

**Okanogan County Regional Planning Commission
Public Testimony on Draft Comprehensive Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement
August 19, 2019**

Officials Present: (None absent)

Albert Roberts - District 1 Representative, Chair
Verelene Hughs - District 1 Representative
Dave Schulz - District 2 Representative
Gina McCoy - District 2 Representative
Phil Dart - District 3 Representative
Salley Bull - District 3 Representative
George Thornton - Representative At Large
Angela Hubbard (AHu) - Interim Director of the Department of Planning and Development
Cortney Ingle - Clerk/Secretary, Planning Department

Audio from the video tape by County Watch failed tonight. Below are notes taken at the meeting by county watch. Actual testimony read verbatim by some citizens was secured and included, and the testimony of others has been summarized below from notes taken at the meeting. These notes are published at countywatch.org and are not the official County record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see <https://www.okanogancounty.org/planning/>, then "Boards," then "Okanogan County Planning Commission." Click on "Upcoming agenda items, minutes and decisions on projects."

RECORD OF PUBLIC TESTIMONY:

No notes were taken on the brief introduction to this meeting, which began at 7PM. Each speaker signed in and had a limit of 5 minutes.

Jim Brennan - Twisp River: *Land uses allowed in the Lower Methow vs the Upper Methow and recommendation to include the whole Methow as one watershed for planning purposes; support for elements of Alternatives 3 and 4. Read aloud, verbatim.*

"Let me begin by thanking the Planning Commission for allowing the citizens of Okanogan County the opportunity to comment on the current draft Comprehensive Plan and the draft Environmental Impact Statement Plan this evening.

"I'm sure the planning commissioners present here tonight realize that developing a Comprehensive Plan is an important undertaking as we look to describe the future of our county. Though mandated by the State of Washington, this process has been unfortunately hobbled for years by efforts to delay and water down the results—much to the detriment of both the County and its citizens. These current draft plans should have been open for review several years ago but now that we've finally arrived at this point, it's apparent the County needs to upgrade them both before their adoption and your recommendations will be an important part of that process.

"I'm certain others will point out that the current draft of the Comprehensive Plan does not meet the minimum standards required by law and fails to articulate the differences between alternatives. It should also be noted that the draft EIS doesn't fully analyze the impacts of the various alternatives on the county's population, environment or its economy. It's truly a shame that so much valu-

able time and considerable legal expenses have been wasted by not complying with these standards and formats in the first place.

“The bulk of my comments tonight will be on land use issues pertaining to the Methow Valley. Presently, there is no Land Use Element playing a central role in guiding land use patterns and decisions for the County. Adding this Land Use overview would ensure appropriate uses are applied to specific areas on a map and not the other way around. Topography, water availability, fire safety, adequate protection for sensitive areas, fish passage and other important considerations should all flow out of the Comprehensive Plan’s data and conclusions to the subsequent Zoning designations. A perfect example of how this approach has been disregarded can be found in the County’s current District Use Chart.

“Focusing on the Methow Valley, if we compare the land uses in the District Use Chart currently not permitted in Methow Valley School District (The Upper Methow Valley) but permitted in the Lower Methow Valley, the differences are striking and amount to what I’ve come to call “A Tale of Two Valleys”—even though the areas in question are contained in the same valley and, in many cases, are located only a few miles away.

“Though located in the same watershed (the Methow River drainage), sharing a common roadway (State Hwy 153), similar terrain and historical rural practices, the list of uses contained in the current District Use Chart now permitted in the Lower Valley is alarming. Reading down the District Use Chart, those uses permitted in the Lower Valley include: Air Cargo Facilities, Aircraft Sales Repair and Services, Aircraft Salvage, Light Industrial, Manufactured Home Sales Facilities, Petroleum Service Stations, and Wholesale Establishments—none of which are permitted in the Upper Valley. With the granting of a Conditional Use Permit, the permitted uses in the Lower Valley expand to even more disturbing categories including Acid Manufacturing, Air Passenger Services, Fertilizer Manufacturing, as well as Sawmills and Pulp Mills.

“Common sense alone should dictate any Land Use Plan built on proper data and review would disallow these types of uses in the rugged and confined reaches of the Lower Methow River— but there they are, designated in black and white and derived from the flawed current draft of the Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan.

“With the rest of my allotted time, let me urge including the entire Methow Watershed within the Methow Valley More Completely Planned Area (MVMCPA). I also strongly recommend the adoption of many of the elements included in Alternatives 3 and 4 which concentrate growth closer to towns, take a conservative approach to addressing water supplies, conserve natural resources and promote land uses that support local agriculture as well as minimizing conflict between residential and other uses of rural lands by creating different designations of land use.

“One final but important plea would be to include the concept of affordable housing into the Comprehensive Plan. Forty and fifty-year-old manufactured homes are not the answer and certainly won’t be 20 years into the future.

Thank you for your consideration.”

Isabelle Spohn, Twisp/Gold Creek - Lower Methow Valley and Methow Valley More Completely Planned Area. *(Read aloud, verbatim. More detailed comments were already e-mailed to Planning*

Commission. She addressed need for update of MVMCPA and inclusion of Lower Methow as a Subunit of that plan.)

“Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

“First - The long overdue revision of the Methow Valley More completely Planned area is incomplete, making this current draft Comp Plan, and thus its EIS, incomplete. Okanogan County is larger in area than any one of the 3 smallest states in the US. One size still does not fit all. Our County’s been doing lip service for decades to considering extremes in geography and weather that lead to great diversity in occupation and lifestyle - but we’re still waiting.

“In 1976, the first “More Completely Planned Area,” was created by citizens in the upper Methow Valley. The problem is that it hasn’t been updated since 1976, except for the addition of Sub Unit A by the Mazama Advisory Committee in the year 2000. An update was attempted in 2014, but, unbelievably, it still uses 1970s data. For example, it quotes:

- * Agriculture data from the 1970 Census.
- *Forestry data from 1974 and 1976.
- *Taxable retail sales for Twisp and Winthrop from 1974

“Unbelievable - but it’s right there on the county website! At the very end of this incomplete 2014 update, it’s stated: “a new Advisory Committee will need to be appointed by the Okanogan County Commissioners consistent with Chapter 7 of the Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan.” 5 years later, we’re still waiting. No advisory Committee. No update. Still incomplete. Are we going in circles?

“Next, there’s one Alternative that is unaddressed in any of the Alternatives as written. That’s expansion of the Methow Valley more Completely Planned area to include the whole Methow Valley. 4 criteria for adoption or expansion of an MCPA are included in this Draft Comp Plan. They are:

*Logical natural and physical boundaries including highways, other MCPA planning area boundaries, & watersheds, etc.;

* Landowner interest;

*Community identification within the MCPA;

* Other factors as may be identified by the County and deemed important in providing for logical land use planning areas.

“The logical inclusion of the rest of the Methow Valley in the Methow MCPA would comply with every one of these criteria, reduce confusion, save the county money, and treat the Methow Valley as one watershed and one ecosystem for these reasons:

“The whole valley lies between the North Cascades and Okanogan Range. The whole Methow composes WRIA 48. The Lower Reach of WRIA runs from northeast of Twisp to Pateros, with closed basins, water shortages, and similar rules. It does not end at Gold Creek, where the MCPA currently ends. Landowner interest was well established when a citizens’ group met for 2 years of hard work, recommending the Lower Valley be integrated with the rest of the Methow Valley. The Planning Commission approved their recommendation. The Methow is served by one highway. The Methow River runs the length of the entire

Valley, making it one watershed. Humans as well as migratory fish and wildlife travel up and down the valley, *as does wildfire*. Regarding community identification with the Methow, the community is closer than ever before, since the 2014 Carlton Complex fire.

“Finally, other government entities do not govern the Methow as two separate areas. The whole Methow as a unit is governed by the Methow Ranger District, the WRIA 48 Watershed Council, Ecology under the Methow Basin Plan, Dept of Fish and Wildlife governing the Methow Wildlife Area, and so forth. Even the students of Pateros planted signs at all 3 entrances to the Methow Valley, designating “ the Methow River Watershed. “

“Let’s get up to speed, get the Methow More Completely Planned Area in order, and move on to create future MCPA’s that will satisfy the visions of other areas of the county.

“1. Next, climate change isn’t just an environmental issue. Human migration within our own country is increasing, due to climate disasters. I suggest the Comp Plan address the need for designated land suitable for emergency housing within city expansion areas, to ease service delivery and reduce impact to communities in case of climate-related human migration.

“2. I’d advise that the Planning Commission request that the Commissioners hire a consulting firm experienced in both land use planning and environmental law. The county’s contracted attorney Mark Johnson of Car Tuttle Campbell already represents the county, is highly qualified in these areas and would be a good starting point for advice.

“3. There’s no “Housing Element” in the Comp Plan in spite of huge public concern regarding affordable housing. I’d suggest checking out the Chelan County comp plan, which has this as its first goal: (to) Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of the county.

“4.) Finally, the Draft EIS is inadequate because it does not give me, nor the decision-makers, the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding the Final Comprehensive Plan.

Bill Tackman - McFarland Creek, Lower Methow Valley. *(Summary)* He was a member of the Lower Valley Advisory Group and worked extremely hard on the documents and recommendations that this group produced, which included expansion of the Methow Valley MCPA. He says the work and recommendations of that group should be reviewed and considered.

Nancy Soriano - Tunk Valley (Okanogan Valley): Zoning should be based on water availability, and the Okanogan basin should have Sub Areas, as does the Methow Valley.

(From Soriano’s notes) Okanogan County is a diverse landscape, and should not be zoned uniformly. The last comp plan and the Alternatives in the re-write zone the entire Okanogan Watershed at maximum of 5 acre densities. I suggest that the zoning should be based on water availability. I suggest that Sub Areas should be identified, where water is very unavailable, and zoned appropriately, according to water availability, and not "like the rest of the county".

I suggest that the county, in its zoning, recognize that the sub basins to the east of the Okanogan River are from a different continent than the land west of the Okanogan River. The land east of the Okanogan River has a different geology, which has shallow aquifers, less precipitation, higher rates of evapotranspiration (up to 98% of precipitation, and higher rates of runoff, than the land west of the Okanogan River, which has lower rates of evapotranspiration, deeper aquifers and importantly has aquifer recharge from the Cascades. The aquifer recharge east of the Okanogan river is only from precipitation.

The difference between the east and the west side of the Okanogan River can be seen by the contrast in orchards and alfalfa fields throughout the land on the west side of the river, as opposed to 10 to 20 miles to the east of those crops, on the other side of the river. This is where the Tunk Valley sub basin lies, which is the largest block of shrub step in the entire county. You cannot grow crops in shrub step without water. Although there is not enough water to grow crops, in the sub basins east of the river the county has zoned the same maximum densities (5 acre minimum) as the basins east of the river and the rest of the county - which has water for crops.

Demonstrating the impact of exempt wells, during the 2015 wildfire in Tunk Valley (*Okanogan Complex*), there was no water in the creek and therefore no source of water to fight fire. The creek was dried up with only 200 exempt wells in the entire valley, but the county has zoned it for 6,000 more parcels and 6,000 more wells.

Zoning needs to be based on water availability. I suggest that the sub basins east of the Okanogan River be zoned as a Sub Area, with zoning based on water scarcity/availability.

The Methow has Sub Areas; Why not the Okanogan Valley?

Kari Bown - Methow Valley, Twisp River (*Summary*) Alternatives 3 and 4 are the best because they concentrate population growth around existing cities and towns. She is in favor of Alternative 4 because it is carefully thought out, well-written, and addresses many of the concerns left out of the other Alternatives.

Jasmine Minbashian - Methow Valley. Testifying as Executive Director of the Methow Valley Citizens Council. (*Summary*): Detailed written comments have been provided. Climate change is not adequately addressed in this Comp Plan. The current draft also doesn't get it right on economy. The draft does not even contain goals and policies, which should be included. Requests that comment period be extended because it is inconvenient for people to testify during the summer, when many are on vacation.. Supports MVCC's Alternative 4. Suggests having another meeting for public testimony in the Methow, since most people testifying so far have been from the Methow Valley. Would support including entire Methow watershed in the More Completely Planned area. She looks forward to working with the Planning Commission and getting this right.

(Kate?) Vjeraska - Okanogan Valley. (*Summary*) My girls are 4th generation in the Okanogan. We raise our own feed, rent, lease, are landlords, stewards of the land. Do not hire one person to push comp plan through. 2014 Comp Plan is a better option than what has been presented so far in the new Draft. Also, as a Farm Bureau member, we want to be sure the 2014 Plan is continued. WRIA 48 and 49 are separate things. There is a tendency to homogenize the County by prioritizing the Methow Valley (*objects to this.*)

Erika Halm - Methow Valley - representing Methow Trails: (*Summary*) Incorporate trails and trail networks into the Comp Plan. They are a part of the economy. Trails and trail users are an important part

of future planning. They are a critical part of economy but also relate to mental health, community connections, fire breaks, and alternatives to driving. Methow Trails is in the beginning stages of a trail linking Twisp and Winthrop. It will better connect the community and also be a critical safe route to the school for the kids. Now only driving is possible to get to school. The proposed rail has overwhelming public support. There were 1500 responses to a survey of the community. It showed that the Winthrop to Twisp trail is the overwhelming first priority. Please include trails, especially this trail, in the Comp Plan. These will be increasingly important to the future in our county. (*Hands in a copy of the survey report.*)

Nichole Kuchenbuch. Conconully area: Testifying on her own behalf. She supports the 2014 Current Comp Plan, Alternative 1 in this draft (*No Action Alternative*) as written. I participated in writing this Comp Plan. A lot of work went into it. I have concerns with options 2-4 of the current Draft. They are blanketing the Agriculture Resource designation over all the Ag lands in this county. This could be bad for farmers' income. Agriculture is very volatile, and the ability of farmers to potentially do non-farming activity on their farm, along with farming - to support continued farming - is important. Very important to leave farmers the opportunity for greenhouses, offices, hunting, etc in land use plans - so they are not crippled by the current economy. Allow economic freedom. As you review requirements of what you are supposed to do - review all the cumulative effects. Options 2-4 have not done an adequate assessment of customs, culture, economic viability, etc. In addition to having been an active part of the writing of the 2014 plan, I was also a part of the VSP (*Voluntary Stewardship Program*), which is not included in the document. You need to look at the VSP for potential help - also, look at WRIA 49. No policy should be included in the Comp Plan. It's a guidance document, an overall umbrella. Stay away from policy and regulations in this particular document.

Larry Campbell, Okanogan Valley /Farm Bureau (*Summary*) I was born and raised in Twisp and am a Farm Bureau Executive member. I stand behind the current 2014 Comp Plan. Showing Ag land (*?could not understand.*) We also have to have timber as an Ag product - timber and grazing. Gov't agencies is an (?) of the Dept of Agriculture. These people that want to live by all these rules and regulations, you can live in a city. Agriculture can't live under a lot of rules and regulations. Sure you have to do it right, but you will not survive if you don't do it right. If you don't like it here, you don't have to live here.

Rod Haerberle - Conconully area (?) - (*Summary, verbatim when possible.*) Lived here all my life except when my father made me leave to get an education. Our operation started in 1936. Worked for a plumbing company for several years - sold to Crown Z, then sold and folded. Back then that mill employed 1300 people, paying decent wages. Then the spotted owl came along. There was a 37 cent letter inside, proclaiming spotted owl a hindrance to timber sales, and USFS shut down the logging. (*Hard to follow,*) Our public lands are supposed to be multiple use. The most important multiple use supposed to be there is now burns (*from wildfire.*) Right now, our lands are not multiple use. Our public lands now are national forests (*and jungle?*) Now in addition to losing timber, we spend \$\$ we don't have and can't put the fires out. Have been in cattle industry my whole life. There have been more issues in last 5 years than ever before...wolves, fake meat on the market, etc. I hear people talking about sustaining agriculture - how can it ever grow when WDFW buys your land with your tax dollars? Farming is not sustainable. Only marijuana seems viable. We are losing 3 Acres per minute of prime agricultural land, 24 hours per day. Don't know how we will sustain agriculture. You cannot make a living on 20 acres anymore. Not sure you could even with 20,000 Acres.

Lorah Super - Methow Valley Citizens' Council, Programs Director (*Summary*): Howdy. I am program manager for MVCC, speaking as such. Thanks for taking your time to consider all comments and, like others have expressed, as much as we are eager to have this over, please extend the comment period

for those who are taking a late summer vacation. The documents you and they have to consider are confusing and hard to grasp. A lot of people are asking for help. Today, MVCC submitted general comments. We will continue submitting until the record is closed. (*She presented 200 petition signatures in favor of Alternative 4.*) Some of those things (*in Alt 4?*) included a conservative approach to water resources and multiple rural designations to avoid conflicts. It prescribed ways to manage wildfire risks in a changing world. The packet we've submitted goes by issue, looking at the current plan, and looking at how things might fit in. The chief author of both plans (*current Draft and 2014 Comp Plan*) left a document that could only be interpreted by himself. Maybe we need something at a higher level that can be understood by others, not just application by application. Something that ordinary people can understand too. Other counties do it - Stevens County's Comp Plan follows a reasonable structure. Other Comp Plans have goals and policies that are not regulatory. Not sure how you get there from here. I don't know, but you will probably get good input. Look at other counties' plans too. We can do this!

Dave Schulz Question- asks if most of the people who signed petition are residents of the Methow Valley. Lorah thinks so.

Dick Ewing - Upper Methow Valley/Farm Bureau . (*Summary with much verbatim*) Hello. I'm Dick Ewing. I live in the Methow Valley. I'm also representing the Farm Bureau Farm Bureau. I support the 2014 Comp Plan and the way it supports the current zoning ordinance. People spent time on this plan working out the county conflicts and it's an example of an over arching document rather than a regulatory document. We wrote up quite a bit of a good study on conservation easements and how they affect the county in the Methow and the Okanogan. Support for these easements should be conditioned to preserve resources such as agriculture, not just to protect the property or transfer it to the public domain. By labeling all private land that is Ag-related, it severely limits the economic opportunity for private land owners and farmers. It's much better to list the public lands and other croplands as Agricultural lands of Significance. Much better for that area of private land, the rural density destination. (*Did not follow.*) Lines 388 - 405 gives the land use that Nichole referred to - we need those support systems to have agriculture in Okanogan County. If you come into conflict with this, you will actually lose Ag and it won't be as widely available as it is now. I'm handing in a written comment with more detail. I'll close with that and let others have a chance for their comments. Thank you very much.

Ray Campbell - Gold Creek, Methow Valley. (*Summary, verbatim when possible.*) Good evening. I'm from the Lower Methow, Gold Creek. I am 4th generation in the Methow. My family came in the 1900's (*should it be 1800's?*) to Watson Draw before we had all the gov't regulations we have today. A Comp Plan is an umbrella - an overriding document, but an umbrella to look to the future to what regulations might be needed in the future. We had the USFS before the spotted owl. Timber industry with sawmills. Government regulations through implemented spotted owl regulations killed that industry. I've watched the economics of Okanogan County dwindle. It's a poor county. This is due to all the regulations and restrictions that take away the cattle industry, the timber industry, and the (*economy?*) that comes with those industries. The 2014 Comp Plan was done by citizens. There was an advisory committee to represent the whole county and without overburdensome regulations in the document there. We are a nation that was formed under a (?) definitely for the people, by the people, not the government overriding people. I heard the discussion about the decrease in water resources. I grew up with the Lower Methow Valley. It was a carpet of orchards back then. The orchards are gone. Those water uses are not being used now. Talk about resources being damaged - there is not that kind of water being used now.

Al Roberts invites others in the audience to speak. No one responds. Roberts ends public testimony.

Discussion by Planning Commission:

Roberts: Thanks for coming out this evening and your interest in the future of the county. We are closing public testimony at this point. Written comment is open until September 3. Angie Hubbard will publish appropriately if the date is extended.

Dave Schulz - I don't see a problem setting a date for the extension. (*Asks Angie if she can do it.*)

Angie H. - Is not ready to pick a date for the extension yet. I'll be talking with the Commissioners about it.

Roberts - turns meeting over to Angie Hubbard

Angie Hubbard to Planning Commissioners: "You've heard a lot of testimony, received written comment. Surely you will receive more. When would you like to start your deliberations? You have a regularly scheduled meeting - do you want to keep the date (*August 26*) and start talking about things, or skip the meeting?"

Roberts - Meeting would help us to remember what was said, and it would be useful. (*All agree.*) It is decided They will continue the deliberation at the August 26th meeting next week.

Phil Dart - I think extending the comment period would be a good idea. You have to work out how long to extend it, etc. If we keep it open long enough to get everyone's input, it would help. We have to follow certain rules.

Dave Schulz. - There has been comment about extending it to September 19th. A number of comments in our packet suggested this. We are only a recommending agency. We could probably set a date along with Angie.

AHu - I would not be extending public testimony. The 19th does not give you time to digest more comments before your next meeting. Your meeting is on the 23rd (*only 4 days to consider those comments before the meeting.*)

Roberts - Would that be sufficient time to get comments, or would it need to be longer?

Verlene Hughes - the 19th is a Thursday.

Phil Dart - Hopefully people would send comments earlier so they wouldn't all come in at the end. If you (*the Planning Dept*) send the comments as they come in, we wouldn't have a pile of papers at the end.

AHu -Wants to talk with Commissioners and with Gecas (county civil attorney) about it first.

Dave Schulz - There is a letter from a County Commissioner in or packets who recommend extending the comment period.

George Thornton - Is that the letter that was from Andy (*Hover*) ? The person asking for the date? We still have almost 2 weeks until September. You can get with the Commissioners - do it and let us know.

AHu - It will be published on the website and in the newspaper.

Phil Dart - I make a recommendation to extend until the 19th, pending the ruling of the people above you (*County Commissioners?*).

Roberts: - Discussion of the 19th as a cut-off date.

Gina McCoy - What is the date of our meeting. Next meeting?'

Phil Dart - You would have 4 days to review the comments (*Friday AM until Monday PM.*)

Gina McCoy - Hopefully all the comments won't come in at the end.

Phil Dart - I'd like to read everything we have seen so far before we start deliberating - wait until next week to do it.

Verlene Hughes - If we could get copies of the minutes that have been taken, it would be helpful.

Dave Schulz - I'd like to start with chapter 1 tonight and then talk about the comments next time. In all the testimony we have, some was vague as to what chapter they were referring to. It would make it good to go through the comments now.

Verlene Hughes - 6 of the comments preferred Alternative # 1 (No change, current 2014 Comp Plan.)

(No one seems to respond to Schulz's suggestion to start looking over the Draft itself together tonight.)

Roberts - The next meeting is the 26th, and we will deliberate at that time. Asks Cortney Ingalls (Planning secretary) to send minutes to the Planning Commission as soon as possible.

A Hubbard - I will send additional comments as they come in.
END of Meeting (about 8PM.)