

**Lower Valley Advisory Group  
(LVAG)  
Planning Meeting  
“Density 101”  
February 10, 2008 2:00 – 6:00 pm  
Methow Cafe**

**Present:** Bill Tackman, Beverly and Jeff Zwar, Al Hymer, Gloria Royse, Karen Luft, Isabelle Spohn, Keith Stennes, Kevin Stennes, Kurt and Sheila Danison, Perry Huston  
**Absent:** Arlan Ruf, Kathie Windle, Alex Kerr, Ken Orford, Betty Hagenbuch

**Agenda**

**I. Housekeeping**

**A. Water Class**

Lorah and Bill were able to get into the class, which is being held on Monday evenings through March.

**B. Vision Pics - Website**

Bill turned the images in to Medicine Wheel and reports they are up on the site.

**C. MV News Guy**

The gentleman who is writing an article about the Lower Methow for the MVNews Builder’s Guide has contacted a few members of the group for interviews.

**D. Last Meeting Notes**

Reviewed and approved

**E. P. Huston on proposed amendments to Comp Plan**

The Planning Dept is submitting some proposed Comp Plan amendments to the BOCC and Planning Commission. A handout was provided summarizing the proposed amendments, and Perry elaborated further on the purpose of the amendments and answered questions from the group.

**II. Orientation to LVAG work from Feb – May 08**

**A. Comp Plan TOC and LVAG timeline**

Handouts were provided with the Table of Contents (draft) for the Countywide Comp Plan and the specific work that LVAG will be doing to inform the writing of that document. To summarize, the group will be providing specific feedback about density requirements and allowed uses for the Rural, Resource Lands and LAMIRD elements. See the handout for additional details. The group asked questions of Perry related to the timing of the process, the review of the draft document for consistency with the feedback provided by neighborhood groups, and the feasibility of achieving such goals.

**III. “Density 101” with Kurt and Sheila Danison**

Kurt and Sheila presented a 1 hour slide show, with some questions and answers from the group included. The presentation covered the basic introduction to Density and issues related to Rural character and the lower valley. Density was defined as

“intensity of use” of a given area. Density will be expressed in our Comp Plan in terms of Minimum Acreage or square feet per residential unit, and by percentage of lot for uses other than residential. Examples of existing density designations and patterns throughout the valley and county were provided, along with a basic description of clustering and some examples of its use as a tool for conserving open space and agricultural lands.

Later in the presentation, more specific information related to land use patterns in the lower valley were presented to inform later discussion. For example, the “Gold Creek Meadows” development that was well-represented in the Vision Process as something residents did not want to see, contains 1.4 dwelling units/acre; Alta Lake contains 9.8 du/ac. To date, the Draft Land Use Map contains three Designations for the Lower Valley: “Rural Residential”, which is found on the valley floor in our map; “Low-Density Residential”, which reflects the uplands in our map; and “Urban Residential,” which applies to Methow and Alta Lake areas of higher density and probable services for future growth.

It is likely that these Draft Designations will change in order to reflect a variety of densities under the “Rural Residential” designation rather than being uniquely named for our sub-area. The Urban Residential designation will also probably change to reflect LAMIRDs (Limited Areas of More Intense Rural Development – a GMA term that will apply).

Kurt and Sheila also presented images of the Methow River Ranch development in the uplands above Methow, showing how the developer used the lack of road permitting triggers to develop extensive roading to ridgetop building sites that are currently un-developed. Exempt Segregations and Boundary Line Adjustments were used to divide the property into a range of parcel sizes to suit the predetermined building sites. This led to a discussion that provided the following feedback:

- Large lot segregations and exempt segregations need to fall under a higher level of county review, ideally with a trigger of some sort to let the county know a project is in the works;
- The “long, skinny” lots that are created in some areas should be regulated more closely;
- Road standards need to be applied before roads are built;
- Ridgetop building is undesirable per the results of Community visioning; where existing lots are vested (as in the Methow River Ranch) but not built, ridgetop regulations can be applied via the Building Permit process to affect building height restrictions, screening requirements and lighting restrictions.

#### **IV: Applying Density Definitions and Preferences to the Draft Land Use Map**

##### **A. Stennes Example**

Keith Stennes presented the rationale and specific information related to the “Homestead River Ranch (?)” project they are developing. To summarize, the Stennes’ have planned their project to allow most of their 300 acres of lower valley ownership to remain in agriculture and housing for their family. The project encompasses roughly 26 acres, 13 of which will be dedicated to housing on 1-acre

lots, and 13 of which will remain in common area and park along the river. 16 – 20 acres adjacent to the project will remain in family ownership and orchard land. The Stennes are in non-binding talks with the Methow Conservancy about applying a conservation easement to the 265 acres they own near the mouth of McFarland Creek.

This project was discussed in light of the density definitions provided, and it was determined that the project encompasses a density of 0.5 dwelling units/acre. The larger Stennes ownership makes it appear as if the project is an ‘in-house transfer of development rights.’ This led to some discussion of potential for encouraging other large landowners in the lower valley to follow a similar path, particularly Prudential. An attempt to ‘codify’ the Stennes project into a density bonus system that could be applied more universally would not work because none of the existing programs allow for consideration of what an owner is doing with other parcels outside the project boundaries.

### **B. Designating Minimum Acreage for Valley Floor/Rural Residential**

This is a difficult conversation to encapsulate!

It was agreed that the “best” way to designate land uses is to begin by designating Resource Lands, Critical Areas, LAMIRDs and UGAs, then everything that is left falls into “Rural,” at which time different densities can be defined for specific Rural areas. We may still attempt to do this, but for the time there were too many questions regarding the Resource Lands and it appeared the group was closer to establishing a minimum acreage for the “Rural Residential” acreage as a starting point. The group spent the final hour wrestling with questions related to whether designating a 5-, 10- or 20- acre minimum for the valley floor would be most appropriate, and how a density bonus system for clustering could be incorporated. Toward the end of the meeting, the group started to lean toward designating 20-acre minimums to protect the few remaining parcels of that size or greater, while allowing some sort of density bonus system that would allow subdivision of 20 (and even 10 ) acre parcels if clustering and other provisions are followed.

There followed a short discussion of when and how to present the findings of the group to the larger community for feedback. In a nutshell, the group will call a community meeting when the members of LVAG feel comfortable standing in front of their community and explaining the rationale for their decisions. That date has tentatively been scheduled for March 30, but may be bumped into April due to a conflict with Spring Break at the school districts.

### **C. Next Steps/Next Meeting:**

At the next meeting, the Density conversation will continue. The group will try to come to a conclusion about different minimum acreages for different parts of the valley floor, and contemplate the elements of a “bonus” system (based on Public Benefits Rating) for clustering.

Prior to the next meeting:

- Kurt will do some more work on the map to delineate Critical Areas and LAMIRDs and potential Agriculture resource lands for designation;

- Perry will provide the group (via Lorah) a draft of the impending Clustering Ordinance, so the group can review and discuss the bonus system contained therein;
- The group will review the Planned Development section of the Methow Review District to understand how it has been working, and review the document provided by Perry to be prepared for the next meeting.

**Meeting Adjourned at 6:00pm**