



KICK-OFF MEETINGS: SUMMARY

March 2022

INTRODUCTION

Kick-off meetings for the Plan Park County process were held between February 28 and March 3, 2022. County staff and members of the project team met with representatives from a wide range of stakeholder groups to discuss recent trends, issues, and opportunities related to land use, growth and development, and quality of life in Park County. Over the course of three days, the project team hosted 16 focus groups with over 75 participants. The following groups were represented: agricultural producers; arts, history, and culture; conservation districts; development community (engineers, surveyors, and builders); economic development and tourism; education/youth; environment and conservation; irrigation districts; municipalities; public lands agencies; real estate representatives; utilities (water); and utilities and infrastructure (gas, electric, WYDOT, and BNSF). These conversations facilitated data and information sharing to support a clear understanding of existing conditions in Park County and to help inform the Plan Park County process. The project team will hold future meetings with the energy sector and Yellowstone Regional Airport.

This document provides a brief summary of the overarching themes and key issues that arose from the overall takeaways from the kick-off meetings. Individual meeting summaries are presented in the order that meetings were held.

OVERARCHING THEMES AND KEY ISSUES

In summary, some of the overarching themes and key issues to come out of the kick-off meetings include:

- **Need for greater coordination on the location and intensity of development in unincorporated areas.** Many participants raised concerns about the rate and extent of new development and subdivisions occurring in the unincorporated areas near cities and towns and the long-term impacts this would have on areas that would otherwise be suitable for continued agricultural production or future municipal growth and annexation. Participants in multiple groups noted that they anticipate development pressure adjacent to and between Powell and Cody will continue due to demand for rural lifestyles with “elbow room.” Many participants also expressed a desire to explore opportunities for more coordinated City-County development as part of the County’s Land Use Plan update to promote the most efficient use of

land and infrastructure in the unincorporated areas and create a more predictable environment for property owners, agricultural producers, service providers, municipalities, and residents in affected areas.

- **Lack of incentive for growth within municipalities.** Participants raised the challenges associated with development occurring in areas with poor infrastructure or higher cost to provide services, but also noted that it was unclear whether there was sufficient incentive to shift growth back to the municipalities due to the higher costs of development in the municipalities. There are concerns that allowing development to occur in places and at densities that overextend services and infrastructure could lead to higher taxes, higher rates and fees, and/or less responsive services. Some ideas provided included focusing more dense development near existing infrastructure and services and limiting density in areas where there is insufficient capacity. The plan should prioritize growth and expansion of infrastructure to places where it can be provided most efficiently.
- **Disconnect between current zoning and development feasibility.** While there were concerns about not enough density in areas that have access to infrastructure and services, participants also highlighted situations where current zoning in the County may allow for more density than is feasible. Particular areas of concern included areas with little to no access to water and sewer service, which necessitates wells and septic systems. However, lot sizes, soil quality, and topography result in unproductive wells (even if deep), poor well water quality, low-functioning septic systems, and concerns about contamination of wells from septic systems. Ideas for improvement include tying density to infrastructure access, soil quality, water availability, and looking at how wells and septic systems are located.
- **Subdivision activity is impacting the viability of agricultural lands and operations.** Many participants highlighted the need to support agricultural activities and protect this way of life. Rising development pressures in agricultural areas, increasing conflicts between farms and residential development, and escalating property values fueled by demand for rural lifestyles have made farming and ranching more cost-prohibitive while making subdivision of farm and rangeland more attractive. Some ideas raised include improving public education on the value of agriculture, allowing a wider range of agriculture-related activities in agricultural areas to create other revenue streams, finding ways to allow subdivision of agricultural lands without preventing future agricultural use, and preserving agricultural lands through trusts, easements, and other conservation agreement mechanisms.
- **Need for wildlife-friendly policies and regulations.** Participants highlighted the economic, cultural, and scenic value of wildlife in Park County and raised concerns about the impacts of growth and development on wildlife habitat, migration, and behavior. Numerous examples were provided where new developments were designed in ways that damaged wildlife habitat, fractured movement corridors, and led to increased human interactions. Participants suggested development guidelines or standards that encourage the retention of more space for wildlife, conservation of more land in key wildlife use areas, coordinating with WYDOT and other agencies on wildlife-friendly infrastructure, and exploring wildlife-friendly fencing.
- **Multiple industries facing housing and workforce challenges.** Participants noted that while agriculture and energy represent a core component of the County's economy, there has been a growing shift towards a tourism-based economy, especially in outdoor recreation. Service jobs, however, tend to pay less and are less stable because tourism can be very seasonal in Park County. Many participants expressed concern that there are not enough workers during peak tourism times, that housing is hard to

find (and too expensive), and that as a result more and more people—especially younger families—are moving farther away from Cody and commuting more. Other participants noted that concerns about rising housing costs and the limited availability of housing options were not just affecting service-based businesses, but also professional services firms, school districts, and others.

- **Opportunity for greater collaboration, information sharing, and education.** With more than 80 percent of land in Park County being under federal or state land management, the need for increased coordination with public lands agencies was highlighted. This included coordination on the issues of road maintenance, access to public lands, grazing and fencing, and tourism and recreation. Similarly, participants indicated a desire to further coordination between the County and the municipalities of Cody, Powell, Meeteetse, and Frannie, especially on issues of growth and development and recreation. The plan should identify opportunities for collaboration with other government agencies in Park County and support alignment of efforts toward common goals.
- **Desire to protect what people value about Park County.** Participants expressed concerns that recent growth and development is having a negative impact on the visual quality of the County and its landscapes, as well as on wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and access to public lands. While perspectives varied, participants generally expressed a desire to create more predictable patterns of development that reflect and respect what is important to the people and economy of Park County.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

Municipalities

ATTENDEES

- Mayor Matt Hall, City of Cody
- Mayor John Wetzel, City of Powell
- Mayor Bill/J.W. Yetter, Town of Meeteetse
- Todd Stowell, Community Development Director, City of Cody
- Zach Thorington, City Administrator, City of Powell
- Ben Hubbard, Building Official, City of Powell
- Mayor Vance Perego, Town of Frannie (invited)
- Barry Cook, City of Cody (invited)

SUMMARY

- Cody and Powell have experienced significant growth in recent years, (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic), which has impacted both the availability and affordability of housing in Park County as a whole. Participants expressed a commitment to trying to grow “the right way” –i.e., in a manner that protects the County’s many assets—recreation, wildlife, and agricultural lands.
- Participants noted that they anticipate development pressure adjacent to and between Powell and Cody will continue, primarily because it is less costly to develop in the County. A desire to revisit the potential for coordinated City-County development within one and five miles of the larger municipalities as part of the County’s Land Use Plan update (and possibly intergovernmental agreements) was expressed to promote the most efficient use of land and infrastructure in the unincorporated areas.
- The City of Cody requires annexation to receive any municipal services; Powell is considering a similar approach. Participants noted that some County enclaves exist (and others are being created as growth in the unincorporated area continues), but that annexation is unlikely due to modifications to state statutes that make it more difficult for cities to accomplish. It was also noted that differences in city vs. county development regulations (i.e., for streets, drainage, and other site planning considerations) can make annexation less desirable and/or feasible due to the potential cost of bringing infrastructure up to city standards.
- The City of Cody last updated their Comprehensive Plan in 2014, but indicated that future annexation areas identified in the plan remain current, and that the Cooper Lane area and Belfry Expansion areas are their highest priorities. Participants noted that the City was seeing some infill development and was looking to expand accessory dwelling unit (ADU) allowances. The City recently added a second water tower (Beacon Hill) on the eastern side, which doubled its substation capacity.
- The City of Powell uses their Master Streets Plan to inform where growth can and should occur, and noted that the City’s current Zoning Map is fairly indicative of where they would like to see urban development occur in the next ten to 20 years—primarily to the south, north, and west (not much past Road 8). Future growth to the east of Powell is generally limited due to sewer constraints—a major investment in infrastructure would be needed to make urban development viable in this area. A wastewater line exists on the plateau, but another water tank would be necessary to support substantial future development in this area.

- Meeteetse has the potential to support a population of 10,000 people based on land availability and utility capacity, but has seen limited population growth or economic development in recent years. The Town would like to prioritize the development of the 100 platted and annexed lots in Meeteetse Ranch Estates on the south edge of Meeteetse to make use of existing infrastructure, but also has opportunities to grow to the north and east. While much of the Planning Area is zoned for smaller lots, development potential in areas outside of the Town of Meeteetse service area is limited by poor soils (that limit the viability of traditional septic systems) and water quality issues. Participants noted that many residential wells in this area are unproductive, offer poor water quality, and have led to residents needing to haul domestic water.

Public Lands

ATTENDEES

- Casey McQuiston, District Ranger, Shoshone National Forest (USFS)
- John Nicholson, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Yellowstone National Park (NPS)
- Tony Mong, Wildlife Biologist, Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Amy Crawford, Wyoming Outdoor Rec (invited)
- Cory Class, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (invited)
- Ray McPadden, National Park Service (invited)
- Chad Krause, Bureau of Land Management (invited)
- Jason Freeman, Bureau of Reclamation (invited)
- Charlie Ronca, Bureau of Reclamation (invited)
- Chris Wichmann, USDA (invited)

SUMMARY

- The USFS sees some challenges with public/private lands interface, particularly where private inholdings exist. Challenges include vegetation management to reduce wildfire risk, a lack public understanding of grazing permits and fencing, and access and maintenance of roads (both where private roads lead to public lands and where public lands provide access to private inholdings).
- Yellowstone National Park coordinates with Park County on a case-by-case basis (i.e., the Winter Use Management Plan (2014) and Natural Resource Management Plan (2021)). The east entrance to Yellowstone from Park County is the fourth busiest. While minor seasonal adjustments are occasionally made in response to weather conditions, notable changes to access and management are not anticipated.
- The Game and Fish Department routinely reviews subdivision applications and discretionary permits in unincorporated Park County to increase awareness of important habitat and minimize the potential for future conflicts. In recent years, impacts from increased development on wildlife populations, migration, and range have become more apparent. Subdivision of large ranches has resulted in the fragmentation of wildlife habitat and the loss of open range in prime winter habitat and migration corridors. These shifts impact the health of migratory herds and make hunting for recreation and population management more difficult. Other challenges include increased wildlife/auto collisions, waste management issues, and human-animal interactions.

- All participants noted they would like to see high-value areas of Park County, such as major drainages (Crandall, Sunlight, North Fork, South Fork) and areas where wildlife populations are struggling be protected through stronger subdivision regulations and other means. The importance of incorporating wildlife considerations into the County’s Land Use Plan update was noted as an opportunity to help build awareness, reduce conflict, and seek common ground on solutions that attempt to balance development and property rights interests with the protection of the County’s wildlife habitat and populations.

Development Community

ATTENDEES

- Collin Simpson, Attorney, Trail Creek Ranch
- Cody Schatz, Engineering Associates
- Harold Musser, Developer
- Dave Schultz, Sage Civil Engineering
- Dusty Spomer, T-O Engineers
- Nick Hummel, Engineering Associates (invited)
- Jeff Sheridan, Developer (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants discussed the rapid increase in demand for large lot subdivisions in Park County in recent years due to a rise in remote workers and an influx of retirees (many moving from out of state). Lot sizes most common in recent subdivisions were noted as ranging from 5-20 acres to 20-40 acres, depending on location. Some of the unintended consequences of this trend that were noted included:
 - The fragmentation of agricultural lands—particularly in the Lower Southfork and around Powell;
 - An increase in people moving to remote properties with bad water and septic conditions—in part because larger lot subdivisions closer in (that were once affordable) have become too costly for the average worker in Park County;
 - Complaints about the poor maintenance of larger lots in rural subdivisions (due to a lack of understanding on the part of newer residents of what’s needed/expected); and
 - A six-month delay for new taps through the Northwest Rural Water District (NWRWD), due to high demand.
- Participants also discussed the need for clearer guidance on the location of growth in unincorporated areas, and noted that ideally development should be focused in areas with adequate roads and access, treated water access, and/or in areas where soils are suitable for quality wells and septic systems. The best locations being close to and within municipalities.
- Participants highlighted the need for greater flexibility and predictability in the County’s development regulations and processes, and noted that in comparison to similar counties they have worked in, the number of meetings required in Park County was higher. Participants noted that as a result, projects that otherwise met development requirements had the potential to get stalled (or potentially abandoned) due to neighbor opposition. The need for additional flexibility in development standards or for unexpected land uses that go beyond “the chart” was also noted. The potential need for more varied (smaller) lot sizes in some areas of Park County as a way to encourage more compact development was also discussed. While the efficiency and potential affordability of smaller lots was cited as a possible benefit,

participants also expressed uncertainty as to whether density would be viewed favorably by the community.

Meeteetse Local Planning Area Advisory Committee (MLPAAC)

ATTENDEES

- Mary Rumsey, MLPAAC
- Tiffany May, MLPAAC
- Mayor Bill/J.W. Yetter, Town of Meeteetse
- Other MLPAAC Members (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants raised concerns about development around Meeteetse having so few constraints (1 acre lots, all land uses allowed, etc.) despite issues with soils (creates issues with septic systems) and poor water quality in many wells. Participants felt that the potential extent of growth would have major impact on wildlife and quality of life in Meeteetse.
- Meeteetse has not had the same level of growth and development as Cody and Powell according to participants because of worse road conditions outside of Town, no access to broadband, poor access to landfill, and generally being farther from Cody than Powell.
- Participants noted that the major land use issues include subdivision of larger parcels (including abuse of family exemption), abuse of short-term rental regulations, and the impacts on scenery, wildlife, and neighbors.
- The Town of Meeteetse has ample sewer and water capacity, an RV park, and vacant lots that can support growth and participants, participants suggested that growth in the Meeteetse area should be encouraged to occur in Town first, rather than in the surrounding areas.

County Departments

ATTENDEES

- Barb Poley, Treasurer
- Brian Edwards, County Engineer
- Colleen Renner, Clerk
- Hans Odde, Clerk's Office
- Jeff Martin, Emergency Management Coordinator
- Mallory Riley, Attorney
- Pat Meyer, Assessor

KEY THEMES

- Participants generally felt that the current Land Use Plan was not relevant to most departments and even conflicts with County regulations in some instances, making enforcement more challenging and leading to court challenges in some instances.
- Participants noted a significant increase in population (especially from out of state) in the past couple years and a steep increase in property values, which has led to rising property tax assessments. The County is trying to spread out the impact on taxpayers, but it is going up so fast.

Kick-Off Meetings: Summary

- Participants noted that service providers (e.g., fire, hospital, ambulance) are tasked with serving the entire County, but that remote areas are costly to serve and reduce response time/access. It was also noted that growth in very remote areas of Park County makes hazard management more difficult and harder to plan for.
- County departments noted that road upgrades and maintenance are major concerns with new development, including challenges with enforcement of private maintenance agreements, cost of upgrading roads when developments ‘leapfrog’ past undeveloped land, and the increased cost to County for maintenance of new roads.
- Participants highlighted the challenges presented by the County not having any enforcement of building code or inspectors like cities (County only inspects septic systems on behalf of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality). This is especially an issue in areas that might become annexed into a municipality (they do enforce building code). Participants noted the potential of exploring different standards in areas immediately surrounding municipalities, but acknowledged that having two sets of rules could be difficult to administer.

Real Estate Community

ATTENDEES

- Emily Denny
- Duncan Bonine
- Echo Renner
- Donny Anderson
- Pia Trotter
- Kim Brandon-Wintermote
- Sandi Shearer
- Ed Higbie
- Rita Lovell
- Nathan Gesner (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants highlighted the following trends in recent years: more retirees moving to Park County, more people from West Coast states and larger cities in the Mountain West, and more sight-unseen buyers. There is demand for larger lots without covenants (people are moving to Park County for “elbow room”), a loss of some residents to Big Horn County due to the rising price of homes and land, and loss of agricultural land.
- Participants noted that some areas have, and should continue to have, larger lot sizes to protect agriculture and way of life, but that that pattern doesn’t make sense everywhere and for all buyers. Others noted that many large lots end up being poorly maintained by residents new to rural living and that some ultimately realize they would prefer a lower-maintenance home and property.
- Conversely, participants noted there are other areas in the County that allow small lots despite having poor soils for septic systems and/or wells. Others noted that the rise in sight-unseen buyers is allowing unethical real estate practices, such as not disclosing to buyers that a property does not have access to utilities (or the costs associated with providing those utilities) or that potable water may need to be trucked in.
- Participants noted that the wide rights-of-way and larger lots typical in recent subdivisions are inefficient and increase the cost of development and housing.

Kick-Off Meetings: Summary

- Participants noted that subdivision of farms and ranches into developments and short-term rentals are key concerns—but that it is difficult to strike a balance—because this practice offers a way for farms and ranches to provide housing for workers, keep local families in Park County, and reduce need to subdivide further.

Conservation Districts

ATTENDEES

- Steffen Cornell, Meeteetse Conservation District
- Carmen McIntyre, Water Coordinator Powell-Clarks Fork and Cody Districts
- Britany Swope, Cody Conservation District
- Ann Trospen, Powell-Clarks Fork Conservation District

SUMMARY

- Participants highlighted their work alongside irrigation districts, realtors, and the County to provide information and public education on soils, septic systems, wells, erosion, and building feasibility. Participants suggested that more focus on education in these areas is needed with the recent influx of new residents that are not familiar with rural lifestyles.
- Participants noted the importance understanding the effects of the ongoing transition to pivot irrigation (versus flood irrigation) on groundwater water table and wells, the impacts of development on wildlife migration and habitat (especially fences), and public education (e.g., don't feed animals, don't plant fruit trees in bear habitat, locate wells away from septic systems and corrals, and how to improve water quality).
- Participants suggested that development should be encouraged to occur closer to cities, consider density and impacts on septic system capacity and location, and focus on resource conservation.

Irrigation Districts

ATTENDEES

- Trent Reed, Shoshone Irrigation District
- Travis Moger, Willwood Irrigation District
- Mary Reed, Lakeview Irrigation District
- Melissa Leonhardt, Greybull Valley Irrigation District
- Tyler Weckler, Heart Mountain Irrigation District
- Jerry Bales, Cody Canal Irrigation District
- Jim Wenzel, Heart Mountain Irrigation District
- Deaver Irrigation District (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants primarily emphasized the challenges that the subdivision of agricultural lands creates for irrigation districts and for working farms and ranches, including:
 - A lack of understanding on the part of new residents about how water rights and irrigation work. This often results in smaller lots using a disproportionate share of water, which creates conflicts between neighbors and districts, and increases the cost of farming;
 - Encroachment of development into easements and damage to underground infrastructure;

Kick-Off Meetings: Summary

- Developers not providing infrastructure and buyers not knowing they need to install it; and
- Loss of viable agricultural lands.
- Participants expressed a desire for greater coordination between cities, the County, and irrigation districts on new development to avoid damage to infrastructure, improve public education, and ensure that approved developments are being designed to minimize costs to irrigation districts and future property owners (instead of what is easiest now). Several districts noted they were working with Park County to share updated GIS information about existing infrastructure to help increase awareness.
- Additionally, participants noted the trend towards pivot irrigation (and away from flood irrigation) as a result of conservation efforts being led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It was noted that while this practice is helping promote the more efficient use of water, it is also impacting groundwater (and wells) in localized areas. However, the potential effects on groundwater in Park County as a whole have not been studied.

Environment and Conservation

ATTENDEES

- Abby Scott, The Nature Conservancy
- Jenny DeSarro, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
- Jarren Kuipers, Land Steward Services
- Chris McBarnes, The Wyldlife Fund (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants expressed concern about the impacts of development and increased traffic on roads on wildlife habitat and connectivity, and suggested that the County explore land conservation strategies, especially in riparian areas, areas larger than 1,000 acres, and areas of seasonal and daily range. It was noted that conservation easements are an effective tool but should be combined with other strategies due to increasing land values. Participants noted that there are ways to balance property rights and the value of wildlife health and habitat.
- Participants noted the work being done by their organizations on conservation easements, wildlife-friendly crossings and fencing, and public education, but would like to have increased coordination between local governments and state and federal agencies to move things forward.
- Other efforts that could be explored include habitat leasing efforts, which Greater Yellowstone Coalition has seen be successful in Teton County, and the Absaroka Fence Initiative, which has identified priority wildlife crossing spots. Otherwise, participants expressed interest in exploring the voluntary removal of unnecessary fencing and the potential for wildlife friendly fencing where new or replacement fencing is needed.

Water Districts

ATTENDEES

- Tony Rutherford, Northwest Rural Water District (NWRWD)
- Craig Barsness, Shoshone Municipal Pipeline

SUMMARY

- Shoshone Municipal Pipeline
 - Started service in 1991. Serves Cody, Powell, some of NWRWD, and part of Frannie
 - Water rights dictated by the Yellowstone Compact
 - Had biggest year last year and no trouble meeting demand; caps in place for cities, but they have not met original projections
 - Plant is expandable (was scheduled for 2010), but have not hit usage threshold that would trigger the need
 - Conservation is voluntary, but they do have a tiered rate structure
 - Prepared for more growth than seen in recent years (even more than experienced in recent years, including drought last year that caused a 20% increase in water use)
 - Reservoir capacity is limited, but has not been an issue, even in drought years
 - Main line from the Dam to Lovell is steel and was designed with 12 taps along the line, most used by NWRWD. Currently, there are four or five taps left (i.e., Cody – Beacon Hill), which limits growth along the line, including along the Cody-Powell highway where the water main is located.
 - Frannie’s original agreement was for 30 taps, a threshold that was recently reached
- Northwest Rural Water District (NWRWD)
 - Purpose of the District is to deliver treated domestic water to rural homes in areas around Cody, Powell, Lovell, Garland, Deaver, and Frannie; funded by user fees
 - Formed after the Shoshone Municipal Pipeline
 - Has different pressure zones and does not have to serve all users in district (e.g., nothing greater than 50 acres) but users can petition for service
 - Tries to provide “first come, first serve,” which has led to long wait times for extending service and the need for more water storage capacity
 - Has seen huge demand in recent years to extend water lines and provide taps (generally for residential development, and especially around Powell). District has the ability to extend a line if the owner/applicant is willing to cover the cost (with 75% required upfront)
 - Process is the same today, but demand is so high, can’t serve every request: 20 to 25 customers added annually pre-COVID, 200+ in 2021. Used to do one to two major subdivision projects a year; 20+ in recent years. Greatest pressure has been around Powell.
 - Low cost has been an incentive for new development in the past, but demand is such that NWRWD recently increased tap fees (includes labor, material, service line, and meter—no connection fee) and

will likely need to increase further to avoid having to tax the district instead of relying on user fees. Current fee is \$7K.

- 2017 Master Plan included 0.5% growth rate with some flexibility. Have seen 12% growth rate. Led to restrictions on new taps while plan is updated. Capacity concerns for NWRWD also stem from a large number of inactive taps (some dating back 20-30 years) that could come online at any time.
- While NWRWD does have built up reserves to help fund infrastructure improvements, state and federal grants and loans are also used for some projects.

Utilities

ATTENDEES

- Joe Burrell, Black Hills Energy
- Brian Edwards, County Engineer, Public Works Department
- Jack Hoffman, District Engineer, WYDOT
- Mike Miller, WYDOT
- Carson Steinhorst, MDU
- Lindsay Van Meter, Economic Development Manager, BNSF
- Rich Scott, BNSF
- Todd Frost, WYDOT (invited)
- David Magee, MDU (invited)
- Ben McDonald, Public Works Department (invited)
- Amber Stoffels, BNSF (invited)
- Skip Hart, Willwood Light and Power (invited)
- William Maxwell, Black Hills Energy (invited)
- Matt Thomas, PacifiCorp/Rocky Mountain Power (invited)
- Molly Lynn, Garland Light and Power (invited)

SUMMARY

- Natural gas providers noted no issues with capacity despite growth.
- WYDOT noted it is not looking to increase lane miles, upgrade intersections, or provide wildlife crossings in Park County in the near future. Key considerations include access management (i.e., limiting direct access onto WYDOT highways). There have been occasional issues with property owners that construct unapproved access points onto WYDOT roads, which may be addressed through public education.
- BNSF is not expecting increased service on the branch line between Powell and Cody, although there is capacity if additional service is needed. BNSF does not approve any new at-grade crossings (there are about 50 today) and would like to see at-grade crossings reduced. Similarly, the key development concern of BNSF is avoiding having schools, EMS, and important services and amenities being located on the opposite side of tracks from most users.
- The County Public Works Department would like to see a transportation plan for the County in the future to help plan for management of roads:
 - Park County has the most miles of paved roads in the state (although half of all roads are gravel), and increased development and road use is leading to more maintenance needs.
 - The County recently began requiring right-of-way permits and improved tracking of pavement conditions and maintenance.

- Other key issues for the Public Works department include an alternative route to Yellowstone Highway (maybe Stagecoach Trail) to handle traffic when there are road closures, maintaining steady funding for maintenance projects, and improvements to the South Fork area through the Federal Lands Access Program.

Education/Youth

ATTENDEES

- Tycee Mohler, 4-H & UW Extension
- Tim Foley, Park County School District 6
- Kelly McArdle, Northwest College
- Shane Ogden, Park County School District 16 (invited)
- Jay Curtis, Park County School District 1 (invited)
- Shelby Wetzel, Northwest College Foundation (invited)
- Jeremiah Vardiman (invited)
- Lisa Watson, Northwest College (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants noted that the rising cost of housing and lack of availability of affordable housing options is an issue for teachers and staff, as well as for students and families.
- Northwest College (NWC) has noticed more students struggling with the cost of living (most coming from Big Horn Basin and South-Central Montana), which has required more students to work/attend school part time. International students tend to have issues with transportation, since many do not own personal vehicles. NWC also noted that they are currently dealing with budget cuts from the state and are working to update their vision/brand to help boost visibility and enrollment, which might leverage proximity to Yellowstone National Park.
- NWC and District 6 have increased their workforce training programs to address local labor needs. NWC has seen an increase in demand for micro-credentials, interest in outdoor education and agriculture, and more part-time students (from high schools and students older than typical).
- Participants indicated that District 6 students seem to want more activities (shopping, indoor activities in the winter) beyond the rec. center, bowling, and movie theaters. Many students work (especially during the summer, and even more so with worker shortages).
- Districts are seeing increased enrollment overall and especially at lower elementary levels in District 1.
- District 6 noted that the cost of providing bus services to all parts of the County is difficult with development occurring far from schools and has been reimbursing some parents to drive kids to school because it is still cheaper than providing bus service (and takes less time for kids to get to school). District 6 noted that having roads plowed in the winter to allow for bus access is also a barrier and that shelters at bus stops would be nice to protect kids from the wind and cold.
- The 4H program has seen huge growth in recent years (including many new residents on smaller lots—micro farms) due to interest in food systems. Cody participation has also increased, although it used to be more Powell kids that participated. There is interest in establishing a barn facility around Cody to support kids on small lots. 4H also provides new homeowners with agriculture/horticulture education.

Agriculture

ATTENDEES

- Don Tolman
- Curt Bales
- Spencer George, George Farms
- Dennis Reed, Reed Farms
- Tom & Coy Churchill, Churchill Farms
- Rebekah Burns, Powell Economic Partnership
- Collin Simson
- Jim Cox
- Kelly Spiering (invited)
- Brian Duyck (invited)

SUMMARY

- Participants highlighted numerous challenges associated with the rapid subdivision of agricultural areas in Park County, including:
 - The need share irrigation headgates and water with multiple landowners, many of whom have a with limited understanding of water rights and conservation;
 - New residents that are unfamiliar with “right to farm” laws and exhibit behavior that violates the rights of longtime property owners;
 - An increase in conflicts between farms and residential developments (i.e., trespassing, complaints about noises and smells associated with agricultural operations, challenges moving equipment safely between fields); and
 - Rising land costs that make it hard for the next generation of farmers to buy land and begin farming (or for existing farmers to buy land for the purposes of “buffering” their operations from future encroachment). Participants noted that land prices were currently 4-5 times higher than what can be farmed profitably, raising concerns about losing farming and ranching as a way of life.
- Participants observed the challenge of balancing protections for agricultural lands/way of life and preserving property rights/land values if next generation doesn’t want to farm (so farmers can sell and retire).
- Factors that influence the viability of agricultural parcels as subdivision occurs were discussed. Participants noted that commercial-scale agriculture needs at least 20 acres (on a square lot, or more if unique shape to accommodate modern equipment) and that the growth of five acre lots for residential development is using up limited agricultural lands. Farmers and ranchers felt that many new residents don’t maintain or use the land effectively and should have smaller lots.
- Participants had some interest (and some skepticism) about conservation easements as method to retain agricultural lands. An important concern was about impacts of easements that limit the crops that can be grown or how the land is used. Tax implications and potential loss of property value (if they decide they want to sell later) were also concerns.

Economic Development

ATTENDEES

- Rebekah Burns, Powell Economic Partnership
- James Klessens, Forward Cody
- Ryan Hauck, Park County Travel Council
- Amy Quick, Wyoming Business Council
- Kristin Fong, Wyoming Business Council
- Kim Terwilleger/Kirsten Yoder, Meeteetse Visitor Center (invited)
- Tina Hoebelheinrich, Cody Chamber (invited)

SUMMARY

- Forward Cody
 - Started by local businesses in 2008 to try to balance tourism economy
 - Focused on attracting industry jobs with higher wages, entrepreneurship programs, and infrastructure development
 - Emphasis on manufacturing that is compatible with community—gun manufacturing, robust broadband (in cities), technology, value added food products
 - Approximately 10% of funding from local governments; 40% from projects; 50% from local business membership
 - Projects have included infrastructure development and business parks
- Powell Economic Partnership (PEP)
 - Funding from City of Powell, AmeriCorps Vista Grant
 - Focused on business development and infrastructure, especially to support agriculture (e.g., niche products like high quality barley, alfalfa, beans, sugar beets) and tourism
 - Opportunities to enhance recreational opportunities (i.e., trails and trail heads) are ongoing through the Outdoor Recreation Collaborative—a group of locals who work with federal partners to advocate for projects. Cedar Mountain trail system is current focus with BLM and BOR.
- Park County Travel Council
 - Park County deals with a lull in tourism outside of summer months, which is an opportunity to attract tourists but also a challenge to sustaining airport activity and tourist-focused businesses.
 - Seeking ways to build out shoulder season with outdoor recreation, conferences, etc.
 - Park County is only the county in Wyoming, besides Teton County, that has a 2% lodging tax. 2022 is 150th anniversary of Yellowstone National Park and visitation is expected to be especially strong.
- Wyoming Business Council
 - Help fund infrastructure for local communities
 - Targeted Industry Studies underway likely regional; statewide study is also out of date
 - Wyoming Main Street and other funding sources and programs available to help build local capacity
 - Not able to give funding directly to businesses
 - Funding goes to cities, counties, tribes - and is then distributed (have to ask for funding each year)

- Cody Airport is 3rd largest airport in state for enplanements (recently expanded)
- Powell Municipal Airport, located on Polecat Bench. Some businesses and rental hangers. Surrounded by federal lands; some oil production.
- More flights coming from regional hubs - Denver, Chicago during summer months
- Key development issues raised by participants include the loss of agricultural lands, sprawling development, housing availability and affordability (especially with more and more tourism-supported jobs), a lack of commercial vacancies in Cody and Powell, poor broadband outside of cities, and the ebb/flow of energy activity (along with high-paying jobs and tax benefits to the County).
- Participants indicated that areas north, west, and south of Powell were most logical for near-term development, including areas along the Cody-Powell Highway, and along Highway 120 toward Montana. It was suggested that infrastructure investments should lead the way for development instead of chasing to keep up.
- Several participants expressed concerns about development occurring in scenic areas and wildlife habitat, which are a key part of local economy.

Arts, History, and Culture

ATTENDEES

- Dakota Russell, Curator, Heart Mountain Interpretive Center; Park County HPC
- Brian Beauvais, Park County Curator/Archivist, HPC
- Brandi Wright, Curator, Homestead Museum
- Dr. Lawrence (Larry) Todd, Archaeology Prof. at CSU/UT-Austin, HPC

SUMMARY

- Participants noted that the Park County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is currently working on nominating a few sites for listing, but is fully reliant on volunteers and grant funding. As a result, the HPC's ability to assess more properties and landscapes is limited. The HPC has applied for CLG grants from the state to pursue outside support (i.e., someone to assist with writing nominations) from time to time.
- The importance of public education was raised by participants to as it pertains to the County's archaeological resources to help limit looting of artifacts, show economic benefits of historic preservation, help property owners identify and protect historic places, and dispel misperceptions that historic preservation severely limits what people can do with their property.
- Several participants noted they would like to see the County do more to protect views and historic landscapes (especially farms and ranches), ensure future land use is compatible with what is existing, preserve access to public lands, and limit visual impacts (like houses up on bare hilltops).
- Opportunities to incorporate background information and policy guidance about the County's historic resources as part of the updated Land Use Plan was also discussed as an opportunity to help support the ongoing efforts of the HPC and other volunteers.