

Draft land use plan to be considered by county planning commish

By ALEX HARGRAVE
alex@buffalobulletin.com

A draft comprehensive land use plan is set to be presented to the Johnson County Planning and Zoning Commission at its next meeting.

The county land use plan steering committee, composed of 17 county residents of various backgrounds, expertise and geographic location, has convened monthly since September 2024. Contractor Y2 Consultants wrote the plan with the committee's guidance.

Johnson County's planner, Jim Waller, said that the plan, and its rollout, aims to educate county residents about land use.

"The plan is saying what is important to us and then how to potentially go about making sure that what's important to us is protected," he said. "No one is keen on putting in regulation. Nothing in our goals equals regulation."

Johnson County currently does not have zoning regulations, which dictate how land can be used in specific areas. A survey of county residents did not yield a clear consensus on whether to implement land use regulations, according to a summary of the results. The survey, and conversations among the members of the steering committee, guided the direction of the document.

For that reason, the plan emphasizes the importance of educating the public about land use. Waller said that this plan and its rollout can show people the tie between land use planning and potential land use conflicts, including as data centers, gravel pits and wind turbines, for example.

"What we're going to see with the plan is hopefully getting more education out there, because if it becomes important for us to not allow agricultural land to get gobbled up, we have to figure out what to do with land use," he said. "What to do with land use should be driven by the public, not (the) planning and zoning (commission)."

The plan includes goals and vision for the county, future land use maps and

a trends and conditions technical report. The four overarching goals outlined in the plan are: preserve and protect natural resources, champion character and way of life, prepare for changes and shifts and build county-wide partnerships.

"It really does specify why we all love to be here," Waller said of the vision and goals. "We need to have a future where we do respect and appreciate — and don't contradict — our rural character and way of life."

Every county in Wyoming is required by state statute to have a comprehensive land use plan. A comprehensive plan creates an overall blueprint for how a community will grow. The county's current land use plan was adopted in 2005.

The future land use map is not regulatory either, but it identifies areas that are either more or less

suitable for development and functions as a consistent reference for land use decisions, subdivision review and coordinated growth, according to the document. Certain areas were identified as "growth areas" based on proximity to existing infrastructure, including paved

roads, and emergency services.

"(Land use) is an emotional issue, and I think it's a good plan," Waller said.

He said that having an updated plan is important when it comes to the county's collaboration with other entities, such as federal land managers.

"Sometimes plans are how we get to have good conversations about land use planning with other entities," Waller said. "Without a plan, it makes it difficult to have a seat at the table."

An example of that necessity is the Biden administration's moratorium on coal leasing that was eventually reversed under the Trump administration, Waller said.

"A plan can give you that socioeconomic footing to help take that natural resource plan with consideration so that federal decisions don't hurt the

county as badly," he said.

The finalized draft will be presented to the county planning commission at its meeting at 5 p.m. on Aug. 4 at the county planning department at 26 North DeSmet Avenue. Waller said that the commission most likely won't vote to approve the document at this meeting but will set timelines for its review and schedule open house meetings in Buffalo and Kaycee.

After the planning commission's approval, the document will be submitted to the Johnson County Commission for review and consideration.

THERE ARE SI

**That's why everyone
Gospel Meeting hos
of Christ, Sunday, A
Wednesday, August**

Our speaker, Mr. Kev
Wyoming, will preser
centered on the them
through the gospel.

Theme: "Renewing y
Sunday AM Class - "I

Relationship with C
Sunday AM Sermon

Relationship with C
Sunday PM Sermon -
in God"

Monday PM Class - "
Tuesday PM Class - "
Commitment"

Wednesday PM Class

Confidence in God

Whether you're young

encouragement of G

for this special oppor

message preached, an

Christian lives.

Dates and Times:

Sunday, August 2 -

10 a.m., 11 a.m., and

Monday - Wednesd

Please plan to attend

at 1 p.m. on August 2