

# Okanogan County Wants to Hear from YOU on the Comprehensive Plan

Now is our chance to shape what the Methow Valley will look like for decades to come.

Comments Due by March 8th

MVCC strongly encourages YOU to comment!

*The trajectory of growth and development in the Methow Valley depends on the will of our community to make our voices heard. Some of us have inherited this home from generations before us, and some of us have chosen this valley for its unique character. Our community is composed of people from very different backgrounds who have one very important thing in common: a deep love for this valley we call home, and an investment in its future.*



## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Under State Law, a Comprehensive Plan is a required blueprint for zoning and future growth. It guides where new homes and businesses will be concentrated, identifies important forest, mineral and agricultural lands, and includes other significant land use policies. A Comp Plan establishes a vision for the future, estimates population growth and describes the tools that will be used to implement the vision while protecting natural resources, quality of life and public safety. Since 1976, MVCC has maintained a strong focus on the framework governing land use in the Methow Valley and Okanogan County.

## Background and Overview

In December 2014, Okanogan County adopted a very flawed Comprehensive Plan that encouraged far more growth than our predicted water supply can be expected to serve. MVCC and Futurewise successfully appealed the Comp Plan in January 2015 in Okanogan County Superior Court. In 2017, Judge Culp ordered a rewrite of the plan by the end of 2018.

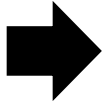
Okanogan County released a Comp Plan update and Scoping Notice in late November 2018 and an updated Comp Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement in July 2019. MVCC provided Scoping Comments and suggested a new proposed alternative (dubbed “The Citizens Alternative”) for inclusion in analysis for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Among other important measures like protection of dark skies and wildlife corridors, the Citizens Alternative provides for land use planning that supports better preparedness for wildfire, increased development pressure and potential water shortages. Over 200 people signed a petition supporting the Citizens’ Alternative.

## What’s Happening Now?

The Okanogan County Planning Department is under new leadership. In 2020, the new Planning Director Stephanie Palmer initiated an internal and legal review of the documents to date. Two updated documents were released on Feb 4, 2019: **An updated draft Comp Plan** and an **Addendum to the DEIS**.

**The revised draft Comp Plan** provides a vision for the county's future and sets up goals and policies that provide direction for elements like land use, recreation, economic development and transportation.

**The Addendum to the DEIS** lays out alternatives that affect the criteria for future development, land use designations, how (by what criteria) growth is directed near cities/towns, unincorporated towns, and rural areas. There are four alternatives that are now being considered in the DEIS – including the Citizens' Alternative (Alt 4).



*THE PUBLIC IS BEING INVITED TO SUBMIT WRITTEN AND VERBAL TESTIMONY ON BOTH OF THESE DOCUMENTS: The Updated Comp Plan and the Addendum to the DEIS.*

## **Suggested Talking Points**

**Your comments can be brief but should address both documents.** In general, the revised Comp Plan and DEIS is much improved, but still needs some work, and clear guidance from public comments will help Planning Staff to improve the final product.

### **In the Comp Plan:**

*MVCC strongly supports the following aspects of the current Plan:*

Major improvements that were added to and are currently included in the Plan include:

- an updated, inclusive Vision Statement (p. 7-8)
- recognition of the importance of consulting government to government with Tribes
- an effort to address concerns about water (p. 15-19), and
- a more comprehensive wildfire section (p.20)

*MVCC also strongly recommends the following improvements to the Plan:*

**Recognize the current water realities.** Most, if not all, of the water in the county is already allocated and rivers and streams do not meet their instream flows in most years. Wells are running dry in some areas. The county needs to recognize that the current hydrograph modeling shows declining flows in the future due to climate change. That needs to be considered in planning for growth. The comprehensive plan needs to recognize the reality that there are not significant amounts of legally and physically available water to serve development in county and especially in the Methow watershed. Instead, the plan should encourage policies that support water conservation, mitigation and storage, and direct residential and commercial development toward cities and towns.

**Improve Wildfire Safety:** The comprehensive plan must go further and direct growth away from areas of high wildfire danger, areas with single lane roads, and areas that do not have two ways out. This is needed to protect people, to protect property, and to save the lives of firefighters.

**Define and Protect Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas:** Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas must be defined to include Department of Wildlife priority habitats and species and Washington State Department of Natural Resources rare plants. Additionally, Okanogan County must comply with the Growth Management Act by including objectives that designate and protect fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas.

**Support Local Agriculture:** The county should work to conserve its agricultural assets. Recommend the county delete the objective that sells out our farms by presuming it will be lost to other uses (p.16) and replace it with an objective that supports protecting and encouraging agriculture for future generations.

**Plan for the future of the whole Methow Valley:** The Comp Plan protects the Methow as a special planning area of its own, but the line stops at Gold Creek – 16 miles up the valley! It’s time to fix this. The Methow More Completely Planned Area should extend the length of the watershed and allow for the creation of sub-area plans to capture the unique character of different parts of the valley.

**Include Maps:** Maps are legally required in the comp plan and help convey valuable information that shows how land use designations and other decisions play out at the landscape scale. Currently no maps have been made available to support the policies and objectives laid out in the proposed plan.

**Viewshed protection:** Finally, there are no goals or objectives in the current Plan that facilitate the development of regulations to prevent ridgetop development or protect night skies from light pollution, except in Alternative 4. Protecting viewsheds, especially in areas dependent on these qualities for economic benefit (i.e. tourism, recreation) is important and needs to be included in the Plan.

These are just some of the top issues MVCC has highlighted. There are many other areas of the comp plan to dig into depending on how deep you’d like to dive!

### **In the DEIS, MVCC supports Alternative 4 because it:**

- Concentrates most growth closer to towns.
- Takes a conservative approach to addressing water supplies.
- Conserves natural resources and promotes land uses that support local agriculture.
- Encourages resilience to wildfires and other impacts of climate change.
- Identifies and protects wildlife and migration corridors and considers our important mule deer population.
- Minimizes conflict between residential and other uses of Rural lands by creating different designations.
- Improves and enhances recreational opportunities; and
- Creates goals to protect our night sky from excessive light pollution, and our skylines from ridgetop development.

### **WHAT MVCC DOES NOT SUPPORT:**

**Alternative 1** – the “No Action Alternative” which essentially keeps a flawed outdated Comp Plan in place and is not legally defensible.

**Alternative 2** – Considers “historically low” population growth, which we already know is not accurate. The Methow Valley alone has grown by 31% between 2005 and 2020, pre-pandemic.

**Alternative 3** – Also considers “historically low” population growth though it does direct growth toward towns, limits growth in unincorporated towns so that it takes place as water and sewer are available. Alternative 3 also ties rural growth to physical and legal water availability. This is all a step in the right direction, however

**Alternative 3 does not address many additional important issues raised in Alternative 4 (the Citizens Alternative) such as:**

- More definition and direction for permitting different uses in Rural areas (prevents conflict, provides more assurance against incompatible activities, and allows developers of some activities more clarity about where those uses are appropriate).
- More provisions for wildfire protection and preparedness.
- Provisions for overlays that would allow prevention of ridgetop development.
- Dark sky protection

## How to Comment

Public participation will make a BIG difference! Make sure you comment on Comp Plan **and** DEIS Addendum – both are important. It is ok to keep it simple and only choose a few points for each, but make sure they are the ones that matter most to **you**.

### 1. PREPARE AND SUBMIT WRITTEN COMMENTS:

**Mark your calendars: Deadline is March 8, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.**

**Email:** [mallen@co.okanogan.wa.us](mailto:mallen@co.okanogan.wa.us)

**Snail mail or hand delivery to:**

Okanogan County Regional Planning Commission  
123 5th Ave N. Suite 130, Okanogan WA 98840.

*Tips for Comments that make a difference:*

- Be positive: First say what you like. It is important to recognize the progress being made in the plan.
- Lead up to areas where the plan could do better and say why it matters (*e.g. need to add an option that allows communities to restrict ridgetop development and protect dark skies for tourism; need to do more to protect first responders during wildfire*)
- State your support for 4<sup>th</sup> Alternative – WHY is important (hint: choose from ideas above)
- BONUS: say why “no action alternative” (Alternative 1) is a bad idea!

### 2. PROVIDE VERBAL TESTIMONY

*Please also consider offer verbal testimony to the planning commission on March 8, it makes a BIG difference for the Planning Commission to hear personal views. You can keep it simple – verbal testimony is limited to 5 minutes or less. Contact us if you would like ideas for the perfect 2 minute verbal comment!*

**March 8, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.**

Okanogan County Regional Planning Commission Meeting Online via Webex:  
<https://okanoganwa.webex.com/okanoganwa/j.php?MTID=m7255a60868510bd45862c083f65c9345>  
Meeting number (access code): 146 977 3703  
Meeting password: i7Z76Me2Z35  
Join by phone: 1-844-992-4726 United States Toll Free

Verbal testimony will be limited to 5 minutes per speaker.

### 3. SPREAD THE WORD AND RECRUIT A FRIEND OR TWO!

*Via email, social media, while out on a ski*

Updates to be posted on: <http://mvcitizens.org/comprehensive-plan/>

*Please feel free to contact us with further questions!*