

Methow Conservancy



January 27, 2020

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Okanogan County Commissioners
123 5th Ave North, Room 150
Okanogan, WA 98840

Re: **Ordinance 2019-11**

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of the Methow Conservancy Board of Directors, thank you for providing this opportunity for public comment re: Ordinance 2019-11, and for selecting the Winthrop Barn as your venue for your January 27th hearing.

The Methow Conservancy is the Methow watershed's local land trust. We inspire people to care for the land and water of the Methow Valley. Participating in the County's land use processes is one of the ways we carry out this mission.

Core to our success as an organization is an underlying belief that community challenges are best met by working to bring differing perspectives together, building trust, and to developing solutions collaboratively. We appreciate the trust you have shown our organization over time in supporting our conservation work here in the Methow Valley.

It is clear from the public record that the threat of water-related litigation by Methow Valley Citizen's Council/ Futurewise forced the County's hand in adopting Ordinance 2019-11. The adoption of this ordinance came without the process of collaborative community engagement we would have much preferred. That said, we acknowledge that imposing a moratorium is always a difficult decision, and we sincerely respect your desire to prevent landowner harm while also protecting our valley's water resources.

A swift resolution of the water and land use issues is critical to the county enacting sound land use policy that results in real benefits to our community, and we believe that any constructive path forward in reconciling these issues of land use and water policy will require a significant degree of trust-building and collaborative process. The Methow Conservancy stands ready to play a constructive role in this path forward.

You can expect our participation to be guided by the following principles:

- A belief that challenges like this one are best addressed at the local level through discussion and listening that includes a diversity of interests and perspectives;
- A belief that it is critical to have the full range of stakeholders at the table to address issues of water policy in the Methow Valley, including Tribal interests;

- A belief that our community's long-term best interests are not served by a prolonged moratorium on land division which infuses uncertainty for landowners and brings potential unintended consequences to development, the real estate market, and affordability.
- A belief that our valley is best served by innovative land use tools such as Planned Developments (prohibited by Ordinance 2019-11) which provide for the efficient sharing of domestic water among carefully planned lots while also preserving open space, habitat and farmland; and
- A belief that government regulation, subject to political change, should not be relied upon exclusively to meet community goals, and that there is a strong need for voluntary, incentive-based tools such as conservation easements to maintain the rural character of the Methow Valley into the future.

While we are not currently members of the Methow Watershed Council, Methow Conservancy staff will continue to attend and participate in Methow Watershed Council meetings. We also note that new forums of collaboration may be required should revision of the Methow Rule (WAC 173-548) be the ultimate vehicle for resolution of the issues the County seeks to study.

We share the belief that ensuring adequate water in the river for fish, for farming, and for future growth is essential to maintaining a healthy and productive valley. We believe an open, collaborative, inclusive process can do this. We encourage you to elevate the resolution of the issues at the heart of this moratorium as a top priority for Okanogan County in the weeks, months and year(s) ahead, and we look forward to playing a constructive role in whatever processes you initiate to move our community beyond Ordinance 2019-11.

Sincerely,



Jason Paulsen
Executive Director