

To: Board of County Commissioners Bud Hover, Andrew Lampe, Mary Lou Peterson
Re: Clearing and Grading Ordinance, Wildfire Regulations and Comp Plan

Dear Commissioners,

The Lower Methow valley Advisory Group is pleased to be working with our community, the Planning Department and other neighborhood groups to update the county's Comprehensive Plan. We take our responsibility to the community seriously, and have been working hard to evaluate and reconcile the current landscape and demographic trends with the future vision and needs of residents and property owners. We are confident that our work and the work of other neighborhood groups will result in a Plan that represents a balance between public responsibility and private property rights, and conserves the values that county residents hold dear. While final approval for a new Comp Plan is still many months away, we have learned about the need for more immediate changes to protect public safety and welfare, and hope that you are willing to investigate near-term solutions as recommended below.

It has come to our attention through the planning process that support exists among residents throughout the county for adoption of regulations that will ensure the public safety of new developments, particularly related to the hazards imposed by wildfire and poorly planned road systems. There have been examples of projects throughout the county in recent years that cost taxpayers and developers money in lost time and re-design, because project proponents chose to "build (roads) first, and ask questions later." These expenses, delays and exposures to risk could have been averted had the project been subject to adequate review and planning before the dirt was disturbed. Based on this information, we respectfully request that the BOCC and the Planning Department investigate options for creating and implementing a Clearing and Grading Ordinance as soon as possible. Such an ordinance would allow for adequate design review of significant road systems and developments, and prescribe mitigation measures prior to breaking ground, saving expense and liability.

It is also our understanding that while there may be adequate regulations governing such things as Critical Areas and Shorelines, current regulations regarding wildfire safety do not provide for adequate road or building standards to allow for wildfire protection by our fire districts or state and federal crews and equipment. For example, many new developments do not include road systems that allow for ingress of fire or emergency vehicles, or adequate escape routes. We have been informed that a countywide Fire Plan steering committee is working on recommendations to improve this situation, and we support their work to adjust the standards for the safety and benefit of current and future property owners.

We believe that investigating and implementing the changes recommended above as soon as possible will be compatible with other near-term adjustments to the Comprehensive Plan currently proposed by the Planning Department. Such adjustments will allow the Planning Department more flexibility and legal authority to bring projects under review for public safety and other public benefits. Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

