

Opinion Piece for the Newport Miner  
August 12, 2022

Responsible Growth \* NE Washington submitted a statement of appeal to the Pend Oreille Hearing Examiner on August 10, 2022. The subject of the appeal was the second DNS (Determination of Nonsignificance) issued by Greg Snow, Community Development Director, on July 27, 2022. It was for the County's Comprehensive Plan Update; amendments to the critical area code and development regulations. We appealed the 2021 DNS issued by Mr. Snow and won that appeal, which resulted in the updated 2022 DNS. The question arises - why are we using our energies and resources and the County's on these appeals? The most obvious answer is that the 2022 DNS remains "clearly erroneous."

A second reason for this appeal is the County's proposal that 65% of the County be rezoned and County owned public lands currently zoned PL for public use only is eliminated and light and/or heavy industry could be permitted along with other new uses. These proposals are drastic changes to the County's land use policies. These amendments have the potential to change the physical landscape of Pend Oreille County.

RG \* NEW believes that a rezone of this size warrants an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement). An EIS is needed in order to understand the full scope of any individual and cumulative adverse environmental impacts in the newly allowed uses.

A third reason RG \* NEW is appealing is we lost confidence in the former County Commissioners to do the right thing when they enthusiastically endorsed a major industrial polluter. That erosion of confidence continues with the current Commissioners, especially when statements are made of being "shovel ready" for development once the Comp Plan and Dev Regs are adopted. There is a real push for unplanned heavy, urban-type, industrial development as is evident by the County's support of the PacWest smelter and the Merkle Cryptomining Facility. RG \* NEW is not opposed to "responsible" economic development and living wage jobs that are planned out, compatible with our rural lifestyle and that have minimal adverse environmental impacts.

When it comes to making decisions on land use the County is bound by the policies and regulations found in Pend Oreille County's Comprehensive Plan, Development Regulations, and Critical Area Code documents. These critical documents must align with the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). There are county officials who dislike the GMA as they believe it hinders economic growth and development. By contrast, the GMA provides a structured and judicious framework for responsible land use planning and regulated development while protecting the environment.

RG \* NEW is using the legal route that is available to us to monitor the County's land use policies and procedures and to ensure that Pend Oreille County doesn't end up looking like the Post Falls/Rathdrum Prairie or the North/South Highway 2 corridor.

We didn't undertake this appeal lightly, half-heartedly, or with malice. Our goal in this appeal is to end up with a much stronger Comprehensive Plan, Dev. Regs, and Critical Area Codes. We want to see regulations and codes that will protect our productive forests, agricultural lands, open spaces, air, ground and surface waters, soils, health, and rural lifestyle from adverse environmental impacts. If we don't do it, who will?

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