

## CHAPTER 6

### COMMERCIAL AND RESORT DEVELOPMENT

#### A. ISSUES

##### **Commercial Character**

As a resort community, tourism and its related commercial services **are** the base economy of Teton County. Since the late 1800's, when Yellowstone National Park was established, Jackson Hole has served the dual role of gateway community and destination resort. Visitation to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks steadily increased through the first part of this century, and today stands at about 3 million annually. Dude ranches in Teton County have accommodated visitors since the early 1900's, and continue to operate today. The growth and development of the Jackson Hole and Grand Targhee ski areas over the past 25 years, combined with other winter recreational opportunities the area has to offer, have solidified Teton County's position as a year-round destination resort.

However, the focus of the tourism industry has changed. Employment growth, sales tax revenues, and other indicators of economic growth have increased at a greater rate than park visitation. These trends are indicators that Teton County has become a destination in and of itself in summer and in winter as a recreation-oriented resort.

Until about 25 years ago, most commercial uses were concentrated in the downtown area of Jackson. Since then, commercial development has spread rapidly along the highways that also serve as the entrance corridors to Town. These newer commercial structures tend to be much larger than those downtown, giving the west and south highway areas a different scale and fabric. Strip development of this type detracts from the downtown area and the community's western image, both of which are vital to the area's continued economic health.

The introduction and proliferation of outlet stores is another facet of community concerns about retail growth. A big issue, however, is their effect on community character. Teton County capitalizes on a rather unique outdoor, recreational visitor experience. A community cannot project that image with outlet stores that offer familiar product lines available in most suburban shopping centers anywhere in the United States.

The battles over outlet stores and other commercial developments have caused the community to examine the type of tourism it offers. Jackson Hole is in jeopardy of changing from an outdoor recreation-oriented resort to a place where a visitor's primary purpose is to shop. "Retail tourism" appears to develop in a cycle that feeds upon itself: the more outlet stores a community has, the more people want to shop there, and therefore, the more stores want to locate there.

Destination shopping at factory outlet malls is not the only threat to Teton County's image. In order to keep the focus of tourism on outdoor, resource-oriented recreation, generic carnival-type facilities and amusements must be actively discouraged. Teton County's uniqueness as a destination for visitors is, for the most part, defined by its natural splendor and the quality of the experience that it offers. That quality experience can quickly be diluted if the visitor comes face to face with go-cart tracks, waterslides, and a strip full of fast-food chain restaurants and motels exactly like those found back home.

Although increased visitor commercial development has its benefits, it also has costs. The demand for employees exacerbates already severe housing problems. The demand for services, such as roads and police, places a difficult and expensive burden on a comparatively small local population. Although tourism will continue as the primary industry, some restraint needs to be exercised so that tourism itself is prevented from irreparably harming the qualities of the community that make it both a desirable resort and a desirable place to live. Preserving and emphasizing these qualities is clearly in the community's best long-term economic

interests. Toward these ends, whenever issues in this chapter require a choice to be made between the quality of the visitor experience versus an increased level of tourism, this Plan's intent is to emphasize the quality of Jackson Hole as a resort and a community.

### **Ranching**

Ranching remains an important part of the local economy, but not in terms of dollars and cents and numbers of people employed. Today the major contributions from ranching are its representation of Teton County's history, its cultural heritage and the wide open expansive views it offers. The analysis of ranching issues and discussion of strategies to address these issues has, therefore, been included in Chapter 3, Community Character.

### **Resort Growth**

Teton County's three ski resorts all have significant growth potential (described in Chapter 2). The resorts are obviously important to the community; they make Teton County a two-season resort area and add to the quality of life for local residents.

Resorts too have their costs, much of which is passed on to the community at large. Employees must be housed, utility systems maintained, road networks and transit services kept up, and police, fire protection and social services provided. A regulatory approach is needed which allows these impacts to be mitigated, while permitting the resorts to modernize and grow.

### **Industrial Uses**

Resort areas do not need (nor want) factories, assembly plants, suburban office parks, or high-tech research and development facilities. However, resorts do need basic commercial services like any other community, plus a few specialized ones as well. Auto and equipment repair, food and beverage distributors, cleaning and linen service and supply, shipping and receiving, and construction services are but a few of the "heavy commercial/light industrial" services needed in the community. But vacant land suitably located and zoned for these services is scarce. Most services and facilities of this type need to be on or near major streets to conduct business efficiently, which tends to place them in areas of high visibility. In recent years, any proposal to designate land in Teton County for any heavy commercial or light industrial use has been fraught with controversy.

Under the Teton County land development regulations in effect prior to adoption of this Plan, many nonresidential uses were allowed in low-density residential zones under conditional use permits. This meant that residents always had to be on the lookout for commercial or industrial conditional use permit requests in their neighborhoods. Zoning alone could not be relied upon to keep such uses out.

Finally, locations need to be identified for public facilities and services of an industrial nature. Bus barns, maintenance yards, impound lots, recycling centers, and animal shelters are not popular in residential neighborhoods, nor in scenic meadows. They are, however, essential services for which locations must be provided.

## **B. SUMMARY STATEMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Goals:**

1. Economic development efforts shall be consistent with community character, natural resources and affordable housing goals.
2. To preserve and protect the economic vitality of the community by ensuring that the quality of the natural and built environment and unique western character are maintained.

## **Objectives:**

1. To achieve commercial development which is sensitive to the scale and character of Teton County and which minimizes disruption of existing neighborhoods.
2. To ensure that commercial development places the most minimal possible economic and natural resource demands on the community.
3. To control sprawl and strip commercial development, and to provide for the effective control of commercial signs.
4. To develop effective mechanisms for providing employee housing.
5. To encourage the continuation of ranching and to minimize the disruption of agricultural activities by new development.
6. To encourage further economic growth only when the higher priority objectives of community character, natural resources, and affordable housing are achieved.
7. To allow resort expansion only in a community-wide context, and to achieve balance between the community and the resorts.

## **C. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

### **Commercial Character**

Strategies for achieving commercial uses and activities which are sensitive to and consistent with the community's scale and character are primarily regulatory. For example, certain outdoor amusements are, by their very nature, incompatible with Teton County's image and the community character objectives of this plan. There is no rational basis to allow them anywhere in the County.

As stated previously, the scale of commercial structures in the Jackson core area tends to be modest. A two-story structure on the Town Square, built lot line to lot line on a "standard" town lot, contains 15,000 square feet of gross floor area. On a percentage basis, very few structures in the downtown area approach the maximum height of 35 feet. It is this scale, and the intimate pedestrian-friendly environment that accompanies it, that is the essence of a vital commercial area which attracts visitors from all over the world. Preservation of that scale is the rationale for implementation of a limit to the maximum floor area of non-residential structures, not only in Jackson, but in Wilson and other areas of Teton County as well.

Signage is another design issue which should be addressed for the desired commercial character to be achieved. The sign codes in effect in Jackson and Teton County prior to adoption of this Plan were considered progressive as compared to most communities. Even so, it was still possible to erect large, unattractive signs depending upon the size of the building, its orientation to the street, or the type of materials chosen by the sign maker.

A sign should say as much about the community as it does the business or product it announces. An effective regulatory strategy is to design models for each type of sign allowed (free-standing, wall, directional, etc.) and incorporate them directly into the sign code. Along with limitations of sign bulk and materials, the models convey the community's standards on signage clearly to the business person and sign maker.

Franchise businesses and outlet stores already exist in Teton County, especially in the Town of Jackson. Given this fact, there is little (if anything) that can be legally undertaken to prevent more such uses from being established. This Plan does not advocate protectionism, nor restraint of trade in any form. But clearly, the proliferation of outlet stores, chains, and "destination shopping" raises character concerns, and the community has determined it does not intend to encourage the future development of such uses. If outlets and chains want to come to the community, they will adhere to the same standards by complying with the

same limitations on size of structures and the same architectural standards and signage requirements to which every other commercial venture is subject.

As with signage, an effective technique for achieving high-quality, character sensitive commercial development is to incorporate site planning and design models directly into the regulations. Commercial projects will all be designed differently from one part of the County to another, depending upon the character type to which their design responds.

### **Town Square**

Special effort must be taken to preserve the unique function, character, and qualities of the Town Square area. The Square is an existing urban environment. It is intensely pedestrian, yet automobile traffic has increased annually to the point where traffic management and parking have become critical during summertime peak periods. As a planning strategy, the Town and County should investigate the following:

1. Alternative routing for through-traffic, including multiple routes to avoid concentrating traffic downtown.
2. Removal of some on-street parking to ease congestion and enhance pedestrian safety.
3. Better directional signage.
4. Relocation of tour bus stop to a less congested area of the Square.
5. A parking district, or some other viable mechanism for increasing useable parking.
6. Better transportation and pedestrian links to hotels and off-street parking areas.

Over the years, the types of businesses downtown have become increasingly tourist oriented. However, there are still services and stores which cater to residents, or both residents and visitors. The two banks and the post office are important to residents, while tourists and locals mix at downtown barber shops, sport shops and restaurants. The local identity of downtown will diminish somewhat as the main post office becomes a branch, the library moves to West Jackson, and the wildlife museum moves north of Town, unless they are replaced, at least in part, by businesses with a local draw. If the role of downtown Jackson is to serve residents and visitors alike, the Town and County must encourage locally-oriented businesses and services to remain, by offering incentives and adopting regulations, as needed.

### **Resort Growth**

It has been recognized previously in this Plan that all of the County's resorts have growth potential, particularly the ski resorts. However, in planning for that growth, all of the resorts face different challenges and are responding to varying circumstances of environment and location within the community. A special "resort zoning district", with strict, uniform standards and requirements, was explored early in this planning process, but it proved to be unworkable.

A better regulatory strategy is to recognize the differences among the county's resorts. Any regulatory approach should be flexible, because of the differing limitations and opportunities exhibited at the existing resorts, in order to address the wide range of potential uses, functions, and scales of resort development. But above all, regulations should incorporate standards and criteria which require each resort to formulate a master plan for its future development in a community-wide context, considering both Town and County concerns.

Following adoption of this Plan, the Town and County have initiated a study to provide planning capacity guidelines within which each resort can develop its own master plan. The capacity guidelines would provide a range for each resort's ultimate development, taking into account:

- existing and planned bed base;

- capacity of the recreation resource (mountain or other);
- impacts on public facilities and services and community character; and
- the overall balance between resort and residential development in Teton County.

### **Balance of Growth**

In order to preserve a sense of community, that is to say, a liveable community that meets the economic and social needs of its residents, residential, commercial, and resort growth must be kept in balance. Tourism is the lifeblood of the community, so accommodations and commercial services for visitors must be provided. At the same time, permanent residents and seasonal service workers need affordable housing and commercial services of their own. No one growth sector should be allowed to strain community resources by growing at a faster rate, or to a greater ultimate size, than the others.

**Resort development** - Growth at Teton County's resorts can benefit the community as a whole if kept within a community perspective. Any resort development, however, will generate the need for some employee housing. Depending on the location and functional relationship of each resort to the community (and all three major resorts are different in this regard), some employee housing should be provided on site. The resort benefits the community, but the community should not be saddled with the entire burden of providing employee housing and transportation systems for resort employees. The community benefits the resort, but the resort should not be required to house all of its employees on site, as those employees are an important component of a diverse, healthy community. The issue is **balance**.

Resorts also should relate to the community by being available to the community. Recreational and cultural amenities should be available to the community at large, as they presently are. Commercial development within the resort also should be in balance with the community as well as the resort itself. Commercial services should be provided in resort areas to meet the needs of visitors and resort area residents, but these services should not be of such a specialty or size that they become an attraction to the community at large.

**Commercial growth** - Commercial development, including non-resort area lodging, must also be in balance with the community of which it is a part. In this case, "balance" also includes scale and character. Most of Jackson and Teton County remain characterized by structures of modest size. This contributes to what urban designers often refer to as "fabric" or "quality," and new commercial development must be sensitive to this issue. Limitations on the maximum size (bulk, scale, mass) of new commercial structures has helped to preserve the character of other resort communities and would be of benefit here. Without such limitations, economic pressures will undoubtedly result in larger, more "efficient" structures, which would eventually cause undesirable shifts in community character.

The type of commercial facilities and services should also be in balance with the community. Jackson Hole, and Teton County generally, take pride in offering a unique visitor experience based upon the area's natural splendor. Generic carnival-type facilities, amusements or visitor attractions which are not community-oriented, and the "destination shopping" atmosphere taking over the downtown are inconsistent with this approach to tourism, and as a planning strategy, should be discouraged. Like the resorts, commercial development and the community benefit each other, and should also share responsibilities for employee housing.

**Residential development** - Perhaps the single most important key to maintaining a diverse, balanced community is to provide for a variety of affordable housing opportunities. Any community, especially a resort community, needs a diversity of people possessing a wide variety of skills. Housing opportunities for residents should keep pace with resort and commercial development. The second home market should be discouraged from competing for the County's existing affordable housing stock. Areas should be provided for higher density employee housing, as well as moderately priced townhomes, cluster homes, and single-family units, consistent with community character objectives. Specific strategies for affordable housing are examined in Chapter 5 of the Comprehensive Plan.

In summary, balancing the growth of resorts, commercial facilities and services, and residential opportunities is an effective, workable planning strategy for maintaining a healthy and diverse community. Figure 6.1 provides a simplified illustration of this concept.

### **Industrial Development**

The most apropos way to provide for necessary industry is to designate more suitable land for heavy commercial/light industrial uses. Criteria for determining land suitable for this type of development have already been written by the Teton County planning office. From these criteria, the most appropriate site(s) should be shown on the Comprehensive Plan Map, and the Character District Map.

As discussed previously, industrial uses are potentially controversial wherever they are located. Therefore, regulations should incorporate standards for architecture and materials, site design, and landscaping.

## **D. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In recognition of the economic and community character objectives of this plan, the following actions are recommended:

1. In recognition of the character, fabric and amount of commercial development existing in most of Teton County, limit the gross square footage of commercial structures through regulatory means.
2. Do not allow outdoor amusements of a carnival nature in any character district in Jackson or Teton County.
3. Adopt a sign code which requires signage to: (a) reflect the community's values for character and image, and (b) be consistent with design and architectural standards for structures.
4. Incorporate models for signage and commercial design directly into land development regulations.
5. Adopt a flexible regulatory approach to resort development, but regulate resort development to achieve a balance among commercial services, residential opportunities, and resorts. Develop meaningful criteria and standards for balance.
6. Limit areas subject to additional commercial development. Allow commercial services only where clearly needed to serve existing and planned residential and resort development.
7. Limit new lodging development to the Jackson core area and to resorts, with adequate commercial services linked by efficient nonmotorized transportation.
8. Designate suitable areas for needed heavy commercial/light industrial services and facilities.
9. Permit businesses to operate in conjunction with residences, where appropriate and consistent with character objectives.
10. Following adoption of this Plan, initiate a study to provide planning capacity guidelines within which each resort can develop its own master plan.

**Figure 6.1**  
**Community Balance Model**

