

# **Our View: Locals can help plan for growth**

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Summary: COMPASS facilitates small meetings to allow residents to have their say about important issues

Steady population growth continues to reshape the Treasure Valley, and there are some exciting opportunities for folks to help guide that growth.

This spring the Community Planning Association (COMPASS) is inviting residents to review a condensed version of its studies and to have their say.

The agency chose a unique way to gather these comments: small meetings anyone can host. Call it "brown bag democracy."

Those interested can reserve a paper bag that contains a guide for running the meeting, a DVD, a few reports, a map and a questionnaire. Reports are included that show the agency's projections for growth, traffic gridlock and plans for highway improvements, bus routes and some planning options. The large map shows where new arterials are planned.

A host can pick up the bag, host the meeting, and gather comments and submit them back to COMPASS.

The comments will be synthesized into a final report that will go to the COMPASS board of directors, which can take a position on public policies such as prioritizing road projects, transit systems and land-use planning.

The whole process is meant to reflect the values of people who live in the valley, not just the technocrats who do the traffic studies, or local officials, who may have their own agenda.

By including such a broad range of voices, COMPASS is taking an authentic survey of people's beliefs. They will weigh in on complex issues such as traffic and land use.

A CD with reports will give as much detailed information as required, or people can simply read the summaries.

Overall the material outlines two simple options for the future. If the valley grows according to current trends, without notable changes in policy, open space between the cities will fill up with low-density housing and traffic will get much worse. Or, if land-use policies encourage high-density housing and mass transit, there will be open space and less traffic gridlock. Each option comes at a cost.

It just depends on what people want.

Reviewing this material will educate residents about their options and make them better informed and empowered to chart the future.

The COMPASS board also will get a solid education from the report. Rarely does a public agency do such a good job connecting public policy with the grassroots values of area residents.

This process is a good example for other agencies wishing to reflect the public's values.

## **How to get involved**

Those interested in hosting a meeting can call COMPASS at 855-2558, ext. 222. Meeting bags will be available to pick up between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. May 3 at the Hispanic Culture Center of Idaho, 315 Stampede Drive in Nampa. Meetings must be held between May 3 and May 18, and comments must be returned to COMPASS by 5 p.m. May 19.

Our view is based on the majority opinions of the Idaho Press-Tribune editorial board. Members of the board are Stephanie H. Pressly, publisher; Vickie Holbrook, managing editor; David Woolsey, assistant managing editor; Michael Hensel, financial director; Jake Alger, opinion page editor; and community representatives Sandra Nosik of Caldwell, Terry Hathaway of Middleton, and Drew Mayes and Sisilia Raass of Nampa.