

**From:** [Bruce Coe](#)  
**To:** [Kelly Bacon \(CD\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Dr. Patricia Galloway](#)  
**Subject:** Letter of opposition to Hidden Point project application CUP-20-20005  
**Date:** Tuesday, December 22, 2020 1:33:22 PM  
**Attachments:** [HVR testimony hidden point.docx](#)

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Ms Bacon.

Attached please find our letter in opposition to the High Point project application, CUP-20-20005.

Will you please acknowledge receipt of this document and verify that it has been added to the existing record concerning this application.

Thank you

Bruce Coe  
Kim Coe  
Hidden Valley Ranch

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Images, Words, Music  
1 509 306 9316 Cell  
1 509 857 2355 Home

[📷] Knockout Photography

[🎵] Slim Chance

December 19, 2020

To: Kittitas County Community Development Services  
411 N. Ruby St  
Ellensburg, WA 98926'

Transmitted via email

Re: Hidden Point, CUP-20-00005

My name is Bruce Coe and I live at 3942 Hidden Valley Road, Cle Elum, WA 98922, I am submitting this testimony on behalf of my immediate family, Cohorts, LLC, Bruce and Kim Coe, and Swauk Pines, LLC. We are landowners in the vicinity of the proposed land use action and live on what used to be the Hidden Valley Guest Ranch. My family has lived and worked in Kittitas County since 1968.

In full disclosure, I am the current chair of the Kittitas County Planning Commission. We will not see this matter as a planning commission as we only deal with code and Comprehensive Plan updates.

In the past I have held the following positions

- District 2 County Commissioner,
- County representative to YRBWEP,
- County rep to the CAC, Mt Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest,
- Member of the Kittitas County Planning Commission during the entirety of the TrendWest/MountainStar/Suncadia permitting process,
- Member of the committee to designate Agricultural Lands of Long Term Commercial Significance
- Member of the CAC Teanaway Sub area designation process,
- As a member of the Board of County Commissioners was assigned to Represent the BOCC to the Yakima Indian Nation, the Yakima Training Center, The implementation of the Growth Management Act, and inter county water rights issues,
- I also was appointed to manage the Kittitas County Fair and Ellensburg Rodeo and did so as a department head for three years,
- Landowner and senior water rights holder since 1968,
- Owned and operated a small hospitality business - Hidden Valley Guest Ranch 1968 - 2004

I have been involved continuously in county affairs for over 25 years and continue to be involved in Issues that I am interested in, I have a solid lay understanding of the Growth Management Act, land use planning and zoning

As a precursor to this testimony I wish to distance myself from the non profit group, "The Hidden Valley Rural Character Preservation Society" even though that entity has used the name Hidden Valley. I am not a part of that group, I do not contribute financially to the fundraising efforts, I have talked and posted on community billboards my general feelings about the development but in an informational way,

expressing little support for the project and a cursory distaste for the Conditional Use application the proponent has submitted.

I would ask all review parties specifically not to conflate the name of the group into blanket support or opposition by those of us who live in the actual geographic location known as Hidden Valley. As a matter of fact there are no landowners in the contested area who live in Hidden Valley, most if not all are more accurately living on what has historically been called Lookout Mountain or the Swauk Prairie.

In short the use of the term Hidden Valley in the non profit's name should NOT be used to imply either the general support or opposition of this project by the landowners in Hidden Valley.

**I do not speak for them but I, as the representative of the entities listed above in this document are not in support of and will resist any alteration of the existing code, or reappraisal of the land uses in the geographic Hidden Valley area. I am not in favor of and will oppose any change to the permitted or conditional land uses to my property, rezones or land use designations or water rights policy and water availability in Hidden Valley as opposed to the issues now present on the flanks of Lookout Mountain.**

Having said that, we believe that the land development proposed under CU-20-00005 is:

- Inconsistent with the generally held definitions of the uses allowed in KCC 17.08.270,
- Incompatible with the original intent of the land use designation,
- Incompatible with the existing land use patterns in the area that have emerged over time, and
- Inappropriate in that the uses proposed clearly do not come close to matching the language in Kittitas County Code, KCC 17.08.270.

Permitting the uses proposed under the umbrella of a guest ranch or a guest farm is not unlike permitting a gravel pit as a children's recreational sandbox.

### **Some Background**

I was heavily involved with the initial Growth Management Act adoption process and at the time of adoption was particularly concerned that our existing use as a longstanding operational guest ranch/dude ranch (since 1948) would be disallowed. As a result I, along with county staff, wrote the language that appears today that allows 'guest ranches' as a conditional use in what was then an Ag-3 zoning, which has subsequently been downzoned into the Ag-20 zoning that we currently have underfoot. The original intent of adding the 'guest ranch/guest farm' as a conditional use was based on the following assumptions. Those of us who collaborated on the language of the code assumed that:

- There was an active underlying agricultural activity that was historical and ongoing
- The Ag community represented by the Washington State Farm Bureau would and did support any additional use in the Agricultural zones as a way of allowing farmers to make a little extra money if they wanted to, thus the addition of "guest farm" to the language in 17.08.270.

- The Washington State Cattlemen’s Association also supported the language as an additional land use for cattlemen and women.
- That there was a specific understanding of what a dude or guest ranch was at the time though it was not codified. In the past there had been as many as 7 dude ranches in the county and Hidden Valley Guest Ranch had been in continuous operation since 1948. The concept was well known and understood by the adopters of the language.
- That ‘western’ activities were the core of the experience including horse activities, BBQ’s, trail rides and riding lessons, cookouts and chuckwagon events featuring campfire/foodservice activities. Also implied in the definition is the hiring of additional staff that are not incidental to the core agricultural use - cabin cleaners, cooks, handymen, office/hospitality staff, and generally a separate business to manage the guest operation.
- Outfits to serve the purpose, No one dresses goth at a guest ranch. The atmosphere was cowboy and the theme was western as embodied primarily in movies, print and other media, giving the general perception of what a ranch is and what the personnel involved in farming and ranching are like.

### **Comments on project descriptions and purpose**

The proponent states in their application that they are filing under 17.08.270, Guest Ranch of Guest Farm. As the narrative proceeds they morph the application to “recreational “ranch”” (their quotes) in the ‘Project description’ portion of the application. There is no existing language in Kittitas County Code for a “Recreational Ranch”. Furthermore the language of 17.08.270 specifically states that to be a guest ranch or guest farm you must “...provide overnight lodging, dining and recreational facilities in a rural setting.”

Note the difference here. The code says you must provide the above, (not “make provisions for” or “provide the facilities for”) and assumes an active participation in the vacation experience between staff and the guests of the facility. I can guarantee that there is not a guest ranch in the United States that just throws their doors open, says “have a great western experience!” and then walks away to leave the vacation up to their invitees.

Once again, they change the descriptive language and resume talking about a Guest Ranch in their proposal stating that “...the use as a guest ranch will comply with all county codes relevant to the guest ranch designation...”

Frankly, if their stated intent is to “comply with all county codes relevant to the guest ranch designation.”, they should withdraw their application as incomplete and enjoy their property as the rest of the community does, in a quiet contemplation of their surroundings.

### **Definitions**

For reference, and since the county has not adopted a precise definition of what a Guest Ranch is, the largest trade organization in the country defines a dude ranch thus:

*“For dude ranches who are members of the Dude Ranchers’ Association, this is an all-inclusive immersive vacation that includes lodging, meals, horseback riding, fishing, hiking and more. With almost 100 members in the DRA the experience is unique at every ranch with a specialty in horseback riding over unique terrain, cattle work and/or luxury amenities. From small, intimate ranches to large resort-style ranches there is a ranch to fit every budget and dream vacation. Take a look at the sampling of ranches below to get a better understanding of what is a dude ranch. ”*

Note also that the dude/guest ranch experience always involves a single price food and lodging package as opposed to an overnight stay with a choice of additional paid activities. There are no a la carte plans in almost all guest/dude ranches

The proponent clearly wants to try to use the existing language to justify what should more accurately be described as a VRBO cluster or a short term stay (STS) facility - a group of sleeping cabins or ‘efficiency’ units with a central unmanned community kitchen and a pool, all with no on site permanent representation. Since the existing language in the code is all they have as a pathway to approval, they will try to squeeze what they wish to do into the language that is available to them in code. Their assumptions in their application amplify why the above historic understanding of the statute is so critical.

As an historical aside you may be wondering why the prohibition of group homes, clinics, nursing homes and rehabilitation centers appear alongside the definitions of a guest ranch. Simple. We had been approached by investors who wanted to convert Hidden Valley Guest Ranch into what would now be recognized as a long term care facility. My father had begun the initial investigatory process to see what could be accomplished through a rezone. Word got out and the community (all 5 big landowners in the area!) around us exploded in protest. We halted the rezone process (though no application had been submitted to the county) and went so far as to include specific exclusionary language in code, odd enough in that all code is generally written from the standpoint that all uses are denied except those that are permitted or conditioned.

We withdrew our investigation, changed the code to prohibit those specific uses and gave up a chance at a much better income than the current use as a guest ranch. That’s what neighbors do.

No one at the inception of the original designation and identification of ‘western activities’ ever envisioned the possibility of 72 people along with their dogs, kids, trailers and other personal recreational equipment to descend on 34 acres. The uses and management envisioned by the proponent are clearly short term rental (STR) stays and are more in the category of couchsurfing/VRBO/AirBnB uses, not the western vacations as defined and as currently exist in the Western US.

The lack of code restrictions or the inability to identify an emerging land use pattern not previously contemplated is not a reason to do whatever you wish to do with your property.

I have no doubt that the County permitting authorities will address the impacts to the surrounding community and make their evaluations and corresponding conditioning as a part of their job. That is the mechanical part of the process and will go on as a part of the proposal and submittal and review process.

### **How do we manage change within code?**

Land occupation and uses are not static and often develop organically underneath the radar of county observation. Identifying and addressing those changes is usually the result of a project application, Code or Comprehensive Plan revision request, or State or federal statutory demand.

It is important to recognize that the Lookout Mountain community has changed in the last 22 years - from vacant land (in this case, land that we used to own and graze cattle on) to relatively low density single family housing. Please remember that when we bought the Hidden Valley Guest Ranch in 1968 not one of our surrounding neighbors owned less than a section of land. Our neighbors were the names you see on road signs now - Micheletto, Emerick, Ballard, Bettas, Burke. Add the unanointed families of Davis and Hansen and you have some picture of how open and vacant the land was.

The land use was purely agricultural and open in nature and not much of that had changed at the inception of the GMA. Most of the land in those historic ownerships is now in relatively low average density development(s), Master Planned Resort designation or large acreage conservation easements.

Identifying the degree of change in a community over time demands a method of recognizing and dealing with those changes. The project conditioning and formal code change process is the only method we have available to us to address change over time.

If none of the historical uses had changed over the years, no one would mind the short term stay facility envisioned by the proponent. But the community has changed and anyone who proposes to do what the proponent has proposed must recognize that the only way that the GMA provides to address the changes in a community is either the mitigation of impacts or the addition of code that specifically addresses their proposed use. That is not only reasonable and prudent, it is the law, and the proponents have done neither. They have tried to shoehorn their short term stay cluster into a boot that is too small.

In closing the county should reject or deny the application as presented as incomplete and irrelevant since:

- Proponent has not been able to meet and satisfy the basic requirements for the local definition of a guest ranch, dude ranch or guest farm.
- Proponent has not demonstrated that the uses in their project description are consistent with the original intent of the code governing the conditioned activity,
- Proponent has not demonstrated that the projected use of the land adheres to an industry standard definition of a Guest Ranch/Dude Ranch or guest farm.

- Proponent is clearly trying to change the code governing their application through an interpretative, project application-based process instead of petitioning the county to change the code as part of a comprehensive plan amendment or code amendment process.
- Proponent is clearly trying to permit a short term stay facility not unlike a VRBO/Airbnb/couchsurfing facility, a use that is not present in the existing Kittitas County Code, and furthermore, is not an issue before the Board of County Commissioners.
- Proponent has not provided any assurance of compliance with county code even if the short term stay project is conditioned and permitted and has not assured that there will be consistent uninterrupted on-site owner representation to monitor the activities of attendees.

We urge staff and the Kittitas Board of County Commissioners to reject the application as irrelevant to the intent and construction of the Kittitas County Code 17.08.270, and we urge the proponent to address their desired uses through a code amendment process that clearly identifies and permits their uses as that of a Short Term Rental cluster, not a guest ranch or guest farm.

Most Cordially

Bruce Coe and Kim Coe,  
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