery such as police and fire protection. It stated that “public works outlays can be reduced in many compact communities because fewer lane-miles and shorter sewer and water pipes can be serviced and repaired less expensively. Likewise, compact cities require fewer police and fire stations per capita than more sprawling areas because more households live within acceptable response time of established service providers.” Essentially, governments can save money, and taxpayers can pay less, when development is channeled into established areas where services can be provided more cheaply.

While Victor and Driggs weigh an extremely costly sewer upgrade, Teton County and several private developments are exploring the idea of having sewer districts of their own. One key component that has been missing in the sewer conversations is a thoughtful discussion between the three jurisdictions on land use in the identified area – or simply examining and planning the area as a region.

There are many qualities of Teton Valley we value as a community: clean water, clean air, funded services and overall quality of life, to name a few. Just as none of these qualities stands alone, so too is the ability to maintain these qualities as a whole not just the purview of one jurisdiction. Successful planning for infrastructure improvements, including where growth will be focused, how it will be serviced and how much it will cost may be determined by the degree to which the four jurisdictions of Teton Valley – Driggs, Victor, Teton County and Teton County – take a regional approach to planning. **VARD**

Affordable Housing

A check of real estate in early February 2007 showed a dearth of affordable housing opportunities for our workforce. The listings showed one home in Driggs for under \$200K (not including the price of the land), six in Driggs ranging in price from \$272-\$295K and one in Victor for under \$250K. At these prices, a household would need to earn an annual income of at least \$60K to consider entering the housing market in Teton County, ID, which is simply out of step with local salaries. An average teacher’s salary is around \$35K, not enough to afford a home. Last year, the school district lost seven teachers due to high housing costs and better paying jobs elsewhere.

The lack of affordable housing opportunities for our workforce will lead to negative effects on our community as a whole. As workers spend more hours commuting they have less to give back to their community in volunteerism whether it be as little league coaches or serving in local government. When “locals” are forced to locate somewhere else we lose an essential part of our character and diversity.

In 2006, the county, with help from several developers, commissioned a housing needs assessment and plan to examine where the gaps are in housing and how we can best address those gaps as a community. A key component to planning for affordable housing is its location. Ideally affordable housing residents would be close to the services they need such as schools, shopping and cultural activities – essentially in our cities – discouraging auto-dependency and putting more money in the pockets of these residents.

Although there are several different models for how to create a variety of housing choices they all require a concerted effort between the various jurisdictions in the county, as well as cooperation between the public and private sectors. Providing a variety of housing choices for our community is in the best interest of this community and in the best interest of all of those who hold a stake in the community. It’s time to collaborate and address this need. **VARD**

One hidden price of sprawling development is the cost of owning, maintaining and using your vehicle. Encouraging development that limits the number of car trips required by residents and the distance of those trips is a way to make living in our community more affordable.

THE TRUE COST OF DRIVING:

52.2 cents per mile
composite national average

65.4 cents per mile for a 4WD Sport Utility Vehicle

\$7,967 How much a person driving a small sedan 15,000 miles a year can expect to pay excluding loan payments

Source: American Automobile Association

Conclusions and Solutions

Not only do we need to start planning better, we need to start taking a regional view – that is, planning as Teton Valley, not as four or five separate jurisdictions. The county and the cities have recently taken strides in this direction through regular informal meetings. Informal meetings are a start, but soon we will need more formalized meetings with the power to make joint decisions – whether through establishing a standing regional planning board or through appointing an ad hoc joint decision-making board for various tasks. Sometimes it seems that what is lacking is just a basic willingness on the part of decision-makers to cooperate with others or to think outside of their box. In some cases, their constituents must demand it.

Recognizing how much the two Teton

counties share impacts, the Teton County, ID and Teton County, WY commissioners have agreed to meet quarterly. But now we are also starting to experience how Teton County, ID is impacting our neighbors in Fremont and Madison counties as well as Swan Valley / Irwin. The time is ripe for similar relationships with our Idaho neighbors.

There are many steps being taken towards regionalism in planning in the private sector through the Yellowstone Business Partnership, the Sonoran Institute, the Teton Area Advisory Forum and other non-profits. Unfortunately, the public sector is too often slow to follow. Although thinking outside of our jurisdictions or boxes may at first be uncomfortable, it is not impossible and ultimately will make a better place for all of us. **VARD**

More Growth by the Numbers

Recently we've been hearing a lot of figures batted around as decision-makers grapple with the costs to service our community's growing population and growing number of subdivisions. These costs come back to the taxpayer in one form or another. Here are some figures we've gleaned recently from meetings and reports:

SCHOOL DISTRICT

School District Surplus in 2002..... +\$1.6 million
 School District Deficit in 2006..... -\$320,000

Source: Superintendent Gordon Wooley

COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE

Cost of new transfer station..... \$2.2 million
 Cost of courthouse renovation/new county courthouse \$2-5 million*

*This figure depends on what kind of courthouse, where it is located, how soon it can be done etc.

Source: Teton County Board of County Commissioners

FIRE DISTRICT

Number of Teton Valley residents in 2025 based on currently platted lots.. 32,000
 Cost of upgrades required by fire district to service 32,000 people... \$6.5 million

Source: Fire District presentation to Teton County Commissioners

SEWER DISTRICT

Sewer service area includes Driggs, Victor and the area in between

Potential population for sewer service area based on current zoning ... 41,000
 Population projection of sewer service area for 2030 based
 on average number of building permits issued since 2000..... 16,158

Cost of sewer upgrade..... \$36 million

Source: Driggs Wastewater Treatment Facilities Plan (draft), Nelson Engineering, October 2006



SAVE THE DATE Friday, June 22

VARD is holding our third annual summer music event at the Knotty Pine in Victor on Friday, June 22, starting at 5pm. Don't miss this fun family event with live music, dancing, food and drinks! This is a way to learn about our work and meet our staff in a fun and relaxed environment. Watch for more details on our Web site and posters around town.



photos by Vicki Vanyo, World Bridger Creations

Design for the 21st Century

a series of free seminars on cutting-edge neighborhood and building design for Teton Valley



Design for the 21st Century – A GREAT SUCCESS!

Throughout February, VARD hosted a free seminar series entitled *Design for the 21st Century* covering different aspects of cutting-edge design and development. The series was a great success with over 100 participants and lively discussions. Our presenters were drawn from Teton Valley's own building, planning and development community. The series featured the following speakers and topics:

- Larry Thal and Penny McBride of Mountainside Village
Traditional Neighborhood Design
- Andy Tyson of Creative Energies
Alternative Energy in Teton Valley
- Bob Heneage of Plan1 Architects
LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)
- Jennifer Zung of Harmony Design
Low Impact Engineering and Planning: Conservation Design for Rural Living

Thanks to all who participated! VARD plans to hold more educational events this year with the goal of educating and empowering citizens to get involved in shaping the future of their community.

Give now and double your donation through the Spring Match

This year our goal is to raise \$100,000 towards our annual budget of \$215,000. If you have appreciated VARD's work in Teton Valley – whether it be our presence at local meetings, hosting of educational events or informative publications like this one – then we hope you'll consider a donation towards our work.

A very generous and committed donor has offered to match new donations dollar for dollar up to \$15,000! This is a great opportunity for you and VARD since your donation will essentially be doubled. For those of you who are already members, any amount you give over and above your last annual donation will also be matched. We hope that you will take advantage of this special opportunity to make your donation go even further.

We are a membership-based organization and the more members we have, the stronger our voice. Thanks in advance for your support!

Get Involved • Become a Member TETON VALLEY NEEDS YOU!

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address _____

city _____

state _____ zip _____

e-mail _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

Member..... \$25-\$49/year

Supporter..... \$50-\$99/year

Friend..... \$100-\$249/year

Patron..... \$250-\$499/year

Sponsor \$500-\$999/year

Benefactor \$1000+/year

Members will receive meeting invitations, regular newsletters and e-mail updates.

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM AND YOUR CHECK TO: **VARD** P.O. Box 1164, Driggs, ID 83422

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