

Moratorium vote put off

*By Cara Froedje Jackson Hole, Wyoming
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County commissioners postponed voting on a moratorium on large developments for almost two weeks to allow the public time to review the proposal.

The Teton County Board of Commissioners on Thursday moved to approve a freeze on subdivisions and zoning changes of 20 acres or more but postponed a vote until after 1:30 p.m. on May 6.

Commissioners said they think it's important to allow valley residents time to review a revised proposal crafted this week and comment on it before the board votes.

The revised proposal would prohibit review, approval, subdivisions or zoning changes on parcels larger than 20 acres if such development would increase residential density allowed under current regulations. Development that's allowed by rights under today's Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan would not be subject to the moratorium.

Further, the proposal would allow commissioners to approve exceptions to the moratorium if those exceptions do not compromise "the justification and basis" for the measure.

Commissioner Ben Ellis said he supports a moratorium to give planning staff the time to work on revisions to the comprehensive plan, a process that could lead to substantial changes in the county's land-use patterns.

Commissioner Hank Phibbs said he thinks the valley, with three major blocks of land now in consideration for development, is crying out for a moratorium.

The only way community conversation about those parcels can occur is with a freeze, he said.

Commissioner Leland Christensen agreed, saying that the county needs a pause so commissioners can listen to residents on the comprehensive plan.

Only Bill Paddleford was opposed to the motion, while Chairman Andy Schwartz expressed reservations about a moratorium's unintended consequences.

"I won't support a moratorium," Paddleford said. "It has nothing to do with the projects that are in the pipeline. ... It will do nothing but hurt the middle class in the valley."

Schwartz said he isn't sure if changes in the comprehensive plan will be that substantial.

At the same time, Schwartz said he's concerned about staff being distracted from the comprehensive plan revision by recent development proposals.

The moratorium idea arose after Teton County received applications for three developments south of town.

The first, Teton Meadows Ranch, has been in the planning process since August. The 500-home development, which would have 400 deed-restricted units for the local work force, won planning commissioners' conditional backing in March and goes before county commissioners Tuesday.

The next is a rezoning of up to 80 acres of Jackson Hole Hereford Ranch, which could accommodate 299 dwellings. The other — from Three Ranchers LLC, made up of Lucas, Von Gontard and Robertson family members — would add as many as 315 new homes through a three-part land deal.

The moratorium discussion will resume May 6 in the board's chambers, at 200 S. Willow St.