



Comprehensive Plan Committee

Regular Meeting

November 20, 2014 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Northern Arizona Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology (NACET)
2225 N. Gemini Drive, Flagstaff, AZ 86001 (928) 213-9234

Draft Minutes

CPC Members Present:

Geoff Barnard	Jim Corning	Patty Garcia	David McKee
Jamie Neilson	Judy Prosser	John Ruggles	

Core Planning Team Members Present:

Jay Christelman, Director of Community Development
John Aber, Assistant Director
Jeanne Trupiano, Principal Planner
Bob Short, Senior Planner
Zach Schwartz, Planner
Kate Morley, Planner
Amanda Acheson, Sustainable Building Program Manager
Hannah R. Griscom, Urban Wildlife Planner, Arizona Game and Fish Department and Coconino County

1. Welcome and Introductions

Jeanne Trupiano called the meeting to order at 3:15pm. She began the process for everyone in attendance to introduce themselves

2. Planning Team Update

Ms. Trupiano handed out the draft revisions to elements that had previously been discussed in other meetings. She stated that the next meeting would be December 18th, and updated the group on the 2nd Science Advisory Group (SAG) in November 2014.

Ms. Trupiano explained her November 2014 presentation to the Board of Supervisors (BOS). The BOS provided comments on the presentation and Ms. Trupiano explained those comments to the group here. The BOS liked the new telecommunication aspect of the Plan, wanted more material on gray water systems within the County and wanted the Plan to mention the programs

that Coconino County offers for early childhood development. The BOS wanted the Plan to state that Coconino County recognizes wildcat subdivisions and lot splits are a problem but there is little that the County can do to address it. The BOS wants the Plan to emphasize the County's diversity and to include more information on transportation corridors, forest restoration, ranching and agriculture, clustering Uses and niche industries etc. The BOS stated that the Area Plans are amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and the Area Plans needed to be flexible in regards to economic development.

The BOS explained that the Parks and Recreation Element needed to emphasize connectivity and wildlife corridors; and further added that pocket parks in subdivisions should be maintained by Home Owners Associations (HOA's) because the County Parks and Recreation Department has reached its capacity for effective maintenance of existing parks. The BOS stated that Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV's) are very dangerous and many accidents happen throughout the County due to their use.

David McKee mentioned that there is a Forest Service rule against using OHV's, but they do not have the staff to enforce it. He noted that OHV's have been a big issue in parts of the County as far as safety concerns and environmental destruction.

Jamie Neilson asked if there are any safety-related laws for OHV's.

John Ruggles stated that there were, but the enforcement of them is an issue and the Sheriff's Department does not have many officers.

Ms. Trupiano mentioned that County Supervisor Mandy Metzger asked if climate change was in the Plan and wanted it to be mentioned there. Supervisors Liz Archuleta and Art Babbott stated that it must be expressed in the plan very explicitly. They also asked that the term 'ecosystem services' be defined, and that Supervisor Metzger specifically recommended consultation with Tom Sisk on that. The BOS had also considered a joint meeting with the Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC) at some point, and Ms. Trupiano asked if the group had any feedback on that note.

Geoff Barnard noted that the BOS seems very supportive of the efforts of the Comprehensive Plan and Ms. Trupiano agreed.

3. Discussion on Natural Environment Element and Water Resources Element

Ms. Trupiano started the conversation on the proposed elements. She mentioned that the SAG had had a great meeting with Ron Doba, Executive Director of the Coconino Plateau Water Advisory Council (CPWAC), regarding the water resources of the County.

Judy Prosser noted that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach in the County. She mentioned the large amount of public land and open space within the County and that some ideas, such as cluster developments, would not be appropriate in all places.

Mr. Barnard stated that he wanted the first portion of the Natural Environment Element to have a reference to a study conducted by Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) and Wayne Fox on the full cost of wildfires. He stated that the Schultz Fire cost the public millions of dollars and that it would be important to mention that in the Natural Environment Element.

Hannah Griscom wanted Mr. Barnard to elaborate on this idea.

Mr. Barnard suggested that when people build in Forest Service inholdings, they often impose a fiscal responsibility on the public because they do not thin the forest around their houses to prevent wildfire. When a fire occurs, County or other public funds are used to protect those assets. He thought those people should be required to thin around their homes so that others would not have to pay to protect them.

Mr. Ruggles stated that this had been one requirement for a development that went before the Planning and Zoning Commission in the past for a Conditional Use Permit. He stated that staff wrote a thinning provision into the conditions of that permit and that was a conscious choice by staff because of this exact consideration.

Ms. Neilson stated that some hydrology permits might handle any drainage issues.

Mr. Ruggles stated that only certain developments are required to submit for hydrology permits.

Mr. Barnard reiterated that people who buy inholdings are costing the public when wildfires break out because their property must be protected using public funds.

Mr. Ruggles stated that many fire districts will come inspect home sites and instruct the property owner that they must thin the areas around their homes or the district will not commit to any fire response on that property.

Mr. McKee stated that during hydrology permit review there is an assessment of adverse impact to neighboring properties for storm water.

Ms. Prosser stated that in the Happy Jack area, there are subdivisions where the Forest Service had met with the property owners for consultation on thinning so that any fires would not result in great losses. She stated that many properties have issues in regards to thinning and possible dangers of wildfires, but there is little regulation to require mitigation.

Mr. Ruggles thought that the permitting process could be more definitive about the 'adverse impact' issue, and that a policy document such as the Comprehensive Plan should not get into all of those specifics.

Ms. Neilson stated that her Homeowners' Association has firewise requirements, but they are not being enforced. She also mentioned that some insurance companies will have higher rates for homeowners if they do not thin around their properties. She thought that the higher insurance rates might work better for developing properties in a firewise manner because the County seems not to have a great deal of authority over the matter.

Ms. Prosser thought that existing properties may not be able to implement that.

Mr. Ruggles mentioned that in the Rodeo-Chedeski Fire area that there were a lot of people without insurance on their properties because they had bought the properties with cash.

Ms. Griscom wondered if the Forest Ecosystem Health section of the element could address the issue raised by Mr. Barnard.

Mr. Ruggles thought that a certain urban/wildlife interface document should be referenced in the Plan because it deals with that issue.

Ms. Trupiano stated that this idea was discussed in the Public Safety Element, but it could be reiterated in this element.

Mr. McKee went on to discuss the topics of riparian, wetlands and hydrology; these items should be mentioned in the Water Resources Element and not in the Natural Environment Element. The Plan should ask readers to refer to the Water Resources Element for these items.

Ms. Griscom thought that the reason that these items were mentioned in the Natural Environment Element was to state that they are important natural resources/ecosystems to maintain; she likes having these topics in the Natural Environment Element.

Ms. Trupiano said that she would look into these ideas and see if there was a better way to tie them together in an appropriate way.

Mr. McKee clarified that his intention was to analyze these ideas thoroughly in the Water Resources Element.

Ms. Griscom stated that Science Advisory Group (SAG) had discussed this topic and thought that it was appropriate to keep them in the Natural Environment Element.

Ms. Trupiano mentioned that the City of Flagstaff has mandates for supplying growth with water and that this situation is very different within Coconino County.

Ms. Neilson thought that riparian, wetlands, and hydrology should be stated in both elements, and that she did not think that having them in both elements would be too redundant.

Mr. Barnard made the distinction that both sections took different approaches to riparian, wetlands and hydrology and that the Natural Environment Element could take an ecological approach and the Water Resources Element could take the approach of detailing the resources themselves.

Ms. Neilson wondered if floodplain areas were considered to be 'riparian'.

Ms. Trupiano thought that they were not.

Ms. Neilson stated that other places defined Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplains as 'riparian'. She stated an area's ecosystem could be greatly affected by floodplains, especially in regard to biodiversity. She thought that floodplain and riparian ideas could overlap.

Mr. McKee stated that he thought those ideas should be separated because people think of them in such different ways. However, he thought that there should be a few words in the document about how those ideas were connected.

Ms. Prosser stated that many people think that a floodplain is dangerous and that a riparian area is something good that should be protected.

Ms. Griscom stated that many floodplain areas do have riparian-type ecosystems.

Mr. Ruggles stated that maybe the distinguishing factor between the two ideas could be ephemeral versus non-ephemeral floodplains.

Mr. Barnard mentioned that the list of environmentally sensitive areas could be expanded to include grasslands and many other types of areas. He wondered if the list should be all-inclusive or not.

Ms. Griscom stated that she had struggled with this as well. She said that perhaps only the connections in certain types of areas would be important and only the key features should be in the list.

Ms. Trupiano mentioned that the glossary used the list as a definition and then added that best available data from current science would help to determine if that list was completely inclusive or not.

Ms. Griscom thought that the words ‘...having a large role in biodiversity and sensitive to degradation...’ would be good for inclusion in the definition of ‘environmentally sensitive areas’.

Ms. Neilson and Mr. Ruggles agreed that they liked that wording.

Mr. Ruggles thought that the attempt to create a comprehensive list of environmentally sensitive areas could cause issues in the future; if an environmentally sensitive area was not listed in the definition it could have legal ramifications related to permitting.

Ms. Griscom stated that a vegetation map with sensitive features would accompany this element. She thought that each separate ecosystem should be discussed in detail in different sections in order to take a different approach to addressing them all.

Mr. McKee thought that there should be more emphasis on climate change and other things that could be at risk rather than just wildlife.

Mr. Barnard thought that it would be better to be broad and less descriptive so that nothing is inadvertently omitted.

Ms. Neilson thought that the first sentence and definition were good.

Patty Garcia wanted the definition to be worded ‘...including, but not limited to...’ so that there would be some description, but it would be left up to staff interpretation.

Mr. Barnard thought that Ms. Garcia’s idea was the best.

Mr. McKee thought that staff should work on that definition based on the comments received and then bring it back for CPC approval.

Ms. Trupiano stated that some subsections of the Natural Environment Element might be moved to other elements.

Mr. Barnard referenced page 4- wildlife, noting that he would like to have a specific reference to wildlife crossings. He stated that very interesting manmade wildlife crossings had been built in other places and that they help preserve public safety and help to maintain wildlife corridors.

Ms. Trupiano thought that the Circulation Element should also include wildlife crossings. She stated that they are expensive to build. Ms. Trupiano gave the group specific data on how much safer wildlife crossings had made certain areas.

Mr. McKee brought up examples of wildlife corridors in Las Vegas, NV.

Mr. Barnard added that the Arizona Game and Fish Department and Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) should be partners as far as creating wildlife crossings.

Ms. Morley stated that Chris Lugenbuhl of the US Naval Observatory wanted to see dark skies for the sake of dark skies mentioned in the Natural Environment Element, as it is currently mentioned in the plan in relation to economic development.

Ms. Trupiano asked the group if they wanted to move on from Natural Environment Element to the Water Resources Element, as the meeting was supposed to cover both elements. She also proposed to the group that they could consider an extra CPC meeting for the month in order to devote this meeting entirely to the former element and the next entirely to the latter element.

Ms. Prosser thought that the group had not finished with the Natural Environment Element yet and wanted to discuss it further, until completion, before moving on.

Ms. Trupiano asked the group if they felt similarly. They agreed and decided this entire meeting would be devoted to the Natural Environment Element.

Mr. Barnard referenced page 7, in bold, the sentence beginning with 'there is a trend...', and said that this was an incomplete list similar to the definition of 'environmentally sensitive areas'.

Ms. Prosser stated that in the same paragraph there was misuse of the term 'intensive grazing'. Intensive grazing is a ranging technique and term. She wanted the term to be replaced with 'overgrazing', which she considers to be more accurate and further mentioned that wildlife and livestock 'sometimes' affect the ecosystem, rather than 'always', as was written in the paragraph.

Mr. Barnard thought that there should be a statement of fact rather than a value statement in the paragraph.

Mr. McKee thought that it should be more general than trying to list everything in the definition.

Mr. Barnard wanted the wording to say 'severe overgrazing affects the County's ecosystem'.

Ms. Neilson thought that the part about the invasive species should still be included in the final wording.

Mr. Barnard stated that that idea was actually in the next paragraph.

Ms. Prosser said that invasive species is one of the least problematic issues that is caused by overgrazing.

Ms. Trupiano stated that John Aber and Scott Harger would provide more information on invasive species in the future.

Ms. Prosser noted page 2, first paragraph, the concept of 'conservation finance' was not a term that she was aware of in this context. She thought that if the Plan were to mention conservation finance, that it should be more thoroughly explained and include a definition.

Ms. Trupiano stated that conservation finance in this context meant items such as conservation easements and that it should be pulled out, explained in more detail, and explicitly defined.

Mr. Barnard wondered why 'conservation finance' was in the Plan in all capital letters.

Ms. Trupiano explained that words in all capitals are in the glossary, though strangely, 'conservation finance' was not actually in the glossary.

Mr. Barnard liked the idea of defining it in general and giving examples. He thought that after the explanation the wording should read '...including but not limited to...'

Ms. Trupiano stated that transfer of development rights was often used in policy documents of this sort, but it is not applicable within the County and transfer of development rights does not happen much outside of very dense areas.

Ms. Prosser gave an example of transfer of development rights and how she might use them for the group. She wondered why they were not applicable to the County.

Ms. Trupiano explained that there is not enough density to trade for or development projects that would want to use development rights. She went on to explain the financial issues with transfer of development rights.

Ms. Neilson asked if there was a local land trust.

Ms. Trupiano stated that there was not a local land trust, but there is one in Prescott.

Ms. Prosser wanted there to be a creative solution to conservation in the Plan.

Ms. Griscom agreed and wanted there to be tools of how to deal with conservation in the Plan.

Ms. Trupiano discussed that the checkerboard of State land was a barrier and if it could be reassembled that it would be beneficial in terms of conservation.

Mr. Barnard said that part of this section should discourage wildcat subdivisions in order to stop fragmentation.

Ms. Griscom asked Ms. Trupiano if she could list some conservation tools related to development that could help in relation to conservation finance, based on Ms. Trupiano's previous experience in the area.

Ms. Prosser stated that it seemed that the paragraph was written in such a way that it seemed that the tool was about purchasing the lands.

Ms. Trupiano agreed, but wanted to add more tools to the list.

Mr. Barnard had a comment for page 9. He wanted to add more policies about wildfires. He said that Policy 17 addressed the issue somewhat but there should be another policy that is much more direct as far as the County's involvement in working with other jurisdictions in wildfire prevention. He wants to add language to existing Policy 17 to mention firewise practices being promoted on individuals' properties.

Ms. Griscom thought that the wording should be more about prevention than anything else.

Ms. Trupiano stated that policies from the Comprehensives Plan could be used to inform the Subdivision Ordinance as far as requiring firewise practices in subdivision development.

Mr. Ruggles stated that the Planning and Zoning Commission has required plans for dealing with fire issues and requiring property maintenance per firewise techniques for Conditional Use Permit cases in the past.

Mr. McKee stated that the scientific documents and data related to fire prevention and thinning should be referenced to show that the rules and policies are not arbitrary.

Mr. Barnard thought that the wildlife/urban interface was not as inclusive as would be desired in the County. He thought that the idea of 'burdening the public sector with the cost of wildfires...' should be expressly written in the Plan.

Ms. Trupiano stated that some subdivisions were required to have Flow2D analysis before platting, and she thought that the fire mitigation issue could be dealt with similarly.

Ms. Neilson wondered if firewise practices needed to be done *after* initial development rather than before.

Mr. Short stated that it could be done during the platting process.

Regarding Mr. Barnard's previous comment, Mr. Ruggles stated that actually it is not so much a public sector burden, but private because the fire districts would mostly be responding to wildfires in the County. The County does not have its own fire department. He thought that 'burden' was not the best word, but perhaps 'impact' would be a better word.

The group all agreed that 'impact' rather than 'burden' was the best word choice.

Mr. Short wondered if the discussion was about impact fees, because the County cannot impose them.

Mr. Ruggles answered that the conversation was not about impact fees, but about requirements for developers to make firewise plans and/or thin properties. He thought that it was well within the authority of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and County staff to impose.

Ms. Neilson stated that even if there is an initial requirement, that people over time might cause issues related to potential fires in the future. She thought that the County and its partners need to make information about firewise practices widely available to the public so that the initial mitigation will be maintained.

Ms. Prosser wanted to defend private property rights, but still liked Mr. Barnard's idea of starting off a development with firewise planning and thinning. She thought that it should be stated that taking these measures would actually add value to properties.

Mr. Ruggles stated that many people consider thinning a devaluation of the property because they are removing the aesthetically valued trees.

Mr. Short agreed, stating that developers might not like requirements like thinning.

Ms. Trupiano proposed new language: 'new developments in forested areas will be assessed for wildfire risk and adhere to firewise plans that recognize the costs to the County for future fires'.

Ms. Prosser liked that wording, except that the 'cost to the County' might not be as accurate. She thought that that part should be a little broader to take into account the different entities that might have to pay for fire suppression.

Ms. Griscom wanted to add that the Plan should include some language about the County playing a role as far as educating the public on these matters.

Ms. Prosser referenced page 4, last sentence. She thought that the explanation should go into more detail as far as describing effects of habitat fragmentation.

Ms. Griscom thought that maybe it should be left out because the detail included is not very helpful.

Ms. Trupiano thought that the Arizona Game and Fish Department wildlife corridors study should be referenced in this section somewhere.

Mr. Barnard referenced Page 11. He noted that there is good evidence that restoration works better if the topsoil is saved rather than reseeding because there are many things in the soil that are beneficial. He wondered if developers should be encouraged to use topsoil to aide in revegetation.

Ms. Trupiano explained Two Guns shooting range project, specifically the berms to catch the bullets. She thought that topsoil in that area would have been a good idea.

Ms. Prosser added that in that area there is very shallow soil, so there might not have been very much to work with for the Two Guns shooting range project.

Mr. Barnard was wondering if the Air Quality subsection should be moved.

Ms. Trupiano explained that staff was thinking that that subsection might be more appropriate in the Sustainability Element.

Ms. Prosser referenced the top of page 9; a sentence containing livestock grazing practices and fire suppression, and stated that livestock is still raised to aide in fire suppression.

Ms. Trupiano thought that the reason that livestock grazing practices and fire had been mentioned in that way was to relay historical practices. She stated that it would be changed to become more clear.

Mr. Barnard thought that that whole idea in general is too expansive to be put into one sentence.

Mr. Ruggles thought that it should be worded in such a way that there is not an implied causal relationship between livestock grazing practices and fire issues. He thought that certain grazing practices may or may not have had anything to do with the fire issues that had historically occurred, and that science had not definitively answered that question.

Ms. Griscom mentioned that as a general trend the sentence seemed to be truthful.

Ms. Trupiano thought that the word 'ultimate' could be excluded.

Ms. Prosser wanted to stress that the modern grazing processes do not have that kind of effect on the environment.

Mr. Barnard thought that much of the language was causal and it should not be. He thought that it should be worded as 'scientists generally agree that...' and other similar statements without direct implication of a causal relationship between grazing and fires. He added that he thought that the Plan in general was too lengthy. If he were to rewrite the Plan, he could make it a third of the length and maintain the context.

Ms. Trupiano explained that many editors would not take on the project of editing the Plan because of the amount of work it would take and the Community Development budget for edits on the Plan.

Ms. Griscom volunteered to help edit the Plan.

Mr. Barnard asked if the Board of Supervisors supports brevity of the Plan.

Ms. Trupiano stated that it was, and it was her intention for the Plan to be brief and to the point.

Mr. Barnard thought that the document should not be overly education-based or include superfluous descriptions. He thought that the actual policies should be the main content of the document.

Mr. Ruggles explained that description and detail are in the Plan in order to show that the goals and policies are not arbitrary. He agreed that the Plan was a little too wordy, but thought that there is a need to support the goals and policies.

Mr. Barnard thought that perhaps the formatting of the text should be reversed to show the goals and policies first and then the rationale behind them afterward.

Ms. Prosser agreed that Mr. Barnard's formatting idea was good and that if people needed more information after reading the goals and policies that they could continue reading the description.

Ms. Trupiano explained the reasons for the formatting and wordiness of the document; this document is progressive and needs community and political backing.

Mr. Ruggles agreed with Mr. Barnard; the formatting should be reversed in the interest of the average reader. Sections could reference each other in order to cut down on the number of words and pages in the document.

Ms. Trupiano agreed that this was a good idea, and noted that staff would meet and discuss the format per the CPC direction.

4. CPC Member Roundtable

There was no additional discussion

5. Call to the Public

No members of the public were present.

6. Set Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for December 10 and the meeting adjourned at 5:25pm.

Notes:

- Need to consider the effect on the entire area around “special” places
- Cluster development might not be the only conservation method
- Preamble-Address the total cost of big wildfires
- Look at economic and social costs of developing in potential path of wildfires (creates a public cost)
- Require thinning when allowing development on inholding
- A no adverse impact clause when approving development—put in Zoning Ord.
- How can the County incentivize existing development?
- Wetlands, etc. in Natural Environment sections should be included with Water Resources Elements or cross-ref. them
- Separate water habitat and other water/natural resources from water resources, such as storage sources, etc.
- Discuss the connectivity of water resources—wetlands and riparian-separate from floodplain management, e.g. floodplains are areas of hazard not necessarily a resource
- Many floodplains have no wetlands or riparian
- Integrate connectivity of different features: grasslands, old growth, wetlands, etc.
- Use “these are included but limited to...” language for covered areas
- Use Hannah’s definition to define Ecosystem Services
- Dark Skies for the sake of dark skies
- Specific reference to wildlife crossings
- Add additional impacts to increasing density of trees
- Overgrazing-is severe it can have many impacts. Keep this general rather than big list.
- Define Conservation Finance.
- Reframe this section (conservation tools) in terms of wildcat subdivision prevention and conserving areas to reduce fragmentation and uncontrolled development
- Emphasize treatment of forest over suppression of forest fires
- In new subdivision/developments assessments in respect to vulnerability to wildfire and adhere to firewise practices
- Remove specific wildfire discussion because it does not add to conservation
- Emphasize retaining top soils over revegetation
- May want to make this less wordy. Text should be limited to what it refers to in the policies.