

Coding Character: Part Two

**Promoting Vibrant
Communities Through a Good
Land Use Code.**

Folks frequently stop by the VARD office with questions about a potential property or business purchase. After a few questions about development history, political sensibilities, observations on the local market, or the prognosis on upcoming powder conditions, everyone always seems to focus on one question:

“What’s going to happen to Teton Valley?”



In most cases, folks see enormous social, economic, and cultural potential in Teton Valley, but have a nagging fear of another poorly managed development boom. There is a nearly universal desire for more slow, steady, and smarter growth as opposed to the boom bust cycles of the past. But are we there yet? Are we ready for stability? Intact open spaces, abundant wildlife, and thriving cities are all ingredients for our desired Teton Valley Character and charm.

Any investment outcome on a home, business, or other property will depend almost entirely on maintaining this special character. The specter of empty storefronts, sullied landscapes, and thousands of vacant lots is enough to scare off the next generation of potential investment.

By keeping our rural spaces rural and encouraging growth in our cities, we can ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for Teton Valley. A good land use code is essential in achieving this goal.

Let's revisit the Frameworks Map.

To reiterate, this map contains the following "character" areas:

Foothill areas shown in the fluorescent green

Ag-Wetland areas in the light blue. Waterway Corridors, the tendrils extending from the Ag-Wetland Zone.

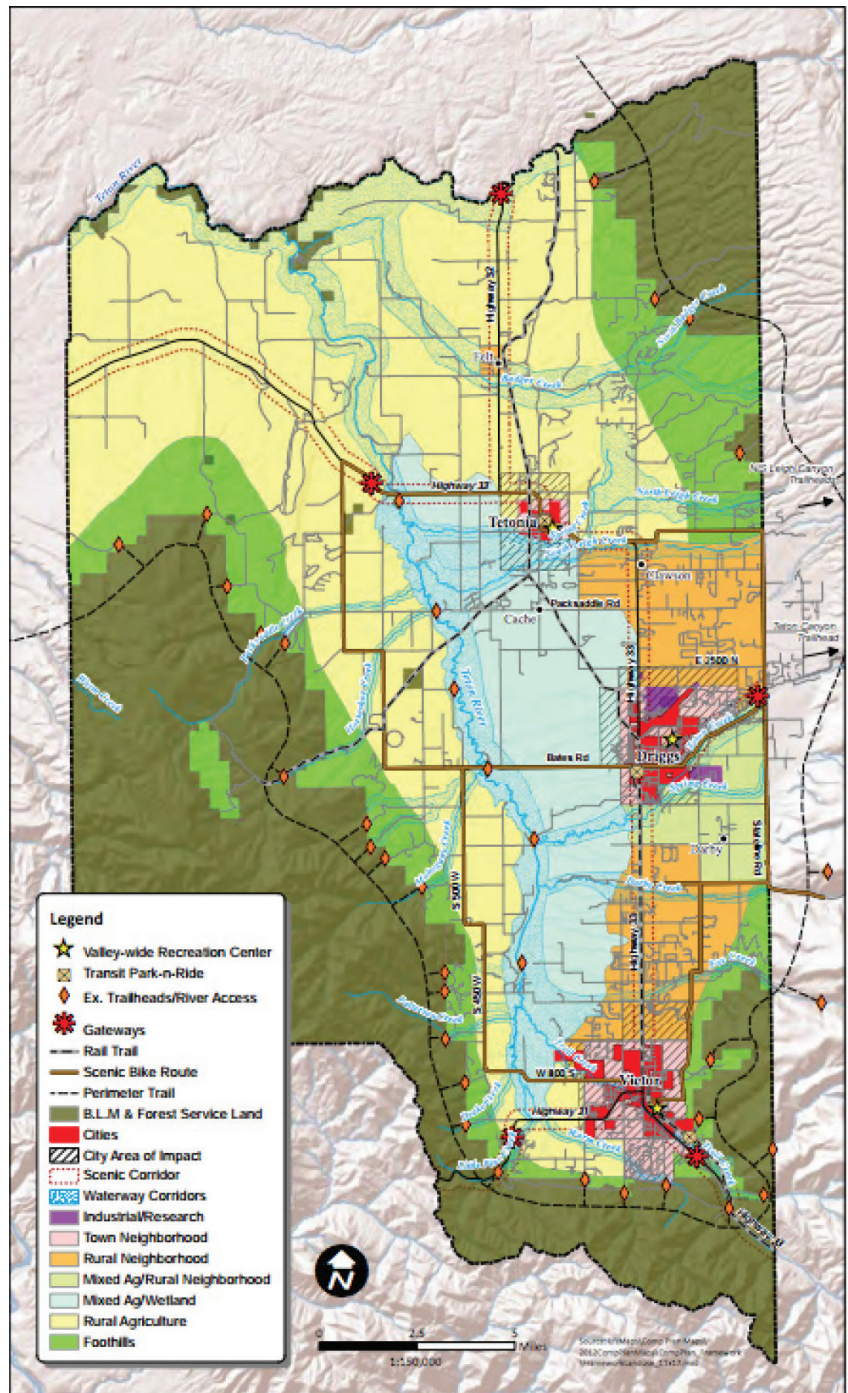
Rural Areas shown in yellow

Agriculture-Rural Neighborhoods in orange.

The Mixed-Agriculture Rural Neighborhood in lime green.

Industrial/Research areas in Purple

Town Neighborhoods in Pink.



In our last issue, **Coding Character: Part One**, we explored the rural qualities of the Foothill, Ag-Wetland, Waterway Corridors, and Rural Areas.

In **Coding Character: Part Two**, we'll delve into the more populous areas of the county: Agriculture-Rural Neighborhoods, Mixed-Agriculture Rural Neighborhoods, Industrial/Research, and Town Neighborhoods.

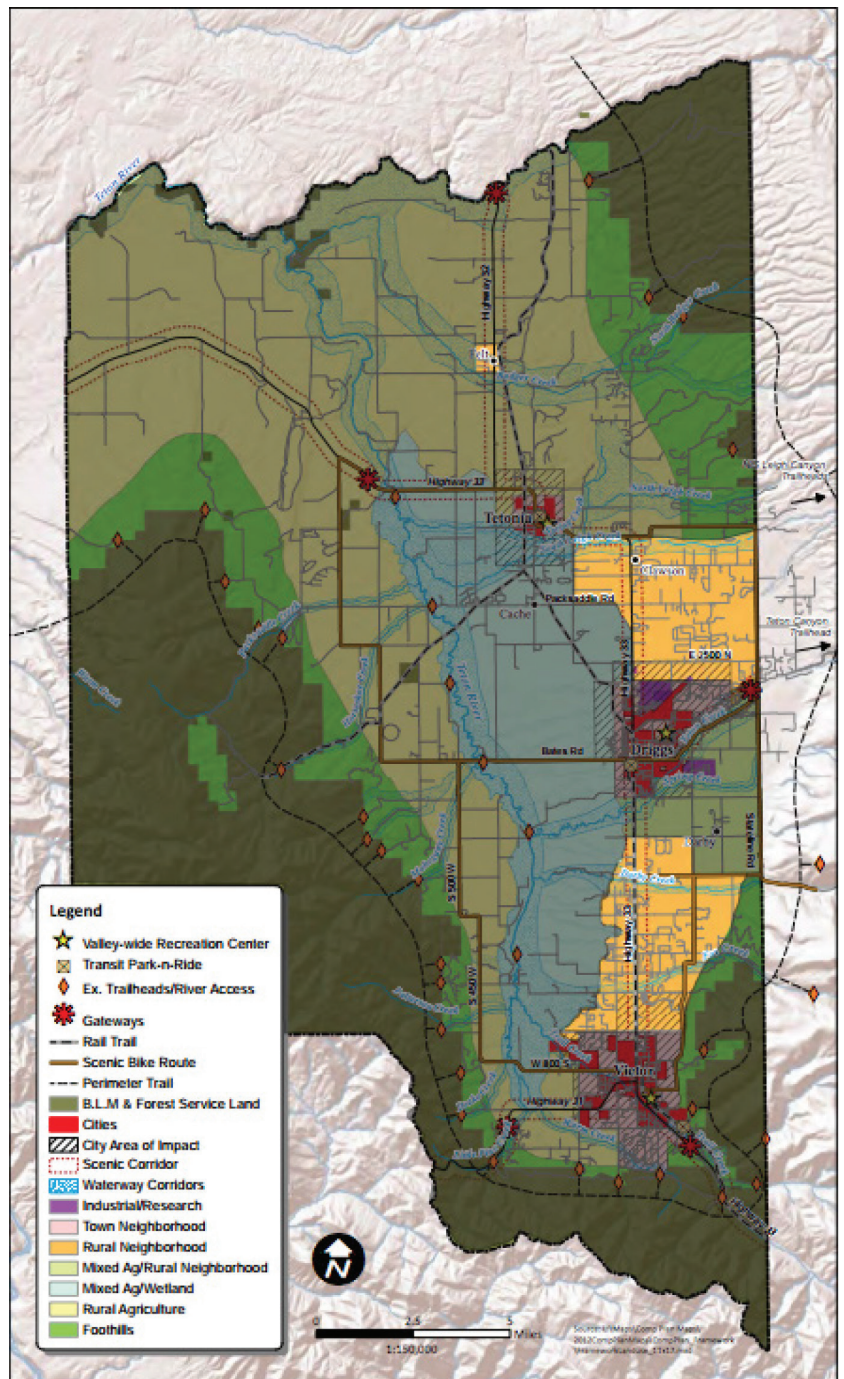
Our economic viability lies in our ability to preserve what makes Teton Valley special. Moose, elk, bears, and other wildlife wander through the valley and up into the world's most famous national parks. The Teton River and its tributaries provide some of the best fishing on the planet. Fields that roll up to the iconic Teton peaks is a scene that cannot be found anywhere but here. Outdoor recreation opportunities are limitless, with world-class skiing, hiking, and biking being located right out our back door. The more we embrace the things that make Teton Valley special, the stronger our economy will become.

Agricultural Rural Neighborhoods: We turn now to “Drictor” (the land between Driggs and Victor) & “Dritonia” (the land between Driggs and Tetonia). These are the orange “Agricultural Rural Neighborhood” areas in the Comp Plan.

Agriculture-Rural Neighborhoods in orange.

Here’s what the Comp Plan recommends for these areas:

- Ⓒ *A transition between the cities and the agricultural lands of the county.*
- Ⓒ *Homesites on medium-sized lots clustered together to protect open space.*
- Ⓒ *Neighborhood parks, pathways, and beautification efforts.*
- Ⓒ *Pathway connections to other neighborhoods and the cities.*
- Ⓒ *Contiguous open spaces that are not chopped up between subdivisions.*



Again, we're faced with the question of unquantified density. How big is a "medium-sized" lot? Current zoning allows 2.5 acre lots - should this be considered medium density? Should 5-acre or 10-acre zoning be considered in some areas? Let's consider what one can build on any given lot in this area currently:

- Ⓒ *A home of unlimited size.*
- Ⓒ *An additional guest house up to 3,500SF,*
- Ⓒ *And several garages, barns, silos, and outbuildings*

As many of us know, Teton County has over 7,000 unbuilt lots, and most of them were created in this 2.5 acre zone. So, perhaps we should ask ourselves ***how has the current 2.5-acre scheme performed in terms of shaping desired growth patterns?***

And what about open space? The Comp Plan calls for "well-defined open space areas that connect to provide corridors." However, the current 2.5-acre zoning has created the exact opposite development patterns — ***Drictor and Dritonia have more housing than our cities!*** The current 2.5 acre zoning scheme has allowed for a shotgun pattern of growth that has parcelized our open spaces and created a vast oversupply of residential lots.



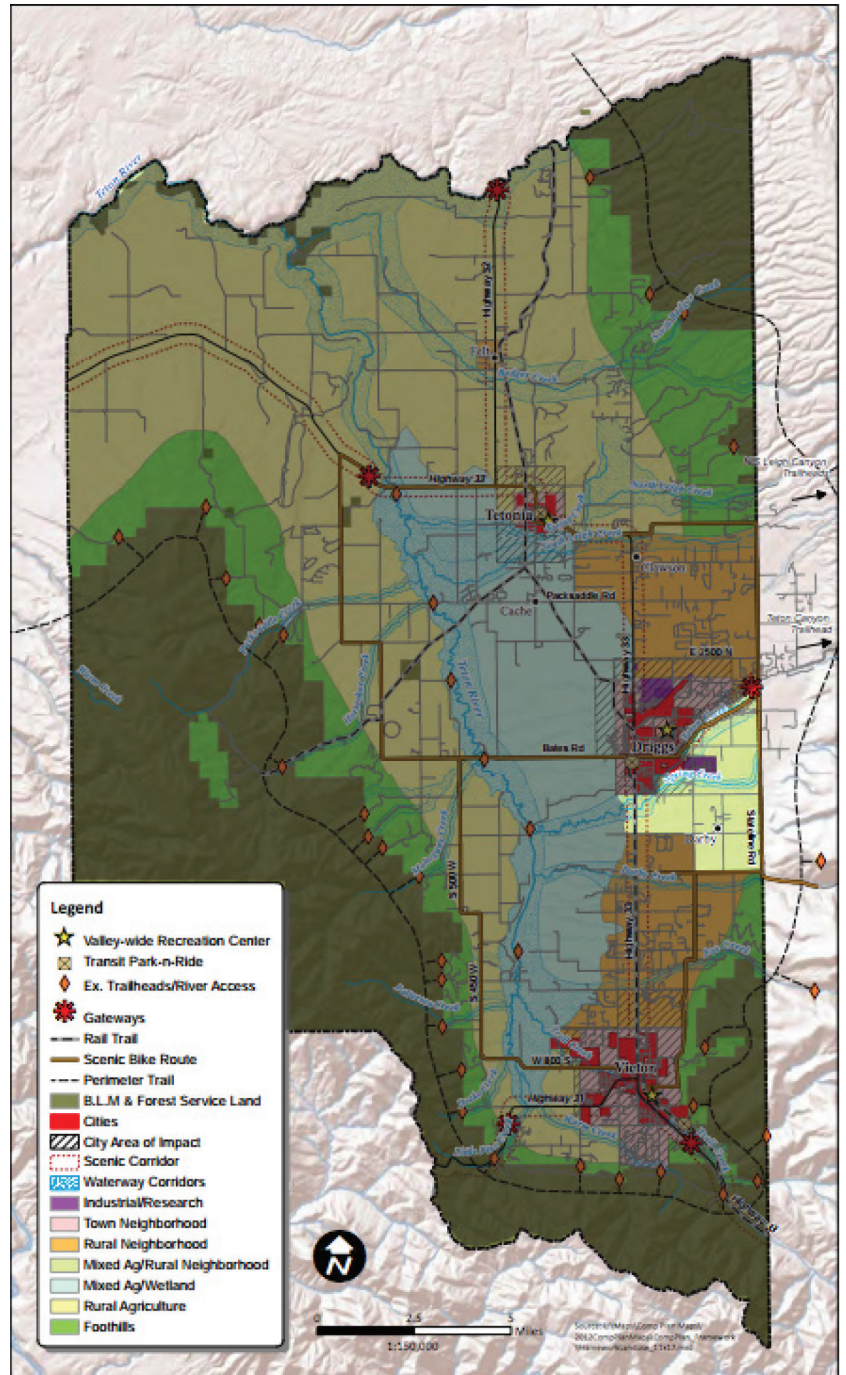
2.5-acre zoning has led to a huge overproduction of lots and many unfinished developments

Mixed Agriculture— Rural Neighborhood: The lime-green area south of Driggs is what the Comp Plan terms as “Mixed Agriculture - Rural Neighborhood.” This location is distinct from the orange Drictor and Dritonia areas because it has not been subjected to rampant subdivisions. Large potato farms and other agricultural uses dominate the area, as does the historic Darby townsite.

The Mixed-Agriculture Rural Neighborhood in lime green..

Here’s what the Comp Plan recommends for this area:

- Ⓞ *Farming and ranching*
- Ⓞ *Large lots with medium-sized lots in the Darby Townsite*
- Ⓞ *Placing homes and buildings out of scenic areas and wildlife habitat whenever possible*



The Darby Townsite is a distinguishing feature in this area. It was settled in 1889-90 and was home to several mills, a school, and a former LDS church that is now a satellite campus for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). It is a unique collection of small lots surrounded by large farms. The Comp Plan's intent for this area is to explore ways to move future homesites from surrounding farm lands into the historic townsite.

One means of achieving this is through implementing what is known as a "transfer of development rights" or TDR program. Rather than building homes on subdivisions throughout these productive farm lands, developers would have the ability to purchase these potential homesites and place them in the townsite. It would then have the potential for more development because development would be relocated away from surrounding farmland. Currently, the draft code proposes that this zone is scrapped and is zoned as the yellow "Rural Agriculture" areas in the more remote areas of the county. Is removing this zone and replacing it with the yellow Rural Agriculture zoning appropriate? (Refer to Frameworks Map on page 3).

Or, does the uniqueness of the Darby area deserve special treatment? There are many other townsites in the county such as Felt, Cache, and Clawson — should we consider using the Mixed-Agriculture-Agriculture approach in these areas?



Darby is a historic townsite surrounded by productive farmland.



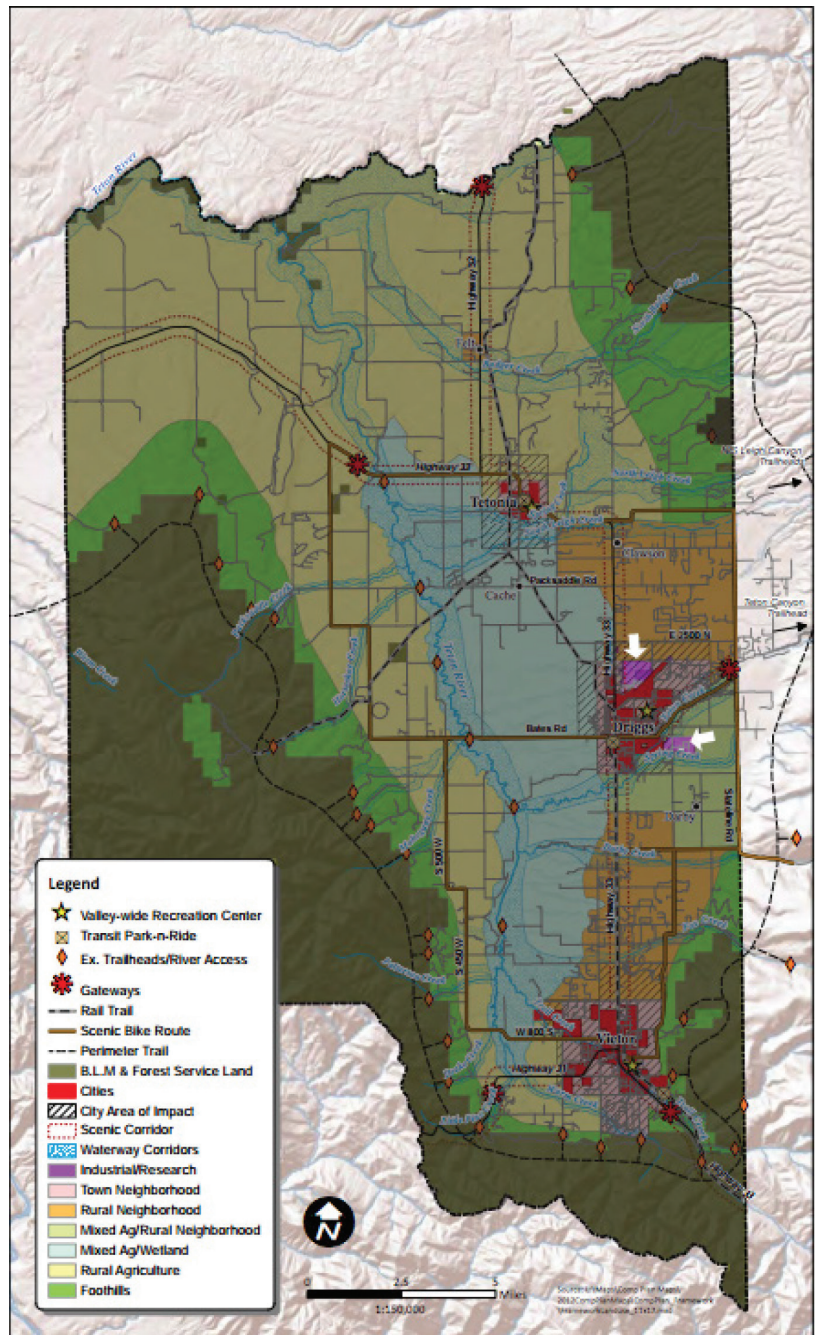
Existing industrial parks like Driggs Centre are mostly empty.

Industrial/Research areas are lands designated in the county for industrial uses. The Comp Plan's intent with the Industrial/Research zone is pretty straight-forward basically industrial uses in the county should be located here. However, there are other existing industrial uses outside of these areas, particularly along Highway 33 between Driggs and Victor. Should these existing industrial uses be encouraged to move to the areas in purple? Or should the Industrial/Research zone be used in areas where there is existing industry?

Industrial/Research areas in Purple.

Here's what the Comp Plan recommends for this area:

- 🕒 *Light manufacturing*
- 🕒 *Heavy industrial uses such as cement and gravel crushing operations*
- 🕒 *Pathway connections to cities*
- 🕒 *Well-maintained roads connecting to Highway 33*

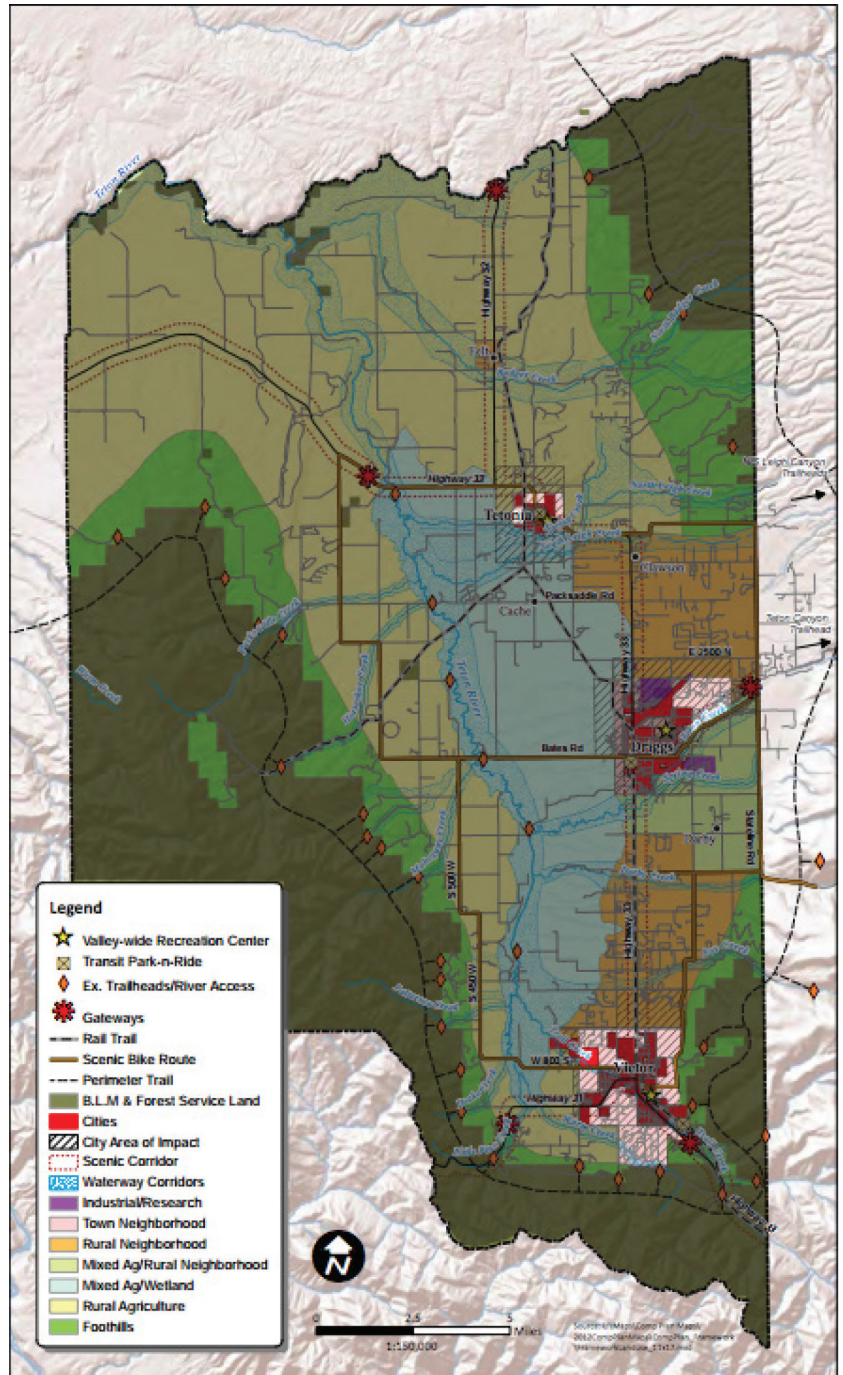


Town Neighborhoods. Finally, we have the “Town Neighborhoods”, which are areas surrounding the cities of Driggs, Victor, and Tetonia. These lands are also known as city “Areas of Impact (AOI),” and each city has its own agreement with the county as to how development in these areas will be governed. Victor and Tetonia use the county’s code in their respective Areas of Impact, and Driggs applies the city’s code in its AOI.

Town Neighborhoods in Pink.

The Comp Plan recommends the following for Town Neighborhoods:

- *Single-family, detached housing on large lots.*
- *Parks, open spaces, pathways, and/or sidewalk connections to the cities*



In thinking about how Town Neighborhoods should look and feel, it is perhaps worth asking the question of whether we want our cities to have a “hard edge” or if they should gradually transition into the orange Agricultural Rural Neighborhoods that surround them. The Hard Edge approach could possibly be accomplished in one of two ways: requiring large lots or allowing smaller lots with an open space buffer on the periphery of Town Neighborhoods.

If you prefer a more gradual transition between the cities and county, such an approach could be accomplished by allowing lots to get smaller the closer they are to the city. Which makes sense to you?



Should there be a distinct edge around our cities or should development sprawl into the countryside?

What are the takeaway issues from this discussion?

Transparency and Predictability. If you've ever bought a home or property, you know how important it is to know what can and cannot happen on surrounding lands. This is essential to enjoying your property rights. If you buy property at the north end of the Big Hole Mountains for the solitude and the wildlife, should you always be faced with the possibility of a giant golf course being developed (or worse, partially developed) next door? Should gravel pits be next to a residential neighborhood? Should there be some assurance that known wildlife corridors will be left intact?

If we ensure that the vision for the specific areas in the Comp Plan are held forth in the code, we can ensure that our valley's character — and our property rights — are protected.

Enabling Farmers and Ranchers to Continue Farming and Ranching. We all know that large tracts of land are necessary for viable farming and ranching operations. However, agriculture in Teton Valley presents many challenges, and sometimes farmers and ranchers need to sell off a home-site or two in order to stay afloat, especially during low crop yields or fluctuations in commodities markets. At the same time, we must remember that the purpose of selling a

homesite in rural areas is to promote farming and ranching —not large scale development. Approvals of conventional subdivisions can be quite burdensome for landowners, and other options should be available for large land splits that allow agriculture to flourish.

If farmers and ranchers want to get out of the business, they should be able to sell their land in a strong real estate market. Preserving Teton Valley's agricultural heritage is key to maintaining a strong, stable market.

Ensuring the integrity of public lands and conservation easements. Teton Valley is blessed to be surrounded by public lands that provide ample recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and breathtaking scenery. The valley is also fortunate to have many willing landowners that have granted conservation easements in environmentally sensitive areas. Though, legally speaking, there is a hard line between public or conservation lands, we must recognize that a healthy ecosystem flows seamlessly between public and private lands — that wildlife don't observe political boundaries.

Of course, private lands are different from public lands in that they are developable and entitled to economic viability. As such, we must ensure that the code protects and enhances a seamless ecosystem and the coexistence of wildlife and people.

The Viability of Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs).

The TDR is a great concept, but will it actually work? Are developers willing to buy potential building sites from agricultural landowners so they can create additional building sites elsewhere? If viable, TDRs could provide enormous benefits in shaping Teton Valley.

However, we must study potential TDR schemes to identify possible buyers and sellers, inventory “sending” and “receiving” areas, address administrative/record keeping issues, and ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

