

My Q&A on Housing in Northern South Park

April 23, 2020



*I had an opportunity earlier this month to meet by Zoom with the leaders of [Shelter JH](#), an important grassroots advocacy organization whose mission is for workers to have secure housing in Jackson Hole. Shelter JH board member Mike Welch interviewed me about planning for workforce housing in Northern South Park.**

**The written version of the interview has been edited*



ISLAND AND ON THE RAINS PARCEL NEXT TO THE ASPEN MARKET. NOW YOU SUPPORT PLANNING FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN SOUTH PARK. WHY THERE?

Our community needs more housing for our workforce and I want to encourage this housing to be sited near town and schools. The location of Northern South Park (NSP) is unique given its:

- proximity to schools, grocery stores, gas stations, and retail.
- access to the town pathway system and frequent START service.
- access to Highway 89 South, the only stretch of major highway in the valley with excess capacity to handle more cars.

I also want to avoid or minimize scattered, isolated, leapfrog development in much of the county; therefore, I voted against developing Hog Island and voted to dispose of the Rains Parcel on Highway 390.

The Comp Plan envisions development in this unique location. It's time to initiate community planning for workforce housing and other development here as the highest priority in the county.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN SOUTH PARK AND HOW DOES THAT FIT



Northern South Park is large enough to plan for a variety of housing types and is the logical site for workforce housing, since it adjoins town. NSP can provide housing for the full spectrum of our workforce and complements the type of housing being built in town.

As a town resident, I am pleased to see more infill affordable and workforce housing in town. Most of this housing is slated to be apartments and condos, which is good. We need more multi-family housing; however, not every working family will choose to live in an apartment.

As much new housing as economically feasible should be permanently deed restricted for workforce housing and for people who perform key roles in the valley. We also need to ensure that more housing is affordable to more of the local workforce, not just our highest earners. This requires more emphasis on private philanthropy and housing subsidies (such as Habitat for Humanity's housing at the Grove) rather than trying to close the gap with too much density.

Affordable workforce housing is critical; however, we must also remember other community goals, such as reducing pressure for scattered development that results in more driving and respecting the character of established neighborhoods. NSP provides a rare



is close to town, schools, and services.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN SOUTH PARK?

My vision for NSP is a mix of density and housing types, ranging from both conventional and innovative multi-family housing, to townhouses with small backyards, to small- and medium-sized lots, to market-based housing on larger lots as a transition to conservation areas to the south.

My vision includes three fundamental tenets:

- Most houses are permanently deed restricted for affordable and workforce housing, along with some homes owned by major employers (ex. St. John's Health, human service nonprofits, state and local agencies) and either reserved for rental housing or perhaps with shared ownership agreements among employers and their employees. I also understand that some housing will need to be market priced to make the development earn a reasonable return and add to the diversity of a complete neighborhood. I also endorse widespread use of Accessory Dwelling Units, to encourage decentralized provision of smaller homes. Realizing this vision will likely require both partnerships with the landowner and public and philanthropic



- New neighborhoods follow top-notch design principles – a mix of densities and housing types, pathways, neighborhood parks, low-speed complete streets, access to public transit, sustainability with respect to energy and waste reduction, and so forth. In other words, it must be well planned, rather than cookie-cutter lots of all the same size on cul-de-sacs.
- The program for development of Northern South Park is combined with conservation and agricultural use of other parts of South Park, so that we build into the approval for new housing a commitment to protect the balance of South Park for wildlife and grazing. As with workforce housing, conservation of South Park will require both partnerships and land use planning tools to ensure permanent continuation of the ranching and conservation heritage of the area.

The neighborhood planning process will also provide a forum for the community and affected landowners to decide whether the fairgrounds should move to Northern South Park and whether some public and semi-public uses, such as the two-acre campus for Central Wyoming College, should be sited there. If this is a preferred location for moving the fairgrounds, then the community can start planning for redevelopment of the



WITH GREEK MYTHOLOGY AND SCYLLA & CHARYBDIS?

*Then we entered the Straits in great fear of mind, for
on the one hand was Scylla, and on the other dread
Charybdis kept sucking up the salt water.*

– *The Odyssey, Homer, trans. Samuel Butler*

Realizing my vision for the future of Northern South Park is akin to Jackson Hole navigating the Straits of Messina between Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, we should not just grant site plan approvals for landowners in response to individual proposals. On the other hand, this is the right place to provide important housing options for local workers.

We should concentrate development into this neighborhood, maximize connectivity with the neighboring commercial areas and schools, and ensure hard boundaries to the south to delineate development areas from areas dedicated to conservation and agriculture. We also should not delay consideration of development in NSP until more residential neighborhoods in the town of Jackson have been redeveloped. Now is the time to sail the Straits and plan Northern South Park.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ONGOING UPDATE OF THE COMP PLAN AND



ORDER, SHOULD THE COMMUNITY EXTEND THE REVIEW PERIOD FOR THE COMP PLAN UPDATE?

The Comp Plan update is a complex initiative, with long-lasting ramifications for the community. I highly value informed public participation throughout a planning process, so I supported for more time for the county commission and the public to review and discuss the update.

I support the county commission's decision to slow down the update process for three reasons: to ensure adequate time for public review; to avoid making decisions on the Comp Plan while people are dealing with COVID-19; and to give people the opportunity to comment in person, which I hope is possible this summer. We agreed to delay the process from a proposed decision on May 4 to a decision in July or August. That gives us all a chance to bring our best ideas in these rapidly changing times.

At a high level, our community needs both (a) multi-family housing within town through infill and redevelopment and (b) development of a wider variety of workforce housing types in Northern South Park. We need both. Fortunately, the 2012 Comp Plan calls for a neighborhood plan for NSP, so I think that we should implement a key element of the Comp Plan and start this process.



remain a top priority for the town. The Virginian property or the fairgrounds could offer a scale of development that would make a real difference for workforce housing. We also must think about multiple alternatives for housing and move when opportunity knocks.

WITH THE COMP PLAN UPDATE SLOWED DOWN, SHOULD WE COMPLETE THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN FOR NORTHERN SOUTH PARK BEFORE COMPLETING THE COMP PLAN UPDATE?

The Gill family has proposed development for workforce housing on some of their land in northwest Northern South Park. Regarding this proposal, the county should first complete a neighborhood plan (a.k.a. a small area plan). Such a plan would create a context and a vision bigger than development on a single property, provide the foundation for us to work with the Gills and other landowners to create an addition to the community of which we can all be proud, and provide the foundation for zone changes in NSP to realize that vision.

This type of plan takes time and will not be completed before the timeline to update the Comp Plan. We need to hire a consulting firm to lead the effort, to ensure that the planning is a partnership among the county, town, and affected landowners and neighborhoods. We need workforce housing right away, so I propose that we



community designers.

To be clear, I think the neighborhood planning process should start before the Comp Plan update is finalized; however, the Comp Plan update will be finished before the neighborhood plan is completed.

**WHAT WOULD BE INCLUDED IN THIS
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN? ISN'T THE COMP PLAN
GOOD ENOUGH?**

The neighborhood plan would provide significantly more guidance than the Comp Plan and lay the foundation for zone changes or new LDRs. A neighborhood plan will provide quite a bit more detail about traffic circulation, wildlife values, town design, housing densities, pathways, and other elements and will provide the foundation for new LDRs tailored to the site and the goals identified in the plan.

Principal elements would likely include:

- Overall density within the study area, with the plan allowing the public to visualize in three dimensions the appearance of proposed development.
- Mix of residential and non-residential land uses.
- Mix of permanently deed restricted affordable/ workforce housing, employer-owned housing, market housing.



- Guidelines on bulk, scale and aesthetics of development.
- Connectivity, public transit, and circulation.
- Environmental mitigation, water quality, and related topics.
- Energy and environmental sustainability.
- Parks, pathways, other civic uses, and amenities.
- Physical development plan at a neighborhood level of detail, with sufficient design detail to guide regulatory changes and future development.

This neighborhood plan approach will likely take longer than the Comp Plan update. I don't support unduly rushing the neighborhood plan, but I very much want to see workforce housing built, so I don't envision unduly delaying the process. It should take a matter of months, rather than years, but let's ensure robust information and analysis and plenty of opportunity for public input throughout. Let's get started and let's get it done.

ARE YOU GOING TO IGNORE THE COMP PLAN IN ORDER TO DO THIS NSP NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN MORE QUICKLY? OR CAN THIS BE DONE ACCORDING TO THE COMP PLAN?

I want to implement the 2012 Comp Plan. It provides solid direction on many fronts, including NSP. The 2012 Comp Plan includes extensive references to and



defined as Sub-area 5.6, labeled a transitional sub-area, and identified for future development as a Complete Neighborhood. The Comp Plan calls for a “neighborhood planning effort that addresses traffic congestion along High School Road” and calls for a Growth Management Program review before development. Beyond that, there are a host of details that collectively pretty much provides support for good planning and plenty of argument about the details.

It’s time to work with affected landowners and nearby neighborhoods and start the neighborhood plan.

IF THE TOWN DOESN’T LIKE THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN FOR NORTHERN SOUTH PARK, WOULD THEY SIMPLY REFUSE TO ALLOW THE NEW DEVELOPMENT TO HOOK UP TO THE TOWN’S SEWER PLANT?

Development in NSP should connect to the town’s wastewater treatment plant. Water pollution and wastewater management are serious problems facing our entire valley. We need a comprehensive program ASAP to reduce water pollution and better manage our wastewater valley wide, regardless of the future of Northern South Park. We don’t need more houses on septic tanks. Furthermore, the 2012 Comp Plan, adopted by the town and county, envisions development in NSP.

WITH WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT AS WELL AS OTHER COMMUNITY GOALS SUCH AS TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND LAND CONSERVATION IN MIND,



Yes, the neighborhood plan should be a joint planning effort among Teton County and the Town of Jackson, as well as the affected landowners and neighborhoods. This will require a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation, and compromise. I hope that we are up for it!



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