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Mr. Perry Huston
Director
Okanogan County Office of Planning & Development
123 - 5th Ave. N. Suite 130
Okanogan, WA 98840

May 13, 2008

Re: Comprehensive Plan Update – Goals and Policy Suggestions

Dear Perry,

Knowing that you and the staff are working hard to prepare a draft Comprehensive Plan update in advance of the upcoming Growth Summit, please find below some suggested goal and policy language for your consideration.

While the organizational history and experience of the Methow Conservancy as a local land trust lies in Okanogan County’s Methow Valley, I believe that the following suggestions of goal and policy language will likely apply universally to each of the neighborhood areas participating in the planning process where maintenance of open space, productive agricultural lands and rural character are identified as community priorities.

Rather than focus upon all of the goal and policy areas where you will receive input from each of the participating neighborhood groups, please accept the following goals and policies as suggestions for how the new Comprehensive Plan might recognize and encourage the tools of citizen participation, voluntary land conservation and other incentives in achieving the vision developed through this participatory process.

Land Use

Goal: To recognize the size and diversity of Okanogan County and to ensure that the land use planning process remains rooted and supported at the local level.

Policy: Expand the use of local neighborhood area advisory groups to assist with the implementation of future neighborhood overlays and preliminary review of commercial and formal subdivision development projects.

Goal: Encourage new development in those areas identified as suitable for higher densities while preserving open space and other important agricultural areas.

Policy: Okanogan County will consider the development of innovative planning tools to achieve the Comprehensive Plan’s land use objectives to include a Transfer of Development Rights program or other tools designed to encourage growth in appropriate areas with adequate services.

Policy: Encourage the use of Planned Developments and other clustering techniques to accommodate growth and protect open space, agricultural soils and rural community character.

Goal: To recognize and encourage the role that voluntary actions by landowners can play in achieving the land use goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy: Encourage landowners to consider the use of voluntary conservation easements as a tool to maintain open space, agricultural lands and important wildlife habitat.

Agricultural Lands

Goal: To maintain partnerships and support land use practices and tools which support Okanogan County's agricultural economy and heritage.

Policy: Develop and maintain partnerships with local land trusts in support of the use of conservation easements as one tool available to conserve priority agricultural lands.

Policy: Encourage the use of conservation easements by agricultural landowners interested in voluntary land conservation.

Policy: Explore options and incentives to help prevent agricultural water rights from being transferred off of agricultural lands and outside of Okanogan County.

Natural Environment

Goal: To maintain and enhance the natural environment in support of threatened or endangered fish populations and wildlife.

Policy: Support the work of local agencies and organizations working to implement the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Plan.

Policy: Encourage the use of voluntary conservation easements as an effective tool in the maintenance and restoration of riparian areas for fish and wildlife in Okanogan County.

Goal: To reduce the potential for future liabilities and private property damage associated with natural flood events.

Policy: Explore opportunities to partner with private landowners and local land trusts in the removal of development potential from identified channel migration or other flood hazard zones.

Policy: Implement the Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan already completed by Okanogan County.

Resource Lands

Goal: To identify priority resource lands, including upland areas and forested areas and recognize their range of economic and ecological values to the community.

Policy: Work with local neighborhood groups and large private landowners to identify important resource lands throughout Okanogan County.

Policy: Implement zoning provisions and/or other planning tools such as Transfer of Development Rights programs, clustering incentives, agricultural zoning which provide for the future viability and integrity (size, etc.) of identified resource lands as important contributors to the economy and rural quality of life in Okanogan County.

Policy: Recognize the important financial contribution of agricultural and open space lands through incentives and public tax policies which encourage maintaining these important resource lands in large ownership blocks.

I look forward to answering any questions you might have regarding these proposed goals and policies, and offer my assistance in further refining goal and policy language for the Comprehensive Plan update.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance and thank you again for your work on the Comprehensive Plan update.

Sincerely,

Jason Paulsen
Executive Director