

Glenda Wiles

From: Lu Terry <snowy@mtwi.net>
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2014 10:39 PM
To: Commissioners
Subject: Opposition to proposed merger of Planning Dept. and Dept. of Environmental Health

March 24, 2014

Ravalli County Commissioners
215 South 4th Street
Hamilton, MT 59840

Re: Opposition to merger of the Planning Dept. and Dept. of Environmental Health Subdivision

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed merger of the Planning Dept. and the Dept. of Environmental Health.

The planning department works to facilitate development; and to function correctly, the Environmental Health Department needs a fully qualified Director.

To put both departments under one Director would create an inherent conflict between people drawing lines on the ground and the people that have to protect the public health.

I agree with the Public Health personnel who support maintaining DEH as an independent department in the county. A strong environmental health organization is always important especially in case of outbreaks and events which are threats to public health and safety. It is essential to have leaders in place with expert knowledge of environmental health.

Many crucial functions of environmental health fall outside the scope of the Planning Department, and non-sanitarians don't have the expertise or the perspective to make appropriate decisions for the Environmental Health department.

If the county combines the two departments the public will likely think that the commissioners are creating a way to snuff environmental concerns, and being irresponsible in protecting the health of the people of the county..

For some time, it seems the acts of the commissioners have indicated an avoidance of their responsibilities to the county's environmental health (including rewriting the county's local subdivision regulations). This proposal to "dumb down" the county health department is a disturbing continuation of this behavior.

Who are the citizens that are pushing this, and why? Is there really a problem that needs fixing, or is this just the latest attempt to prevent environmental concerns from getting in the way of private property rights (according to the realtors)?

The impacts would result in significant conflict of interest in the operation of the planning department and the environmental health department. It caused problems and did not work out well the last time this was tried, and it is unlikely that there is any real cost savings in merging the two departments.

Sincerely,

Lu Terry
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