

Project Description

Summary

The cities of Victor and Driggs in Teton Valley, Idaho are undergoing exponential growth that is threatening each community's ability to maintain its unique community character, provide services to its residents and grow in a way that is ecologically, economically and socially sustainable. The elected officials of both Victor and Driggs have a strong desire to incorporate smart growth principles into their local decision-making process but lack the staff capacity to effectively put a smart growth framework in place. The cities are currently updating their comprehensive plans, and with professional assistance from the EPA for policy analysis, the cities can better ensure that their smart growth goals will be implemented and that the unique qualities of each community will be preserved.

Introduction

The municipalities of Driggs and Victor are located in the Teton Valley, Idaho, a significant area of one of the U.S.'s most recognized ecosystems, the Greater Yellowstone. The two cities are jointly seeking technical assistance to review and analyze current and proposed codes to more effectively implement smart growth principles in the two municipalities.

Teton Valley encompasses approximately 450 square miles of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). The Teton Range and Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks lie to our east and north, with the Palisade Range and the Big Hole Mountains to our south and west. The uniqueness of Teton Valley is in the abundance of natural resources and amenities. The valley is rich with wildlife including many endangered species such as grizzly bears, Trumpeter Swans and grey wolves as well as black bears, elk, moose, cougars, Sandhill Cranes and bald eagles. The Teton River, an important tributary of the Snake River and a renowned blue ribbon Rainbow and Yellowstone cutthroat trout fishery originates in Teton Valley. This area is also recognized nationally for its extraordinary recreation amenities including skiing, hiking and mountain biking opportunities.

These natural and recreational amenities make Teton Valley a superb place to live and have attracted a new demographic of residents to the valley. Historically, the economy has been based on agriculture; however, in the past 10 years there has been a dramatic shift to a "new west" (real estate and recreation) economy. The county population has increased 7.4% annually from 1990 to 2000, the fastest growth rate in the GYE. Driggs, the county seat, Victor, a bedroom community to Jackson, WY and both cities' areas of impact have averaged a 12.5% growth rate annually, the second highest growth rate in the state.

This economic shift, and the growth resulting from it, has created land-use changes that are threatening the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the area and challenging the efforts to sustain the unique local character of Victor and Driggs. A study commissioned by the Doris Duke Foundation and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, ranked Teton Valley **number one** of 43 "mega-sites" assessed for conservation priorities within the GYE. This assessment was based on the unparalleled ecological resources of Teton Valley and their vulnerability to development. Additionally, significant social impacts such as a dearth of affordable housing, decline of

community character, and the increasing challenge to pay for the cost of growth, have left decision makers scrambling to define more sustainable growth patterns.

The cities' Commitment to Smart Growth

Over the past two years Driggs and Victor have participated in and/or organized a number of programs focused on smart growth. Both Communities have participated in the Western Community Stewardship Forum sponsored by the Sonoran Institute. The program provides training and assistance for rural western officials in effectively managing growth. In 2004, Driggs was awarded the Your Town design workshop, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, in which many community design issues were discussed including commercial sprawl, walkable neighborhoods and infill. Officials from Victor also participated. Also in 2004, Driggs and Victor participated in a transportation-planning workshop facilitated by Dan Burden, which included a walking audit and tools to build a pedestrian friendly and walkable community.

From these programs a number of initiatives have been, or are in the process of being, conducted by the cities including a revision of design guidelines by a professional design firm, a comprehensive transportation plan that incorporates pedestrian-friendly designs, an urban renewal district, a design review sub-committee of the planning and zoning commission, a revision of the zoning and subdivision ordinances to promote mixed uses and a more compact community design, a newly created “central business district” zone, and planning for a greenbelt area along Teton Creek in Driggs and Trail Creek in Victor – two ecologically and socially significant areas in the municipalities.

From the private sector, there have also been a number of initiatives conducted recently that reflect the desire of the community to grow responsibly. Most notably, a development group, who owns and plans to develop over 1200 acres in and around Driggs, conducted a design charrette in conjunction with Driggs, Teton County and a variety of stakeholders to help master plan their project. The charrette process included extensive public participation and addressed plans for a new county courthouse, commercial development, recreation and open spaces, habitat enhancement areas, transportation, street design and an overall design character for the development.

Additionally, in response to recent developments that threaten community character, a petition containing over 400 signatures was started by a local resident and business owner to demand that Driggs uphold and craft ordinances that preserve community character and increase economic vitality of the downtown. During Victor's comprehensive planning process, the city conducted an extensive survey which unveiled residents' main concerns of: 1) the dangerous Main Street design [in the last 5 years there has been one fatality and one serious injury due to pedestrian/car collisions], 2) the importance of a unique community character, and 3) existing codes that allow exponential growth without consideration to infrastructure costs, community design and environmental conservation.

Timeliness and Need for Technical Assistance

Driggs and Victor face many of the same issues, including affordable housing, deterioration of community character, loss of important habitat and farmlands, threats to water quality and an inefficient and unsafe transportation network. There are a number of plans for significant developments in and around the communities, which have the ability to significantly change the community for the better or the worse.

One of the most significant development projects is the expansion of Grand Targhee Ski Resort, which is located outside of the jurisdictional boundaries (in Teton County, WY) yet is only accessible through Teton County, Idaho. The impacts to the Idaho communities of Victor and Driggs are significant, including basic infrastructure such as waste disposal and roads; services such as schools, hospitals and fire and police protection; economic impacts due to commercial expansion at the resort; transportation pressures due to increased visitors to the resort; and finally impacts to affordable housing.

Additionally, this past year, the Idaho Transportation Department announced that it would make 7 million dollars available to the cities of Victor and Driggs for a re-design of Highway 33 (Main Street) through both downtowns. The city is currently working with ITD, the Downtown Driggs Community Association (primarily composed of downtown business owners), Victor Businessman's Association, Valley Advocates for Responsible Development, Teton Valley Trails and Pathways and the Urban Renewal Agency to develop an improved pedestrian-oriented streetscape for Main Street.

Teton Valley Trails and Pathways, a non-profit organization focused on non-motorized transportation, recently conducted a visioning forum to plan pathways through the communities. They have also recently applied for a Transportation Enhancement grant through the Idaho Department of Transportation to develop a path network that would tie our schools, public areas such as parks and neighborhoods together creating a safe, walkable route for pedestrians. The beginnings of a regional public transportation network is also emerging, through the efforts of the Teton Area Advisory Forum, in which the cities of Driggs and Victor participate.

In response to the rapid growth, both municipalities are in the process of comprehensive planning and have shown a strong desire to incorporate smart growth principles into the goals and objectives of their respective plans. Additionally, Victor recently enacted a moratorium on the filing of subdivisions, annexation and zone changes based on exponential growth and the inability of the city to cope with growth under the current comprehensive plan and ordinances. Although Victor and Driggs both desire to grow in a responsible fashion, they lack the framework to ensure responsible growth will take place in the face of rapid and large-scale development. Soon the comprehensive planning process for both cities will be complete. The next step in the process is where the rubber hits the road, the crafting and revision of codes to effectively implement the smart growth principles outlined in the comprehensive plans. Expert assistance at this step is crucial to the successful long-term implementation of smart growth principles.

Specific Issues to be addressed: The assistance requested is for a Policy Analysis to review the existing Zoning Ordinances, as well as propose new regulations that will enable the cities to

achieve new development and growth patterns that are attractive and sustainable. A successfully implemented smart growth code would enhance the attractiveness of the cities, foster development of affordable housing that is not isolated from the city (as is currently the case), increase the number of pedestrian and bike trips, preserve sensitive natural resources and create opportunities for new pedestrian-scale and tourist-oriented infill development in the historic downtown.

More specifically, the cities would like to review and craft ordinances that will:

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices and Create Walkable Neighborhoods

- A Main Street (State Highway 33 and Scenic Byway) design that is efficient and safe for pedestrians and autos.
- Residents of new development should have convenient access to the potential future transit network.
- More pedestrian connections should be created, such as pathways and sidewalks between services, neighborhoods and amenities.

Foster distinctive attractive communities with a strong sense of place

- Historic structures should be preserved and restored.
- New design should complement historic buildings and character.
- Public parks and open space should be integrated into all new development

Strengthen and Direct Development Toward Existing Communities

- Development of vacant properties in and near the city centers should be encouraged.
- Commercial and residential sprawl should be prevented.
- Mixed-use projects should be encouraged in the city centers.

Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

- The need for affordable housing should be addressed
- Housing types should be mixed throughout the cities and located to make efficient use of public services.

Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environmental Areas

- The creation of greenbelts should be encouraged for recreation and natural resource protection.
- Sensitive riparian and wetland areas (i.e. headwaters of Teton River, Teton Creek and Trail Creek.) should be protected.
- Important wildlife habitat including agricultural lands should be preserved.
- Scenic views should be safeguarded and considered in the design of new developments.

Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective

- Land-owners should be able to easily interpret new ordinances and find incentives for developing model smart growth projects.
- New ordinances should not overburden the limited city staff and budgets.

Impacts to local and regional growth as well as local environmental, social and economic health

Two recent studies focused on Teton Valley's growth related dilemmas as case studies in regional and national investigations, respectively: Yellowstone 2020: Creating Our Legacy (Sonoran Institute, 2004), and They Paved Paradise: Gentrification in Rural Communities

(Housing Assistance Council, 2005). Similar to Driggs and Victor, many communities in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem are experiencing dramatic growth due to the attraction of the National Parks and forest land as well as the many natural amenities of the region. As Teton Valley continues to grapple with growth, many communities in our region have sought assistance or looked to Teton Valley for guidance or lessons learned. Communities that have sought guidance from Teton Valley include: the Henry's Lake region of Fremont County, Idaho for implementing a local citizen group advocating for water quality protection; the Pinedale region of Sublette County, Wyoming for preservation of community character and Madison County, Idaho for groundwater protection. We have also had inquires from the Priest Lake region of Northern Idaho and Flathead County, Montana.

We are confident that this project can successfully demonstrate the implementation of smart growth principles to create win-win solutions that cross the cultural division of property and community rights. We believe this project will be the model for responsible planning that Teton County will support in future growth planning. Finally, we are also confident that the incorporation of smart growth goals, policies and codes will better protect groundwater in Teton Valley, will create more economically vibrant cores, enhance community character, and create more equitable housing and service opportunities for valley residents.

Involvement

The local team will consist of Doug Self, Driggs City Planner; Cari Golden, Victor City Planner; Kathy Rinaldi, VARD Operations Director and Driggs P&Z Commissioner; Christian Santelices, Executive Director Teton Valley Trails and Pathways; Alan Wilder, Driggs Director of Public Works; Rick Baldwin, Driggs Design Review Committee; Darla Neeley, Chairperson, Driggs Planning and Zoning Commission, Mike O'Neill, Chairman, Victor Planning and Zoning Commission. The project is supported by Mayors Louis Christensen and Don Thompson, and Council members MaryLou Hanson (Driggs), JeanneMarie Callahan (Driggs), Greer Jones (Driggs), George Mosher (Driggs), Richard Naef (Victor), Sue Karichner (Victor), David Kearsley (Victor), and Grant Thompson (Victor).

Stakeholders who support this project include members of the: Downtown Driggs Community Association, Victor Businessman's Association, Grand Targhee Resort, Victor and Driggs Planning and Zoning Commissions, Teton Valley Chamber of Commerce, Teton Valley Trails and Pathways, Teton Valley Recreation Association, Teton Area Advisory Forum (consisting of representatives from Teton County Wyoming and Idaho) and the Teton Regional Land Trust. Other stakeholders are business owners or property owners including Blackfoot Farms LLC, Geordie Gillett, Justin Hokin, Bruce Simon, Larry Thal & Mountainside Village, Travis Thompson and Victor Mountain Retreat, Teton Properties LLC, Teton Valley Land Development LLC, Copper Ranch Development, and PC Development.