

To: San Juan County Planning Commission and County Council

From:

Joe Symons

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Re: Population Projection Comments from Symons / additional

While my following comments may appear to be critical, I wish to begin my stating that it is not my intention to create disharmony or any kind of adversarial environment.

I voted for all of the now sitting County Council members. I have attempted to create a positive and supportive working relationship with Erika and other members of DCD.

As some of you know, I have been a resident, landowner and voter in San Juan County for many decades. I participated in the county's Comp Plan construction process beginning in 1993 as the Chair of the Orcas Citizen Advisory Committee.

I am a firm believer that a healthy transparent comprehensive careful and thorough process will have the highest likelihood of creating a wise and useful product.

In thinking of my experience with the county over the past 2 decades regarding the comp plan, I came up with an evaluation scorecard comprised of 5 categories:

bad

wimpy

ok

good

gold standard

There is little doubt that the process used to craft the current San Juan County Comprehensive Plan would receive any rating higher than "bad." The record can amply support this evaluation.

The county is now faced with updating the plan. My sense of the current process would rank it higher than the previous process. It now ranks as "wimpy". If I could add an adjective, it would be "really wimpy."

As resolution 10-2015 attests, the county asked for a 2 year extension to complete the GMA mandated update which was due in June 2016. Given that it was due to be done

then, the County knew it should have started on the process at least 2 years earlier, in 2014. Since nothing had been done, it had no choice but to ask for an extension. Having received it, the county has done next to nothing until now, June 2017, leaving it about one year to accomplish a process that would at a minimum require 2 years. That minimum 2 year process would be reasonable, say, if the comp plan were “good”. However, given that the previous comp plan process was “bad”, the resulting product was “bad”. I suppose we should be grateful it was not worse. However, the litigation alone, which found the county in continuous non-compliance for years, including years of invalidity rulings, is clear proof that the 1998 comp plan was not “ok” much less “good”.

Consequently, trying to update a bad example of a comp plan in one year could at best be described as unwise. More colloquially, it is a joke. It is ridiculous. It shows a staggering disregard for any number of stakeholders, not the least being the citizens of the county.

The process is being rushed to a point of absurdity. I am distressed that there is no leadership that recognizes this and acknowledges it.

The update schedule shown on the county’s web site shows that a “vision process” is scheduled from July through September 2017. That is 3 months. In the previous “bad” process, the crafting of the vision statement adopted by the county in 1994 took 4 committees a full year of frequent meetings. The only explanation for cramming the current schedule into 3 months is to meet the June 2018 deadline. These aren’t any 3 months. They are the busiest months of the year for locals. Their ability to attend to the important work of this process is most severely compromised during this period. It is all but unconscionable that this vision process occurs for such a short period during such a busy time.

Woven into the tapestry of this forced march toward a deadline that coulda/shoulda been avoided is the fundamental fact that virtually no one in the county, including those addressed in this letter, really understands the true meaning of the existing comp plan. This situation is not just unfortunate and avoidable, it is unconscionable. I am appalled at the lack of understanding and leadership that has allowed this to occur.

How can anyone in good faith update something they don’t know about? Not just “something”, but the future of the county, which is to say, a placeholder for the hopes, dreams and investments of time, money and energy that the citizens, including yourselves, have made?

Let me repeat my opening comment. My goal here is harmony and my intention is to get the right process crafted. San Juan County should shoot for a gold standard, not “wimpy”, in going forward with this vital project. “Ok” is not good enough.

I believe that asking a highly competent but overworked, understaffed and underfunded director of DCD to rip off her clothes to reveal a Wonder Woman costume is the stuff of Hollywood, not the normal and wise business of the county. It is unfair, unrealistic and foolish.

The current process is like trying to put four pounds of flour in a one pound bag. What is on the table here is big stuff. The county needs to rise to the occasion.

From my perspective a gold standard comp plan includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- More than a 3 month visioning period with citizen participation.
- A period of community visioning that doesn't take place when most islanders are unable or unlikely to participate.
- Robust participation from a citizen advisory committee.
- Ensuring that the Comp Plan realistically and thoroughly conforms to the Vision Statement; the CP walk must match the Vision Statement talk.
- Making transparency in data a key goal. Use visual aids every step of the way so a high school senior can understand the Comp Plan.
- A systems approach should be used throughout the document because if one factor changes all factors change. The islands are the core and everything that effects them are part of a system. (See work by D. Meadows)

There are many excellent examples of CP processes that have been used and been successful. No wheels need to be re-invented.

The County Council needs to ask the DCD director what would be the gold standard to do this process right, and then shop that out to the public for vetting. Then, adjusted as needed, (cue the Nike ad)

“Just *Do it*”.

references:

resolution extending time to complete update from June 2016 to June 2018
<http://www.sanjuanco.com/DocumentCenter/View/2964>

Comp Plan Update schedule and status as of 13 June 2017:
<http://www.sanjuanco.com/1312/Schedule-and-Status>