CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM
418 EAST SECOND STREET
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026
5:00 PM

To attend the meeting via Zoom and provide live comment attendees should go to the web link below. **Due to occasional technical difficulties, the most reliable way to participate is through in-person attendance. Electronic means are not guaranteed.**
Meeting Link**:** Zoom Link Meeting Number: **849 2808 8413** Password: **59937**
Raise your virtual hand to indicate you want to provide comment.

- We encourage individuals to provide written public comment; to the City Clerk, Michelle Howke at mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov or deliver by 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, January 20, 2026, to City Hall. Written comments should include name, address, should be short and concise, courteous, and polite. All written comments received by 4:00 p.m. will be provided to the City Council and appended to the packet following the meeting.
- Public comment by those attending the meeting "live" via Zoom or in-person will be limited to three minutes per individual.

1) Call to Order

2) Discuss City Beach Boat Launch Fees – Carla Belski
   a) Public Comment

3) 5:30 pm: Growth Policy – Vision Whitefish 2045 update – Alan Tiefenbach
   a) Public Comment

4) Direction to City Manager

5) Adjourn

Proposed Fee Adjustments for Boat Lauch Passes and Commercial Use Permits Whitefish City Beach

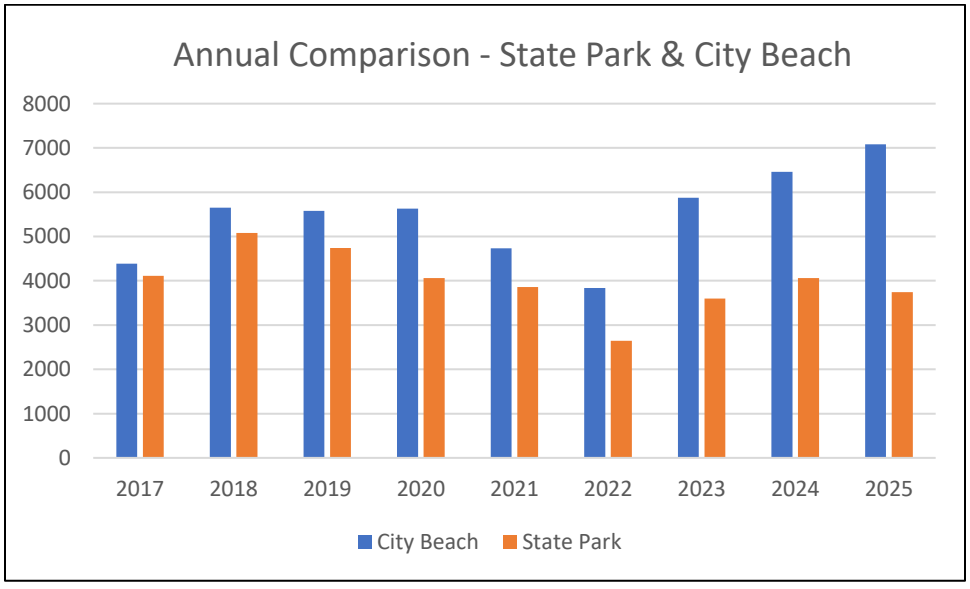
The City of Whitefish, Parks and Recreation Department is proposing fee increases for launching boats at Whitefish City Beach. Proposed fee increases include both privately and commercially launched watercraft. Funds would be used to support the aquatic invasive species program including inspections at City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park. Watercraft decontamination will continue to be free. Funds will also support boat ramp maintenance, facility maintenance, and staffing.

In 2016, City Council approved a boat launch fee increase from $5 to $10 for a day pass and $40 to $50 for a season pass. When Council passed the increase to the launch fees, they asked staff to monitor rates to make sure they adequately pay for the city's aquatic invasive species program.

The cost to fund seasonal staff who perform inspections, decontaminations, and facility maintenance averages $150,000 annually. Whitefish Lake Institute contributes to the cost of running the decontamination station in the amount of $17,000 annually. Total income from boat launch passes and commercial permits in 2025 was $32,590. Boat ramp and access road improvements were completed in fall of 2025 at a total cost of $235,000. Increasing boat launch fees and commercial permits will help to better support the city's efforts to have a safe place to launch while protecting Whitefish Lake through a vigorous AIS prevention program.

Of special note is Whitefish Lake State Park. Although residents of Montana can launch for free, commercial use is permitted with a range of fees. Due to commercial permit fees and limited parking, we have seen use grow at Whitefish City Beach for both private launching and commercial use (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Whitefish Inspection Station Visits



Day and Season Passes – current situation

In 2025, City Beach sold 1,099 day passes at $10 per launch for a total of $10,990. Additionally, 22 punch cards were sold at $50 each for a total of $1,100 (commercial permit holders only). A total of 350 season passes were sold at $50 each for a total of $17,500. Total day use and season pass sales for 2025 was $29,590. Day and season pass fees have not increased since 2017.

As the threat of zebra mussels stems primarily from out of state watercraft, out of state visitors have also not contributed to infrastructure improvements at the boat ramp funded by residents. Numerous other ramps have a resident and non-resident fee schedule as noted below in the examples.

Boat Launch Fee Comparison examples:

- WF Lake State Park – Residents free, $8 non-resident
- Collier County - $100 resident, $250 non-resident (annual)
- Town of Minocqua - $100 non-resident seasonal, $10 single day, $30 three-day, $70 weekly
- Kootenai County - $15 daily launch fee (ID resident), $30 non-resident; $50 annual resident, $150 non-resident
- City of McCall, ID- $15 day pass, $30 non-resident day; $100 annual resident, $200 annual non-resident
- Mineral Ridge, ID (BLM) - $12 daily, $80 annual
- Canyon Ferry, MT - $5 daily, $50-100 annually (depending on which launch)
- Lake Tahoe, NV - $20 per launch ($24 non-NV vehicles)
- North Tahoe PUD - $17 per vessel and $60 non-residents
- Tahoe City - $20 residents, $75 non-residents, $195 season pass (resident/property owner), $1,050 (non-resident)
- South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation - $17 day use, $138 season pass
- Cave Rock State Park, Tahoe: $20 daily boat launch (non-NV $25)
- Lake Shasta, CA - $17 daily, $215 season pass

Proposed City Beach Boat Launch Fee Schedule

What	Current Fee	Proposed 2026 Fee
Day Launch Resident*	$10.00	$15.00
Day Launch Non-Resident	n/a	$30.00
Season Pass Launch Resident*	$50.00	$100.00
Season Pass Launch Non-Resident	n/a	$200.00

*Resident – Watercraft is registered in Montana.

Commercial Permits Current Situation:

The Commercial Boat Launch Permit program was first established in 2017 with 9 permits issued that year. In 2025, there were a total of 24 permits issued. Permit holders pay a $125 flat fee upfront, which includes one season pass or one punch card. Revenue from commercial permits was $3,000 for the 2025 season. Fees have not increased since 2017.

Commercial permit holders use the launch heavily. In the spring and fall, boat delivery and pick up dominate the launch, although public use at these times is low. During the summer, motorized watercraft rentals and guided trips are the primary commercial users of the launch. Not only does this add to the busyness of the launch during peak public use, but it also adds to the demand for parking by commercial clients.

In 2021, Park Board established limits on the types of Commercial Use Permits issued for Whitefish City Beach. The city allows up to six permits for businesses providing guiding services and up to four permits for motorized rental delivery businesses. There are no limits on boat storage/delivery, marine service/sales, and dock service permits. Non-motorized rental delivery is not permitted at the beach but is allowed at riverfront parks with a limit of 5 per day.

The rental permit quota has been filled every year since limits were imposed. In 2025, there were 4 businesses on the waiting list. Staff have also identified other individuals renting personally owned boats on websites such as *Boatsetter* and *GetMyBoat*. Additionally, the rental of e-motorized hand launch watercraft, a relatively new form of recreation, is a potential commercial use that needs to be evaluated in the permitting process.

Other commercial permit examples:

- Montana State Parks – Livery/watercraft delivery $150.00 per year; non-consumptive (dock services) $50-$1,000 per launch (dock service and construction); service providers (guided trips, high use rentals) $5 per client day
- Town of LaGrange, WI: Commercial installers/users $500
- Kootenai County - $200-$500
- City of McCall, ID - $1,500 commercial use permit (includes 5 annual stickers)
- Lake Forest Boat Ramp, Tahoe - $1,000 commercial vessel season pass

Proposed Commercial Boat Launch Permit Fee Schedule

What	Current Fee	Proposed 2026 Fee	Permit Quota
Commercial Boat Launch Permit – Watercraft Delivery, Dock Services, Sales, and Marina launching	$125 (includes one season pass/punch card) *	$500 (includes two punch cards) **	No limit
Commercial Boat Launch Permit – Motorized Rentals (including e-motors)	$125 (includes one season pass/punch card) *	**Level 1** – 0-15 launches per season $500 (includes one season pass)** **Level 2** – 15-30 launches per season $750 (includes two season passes)** **Level 3** – 30 plus launches per season $1,000 (includes three season passes) **	**Level 1 –** 2 permits **Level 2 –** 2 permits **Level 3 –** 2 permits
Commercial Boat Launch Permit – Guiding	$125 (includes one season pass/punch card) *	$500 (includes two punch cards)**	3 permits
Commercial Boat Launch – River Non-motorized	$125	$250	N/A
Commercial Launch E-motor (use of motorized mooring area on beach)	N/A	$5 per watercraft and $50 season pass per watercraft	(see rental and guiding permits above)
Commercial Motorized Punch Card	$50 (5 launches)	$100 (5 launches)	N/A

* Must pay any additional boat launch fees – single launch ($10) or season pass ($50).

** Must pay any additional boat launch fees – single launch ($15) or season pass ($100).

Permit Hours for Dock Service Providers

At their January meeting, the Park Board approved staff's proposal to set specific permitted hours for dock service providers, as they typically require extended use of the ramp for material delivery. Dock service providers must launch and/or get materials delivered between 7-11am and 6-9pm. In the event of an emergency service request, dock service providers can contact the Lead Ranger on duty to request access between 11am and 6pm.

Summary

Total revenues generated by the City Beach Boat Ramp in 2025 were $32,590, which only covers about 20% of the costs to run the ramp, maintain City Beach Park, and perform inspections and decontaminations at City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park. Recently the city has made financial investments in infrastructure improvements that were not supported by revenues generated from boat ramp use. By increasing user fees directly tied to boat ramp use, the cost to operate the boat launch is passed on to both private and commercial users who utilize the amenity the most. The proposed fees align with regionally similar facilities and are not excessive.

The proposed fee schedule was presented to the Park Board January13, 2026, at their regularly scheduled meeting. The board voted unanimously to approve the fee schedule as proposed. However, there was also general consensus that the board would be supportive of increased fees for non-residents and asked staff to bring data back to the board at the end of the season to evaluate the effectiveness of the fee changes. Staff requests City Council to review the proposed fee schedules and provide feedback on the proposed rates. Once staff has received Council feedback, this item will be scheduled for a public hearing at the next available Council meeting.

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Alan Tiefenbach, Long Range Planner

Date: January 20, 2026

RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 Work Session on First Three Plan Elements

Honorable Mayor and members of the City Council,

On January 20, 2026, the first work session has been scheduled to introduce you to three plan elements – economic development, environment, natural resources and hazards (ENRH) and public facilities – as well as a wealth of background information.

Staff is pleased to present the first (partially) assembled version of the plan comprised of all the components intended for discussion at the upcoming work session. Please note at this point this is mostly a text document, although maps have been included when they are part of the plan elements. Once the draft has been completed to meet all statutory requirements by the May 2026 deadline, the next phase will be implementation schedules, layout and final presentation.

Throughout the numerous work sessions during the development of this plan, the Planning Commission has made a myriad of revisions. Revisions that are benign, do not concern staff or are non-controversial have been accepted into the draft you are receiving. Revisions of which staff has concerns or that are controversial have been identified in red-marked text.

Please note Planning Commission public hearings on the final draft are scheduled for February 19 and February 25. The version that goes to the Planning Commission for these hearings will be comprised of ALL red marked changes as made by the Planning Commission with any subsequent red-marks as recommended by staff identified. As there could be additional changes made by the Planning Commission during these hearings, the final version that goes to the City Council for adoption in early March will be red-marked accordingly along with staff's recommendations regarding the changes.

VISION WHITEFISH 2045

COMMUNITY PLAN

PLANNING COMMISSION DRAFT

JANUARY 7, 2026

1. RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION
2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
3. LETTER FROM THE MAYOR / COUNCIL

January 7, 2026

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January 7, 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

a. Opening paragraph(s)
b. Community Planning and Whitefish
c. Purpose of the Plan
d. Summary of Growth
e. Brief description of the process
f. Discussion about implementation

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

What is a Community Plan?

A community plan[1] is an official public document adopted and used by cities, towns, and counties to set a community vision and to be used as a guide for making decisions about their future, particularly with regards to land use. This plan is not a regulation; however, it provides the legal and rational basis, or "nexus" for implementation by adopting or updating zoning regulations, subdivision regulations or other regulations which can be used to achieve the goals of the plan. Under Montana State Statute, the Planning Commission is the only entity designated to prepare a community plan, with adoption required by the City Council (the governing body). Although previous versions of this plan were referred to as growth policies, this plan reflects the goals and vision of the City of Whitefish community and not merely issues pertaining to growth or land use. Accordingly, with this update it was determined that *Community Plan* is a more appropriate term for this document.

Vision Whitefish 2045 is the guide to the future of the City of Whitefish. It builds on Whitefish's history and community wishes, integrates previous and upcoming plans and projects, and recognizes the contributions of our leaders and community members that have made Whitefish such a desirable place to live. Thoughtful and deliberate planning is imperative to preserve and improve upon the current quality of life.

State Requirements for a Community Plan

Prior to 1999, Montana State Statute had no requirement for a community plan other than mandating one before a city or county could adopt zoning or subdivision regulations. After the 1999 Legislative Session, additional minimum requirements were added with the rationale if a community plan was going to be used as the basis for regulation there should be minimum standards. These requirements were outlined in the Land Resources and Use Section of Montana Code Annotated, Title 76-1-601-607.

On May 17, 2023, Governor Gianforte signed Senate Bill 382, known as the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA, MCA Title 76-500). This new law provides sweeping changes to how land use planning must function within the State of Montana. Although community plans had previously been optional under Title 76, MLUPA now mandates a plan be adopted for all incorporated municipalities with a population of greater than 5,000 in a county with a population greater than 70,000. As of 2024, this amounts to ten cities within the State of Montana. MLUPA is detailed regarding what is required for each

[1] "Growth Policy" is the term used by the previous version of the Montana Code Annotated and is the name of the earlier version of this document. Recent state statutory updates now use the term "Land Use Plan," although "Master Plan, Long Range Plan, "Growth Policy", Comprehensive Plan" and "Community Plan" are all synonymous terms.

element of a community plan. The statutory requirements of each section will be discussed in the pertinent plan element. MLUPA requires all ordinances and issue-specific plans be in "general conformance" with the community plan.

Relationship with Other Plans

Vision Whitefish 2045 is the community vision for the City. It is intended to guide the development of city regulations including the zoning ordinance, land use policies, subdivision regulations, issue-specific ordinances such as floodplain regulations, and future capital improvement and infrastructure projects. This document sets a broad body of public policy founded in the vision and addresses issues through the various topic areas. There is background information, community goals and objectives for achieving those goals and implementation schedules for action items.

Numerous other plans and studies have been undertaken over the years which have influenced and impacted decisions made by the City of Whitefish. Some of these plans have not been fully implemented due to several reasons, including inconsistencies with other plans, political differences, financial implications, the number of studies or conflicting information and duplicative efforts. Vision Whitefish 2045 attempts to incorporate, recognize or reference the recommendations of these documents, or suggests updates in the case of contradictory or antiquated documents. Existing documents adopted by the City and are still in effect include:

- A Trail Runs Through It Master Plan, 2006
- Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan, 2006
- Climate Action Plan, 2018
- Community Housing Needs Assessment Update, 2025
- Community Housing Roadmap, 2022
- Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, 2017
- Critical Lands Report, 2008
- Emergency Operations Plan, 2019
- Extension of Services Plan, 2021
- Highway 93 South Corridor Plan, 2021
- Highway 93 West Corridor Plan, 2015
- Irrigation and Landscape Master Plan
- Long Range Fire Department Master Plan, 2021
- North Valley Hospital Campus Neighborhood Plan Revised 2009
- Parking Management Plan, 2019
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan, 2013
- Safe Streets for All Plan, 2025

- Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, 2020
- Transportation Plan, 2022
- Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, 2015 (revised 2018)
- Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan, 2018
- Whitefish School Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan, 2003

Although not formally adopted by the Whitefish City Council, there are also existing plans which are pertinent and affect this community plan. These include:

- Downtown Whitefish Highway Study (MDT), 2022
- Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, 2021
- Flathead County Growth Policy, Updated 2012
- School District Long Range Facility Plan (Whitefish School District), 2021
- Urban Corridor Study (MDT), 2010
- Whitefish Area Community Wildfire Protection Plan, 2009

How this Plan is Organized

This Plan is intended to address a full range of specific aspects of land use planning and the vision of the Whitefish Community. It is organized to be as user-friendly and easily accessible as possible.

The plan begins with an executive summary, followed by background information including the planning context, geographic location, and summary of the process. The Plan establishes a community vision divided into six themes. Each theme serves to frame plan elements addressing the required topics of Title 76-25 of the Montana Code Annotated. Plan elements begin with a summary of the topic followed by goals and objectives. Following the plan elements is an implementation section intended to provide the timelines and responsible parties for implementing the statutory and city-recommended actions of this Plan. Detailed background data, consultant reports and general information is organized into a resource document as a second part of this document.

How to Use This Plan

As mentioned above, this plan is not a regulation; but it provides the legal and rational basis, or “nexus” for implementation through the adoption or updating of zoning regulations, subdivision regulations or other regulations to achieve the goals of the plan. It is a tool for decision-makers and property owners to use in making choices about public investment, land purchases and land development. It steers city policy, sets priorities, and should be consulted when creating work programs. It is also used when assessing rezonings, amending regulations, or annexing property into the City. Changes in land

uses and annexations of land should generally conform to the plan's goals, objectives and maps.

Requirement for Review and Update

The previous City of Whitefish Growth Policy was adopted in 2007. There have been periodic reviews and minor revisions up to 2016; recent corridor plans and other specific plans have provided more comprehensive updates. Given the amount of time elapsed since the approval of the original growth policy, the City Council has made it a high priority to review and update the plan and incorporate more recent corridor and specific plans into a single, cohesive document. A community plan is required to plan 20 years into the future, which is why this plan is called *"VISION WHITEFISH 2045."*

A community plan is not a static, end state document. Communities are dynamic - they change over time - and a community plan must be as dynamic and adaptable as the community it serves. Periodic review and revision are necessary to keep abreast of changes in circumstances and the thinking of the community. This is continuously influenced by population growth or reduction, demographic shifts, market trends, economic cycles, innovation, and institutional and regulatory changes. The State requires a community plan be reviewed at least every five years, although due to intense growth pressures and changes taking place in Whitefish and the Flathead Valley, this plan should be thoroughly reviewed every *three years* and updated as needed.

In three years from the time this community plan is adopted, and every three years thereafter, the Whitefish Planning Commission should conduct a review of this plan. This review should consist of an analysis of the plan's effectiveness in working toward community goals and in carrying out its vision. The review must, at a minimum:

1. Make a preliminary determination regarding the existence of new or increased adverse impacts from those previously described and analyzed when the community plan and future land use map were previously adopted.
2. Check for changes in community conditions, trends, demographics, economics, and other factors that may require revisions to the community plan.
3. Determine if there have been any changes in legal framework to warrant a revision(s) to the plan.
4. Note which implementation items have been completed or begun since most recent adoption or review.
5. Consider any public input suggesting the need to make changes.

Following this review, the Commission will submit a written report of its findings to the City Council. All plan updates must follow the same public procedures required by the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MCA 76-25) for initial adoption of a plan.

State Requirements for Public Participation and the Public Process

The Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) enacted considerable changes to the methods in which public participation is to occur in land use planning in Montana. Under previous statutory requirements, after a community plan and regulations were adopted through public hearings, zoning regulations could require additional public hearings for site specific developments (hotels, for example) through processes such as the conditional use permit. Public notification could be required with opportunity for public comment as part of the process, and the City Council would make the final decision on whether the specific developments should be approved after a recommendation from the Planning Commission.

Public hearings as part of a regular review process for site specific developments ended with MULPA. Pursuant to MCA 76-25-106, *the time for public participation is during the adoption, amendment or update of a growth policy or regulations.* Throughout the process of development (or update) of these documents, the local government is to provide continuous public participation and emphasize that *after adoption of the growth policy or regulations, scope and opportunity for public participation and comment on site-specific developments will be limited.* Site specific developments are to be reviewed administratively (at city staff level) against the adopted land use plan and regulations with a decision rendered by the planning administrator (or designee) without public hearings. Only when the planning administrator determines there would be new or significantly increased impacts not previously identified by the adoption of the land use plan or regulations, will the public be given the opportunity to comment during a 15-day period prior to decision. Under MLUPA, public hearings on site specific developments only occur when appealed by an applicant or by the public, the appeal must be limited to the issues raised on the appeal, and it must be demonstrated the decision being appealed was made in error.

Community Outreach

The City of Whitefish believes community participation is a critical component of the planning process and recognizes policy and planning decisions about land use, housing, transportation, and capital facilities do not impact us all in the same way. Providing the opportunity for public input encourages citizens to be invested in the future of their community and helps ensure recommendations developed as part of Vision Whitefish 2045 are implemented and sustained over time. Community members are holders of local knowledge. It is the responsibility of the City to listen, elevate, and consider community voices during the planning process. Robust and inclusive community engagement should always be a vital component of drafting and updating a community plan.

Developing Vision Whitefish 2045 involved an extensive public outreach process[2]. Due to the importance the Montana Land Use Planning Act places on public participation during the process of adopting a community plan and associated regulations, the statute requires the City Council adopt a public participation plan. Before MLUPA had been passed, staff had already completed a public participation plan that met the upcoming requirements of MCA 76-25-106. This plan was adopted by the Council in July of 2023. A public engagement website was established for Vision Whitefish 2045 and staff held a kickoff meeting to announce the update process on August 24, 2023.

The community was provided many opportunities throughout the plan update process to voice their opinion and participate. This included:

- A public kick-off meeting
- Online question and answer sessions
- Creation of a public engagement website
- Eight visioning sessions
- Stakeholder interviews
- Presentations to community groups
- Three open houses
- Online surveys
- Online mapping exercises
- Posting of all materials and drafts on the engagement site for review and comment
- X Community Development Board Work Sessions or public hearings
- X City Council Work Sessions or public hearings

[2] Please refer to the appendix for a complete detailing of the public participation process.

Whitefish High School Participation

To involve members of the community not typically involved in a growth policy update, staff reached out to faculty of Whitefish High School to get students involved in the update process. Starting in Fall of 2023, Whitefish High School Seniors began using the community plan update as a senior project. Staff gave presentations to the senior classes, and the students were tasked with choosing an issue or topic generally addressed by a growth policy and proposing a solution. Ideas were presented to the Community Development Board at January 2024, 2025 and 2026 work sessions. Some of the ideas have been incorporated into this Plan where noted. In addition, Whitefish High School art students were challenged by faculty to create artwork that captured Vision Whitefish 2045. This artwork was displayed at both city hall and the library and some has been included (and credited) throughout this community plan.

Please refer to the Appendix for a complete detailing of the public participation process.

SETTING

LOCATION OF WHITEFISH

The City of Whitefish is in a mountainous portion of Northwest Montana approximately 60 miles from the Canadian border at 3,028 feet above sea level and surrounded by forest. The City is located on the south end of Whitefish Lake, a natural lake which is 5.7 miles long, 1.4 miles wide and 222 feet at its maximum depth. The Whitefish City Limits encompass 8,106.79 acres, with 3,350 acres of this being the lake. This amounts to a total area of 12.67 square miles of which 5.37 square miles is land and 7.3 square miles is water. As of 2024, the population of Whitefish is estimated to be 9,256.

The City of Whitefish is within the Flathead Valley, which is approximately 15 miles wide and 20 miles long extending from Whitefish at the north to Flathead Lake at the south. Flathead Lake is the largest freshwater natural lake west of the Mississippi River with 200 square miles of surface area and 185 miles of shoreline. The Flathead Valley is within Flathead County, the third most populous and fastest growing county in Montana. With an area of 5,252 square miles, the population of Flathead County is estimated at 114,527 in 2024. Approximately 94% of the land in Flathead County is managed for specific purposes: as a national park, as federal or state forest land, as wilderness, as agricultural production, or as corporate timber land. The population of the City of Whitefish is approximately 8% of the total Flathead County population.

FIGURE S1: LOCATION OF FLATHEAD COUNTY

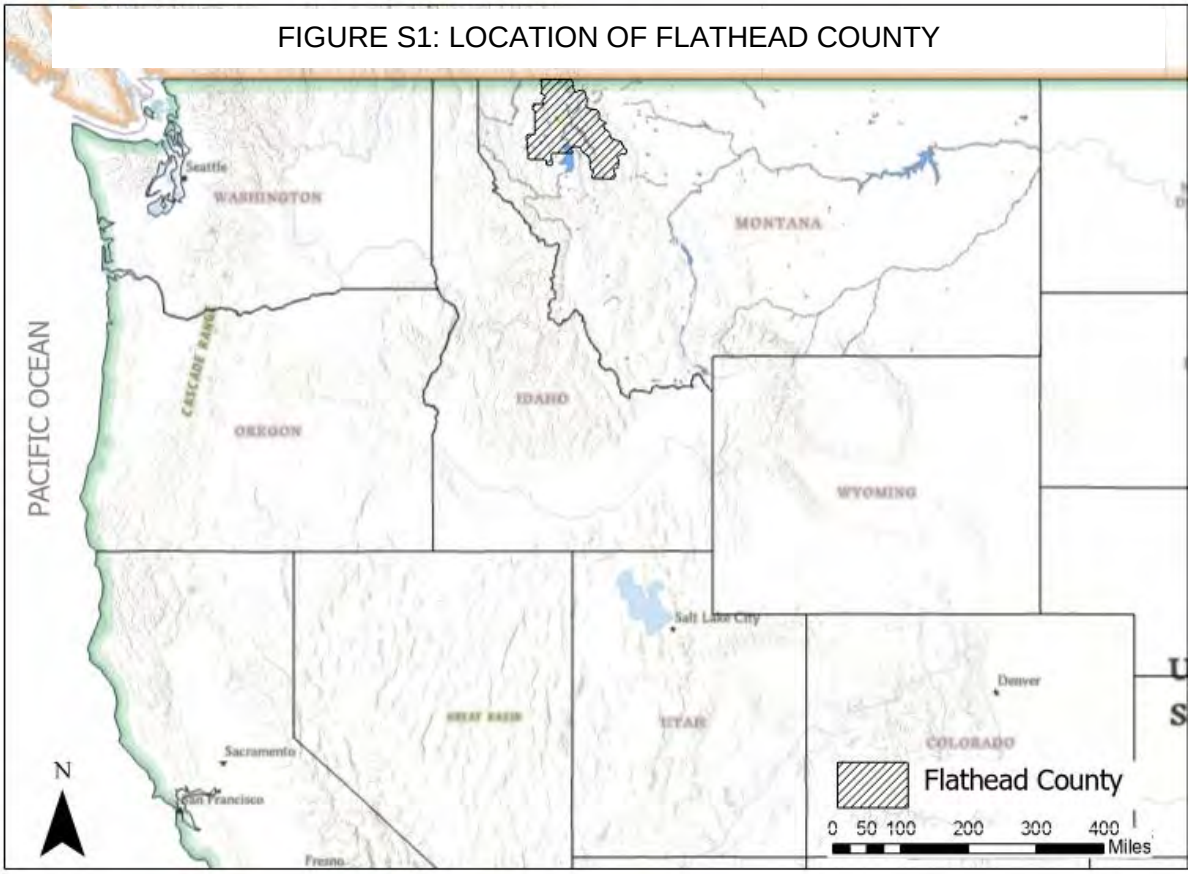


FIGURE S2: FLATHEAD COUNTY / CITY OF WHITEFISH VICINITY MAP

January 7, 2026

The City of Whitefish lies approximately 25 miles west of Glacier National Park (established in 1910), Flathead County's most popular tourist destination. To the north of the city, the Whitefish Mountain Range rises to heights of 8,000 feet. Ten miles to the west are the Salish Mountains, a lower mountain range. 35 miles to the east, the Flathead Range forms the Continental Divide. Nine miles to the east of Whitefish is Columbia Falls. 15 miles to the south of Whitefish is the City of Kalispell, the seat of Flathead County and the center of business and commerce in northwestern Montana. Regionally, Whitefish is centrally located between four larger cities; driving distance to Spokane is 254 miles to the west, Calgary is 281 miles to the north, Great Falls is 219 miles to the east, and Missoula is 138 miles to the south.

Whitefish is located on the main line of the Burlington Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) which runs between Chicago and Seattle. Amtrak's daily Empire Builder passenger train is also on this line, and Whitefish is the busiest passenger stop between Portland and Minneapolis. US Highway 93, officially recognized as a US highway in 1926, begins in Arizona, runs through the center of the community to the Canadian Border where it continues as a Canadian highway. Just outside the southern city limits, Montana Highway 40 intersects US Highway 93 before continuing east as US Highway 2 into Columbia Falls and along the southern periphery of Glacier National Park. From there, US Highway 2 travels over Marias Pass and approximately 300 miles east as the "Hi-Line" terminating in North Dakota. The City of Whitefish is approximately 11 miles to the northwest of Glacier International Airport, the primary airport serving Northwest Montana.

General Layout of the City (see Exhibit S3)

The City is bisected by railroad tracks into a northern portion and a southern portion. A viaduct connecting Baker Street to Wisconsin Avenue provides the only grade-separated crossing across these tracks. East Second Street provides a second link between the north and south sides of town, although it is an "at-grade" crossing and accessibility on this route can be obstructed by trains.

US Highway 93 South serves as the main travel route and the primary southern and western access in and out of the City. It has a north-south alignment as Spokane Avenue from the southern city limits to its intersection with East Second Street in the downtown. It then turns to an east-west alignment from Spokane Avenue to the western city limits (leaving as West Second Street). Primary access to the eastern city limits is provided by East Second Street on the east side of Spokane Avenue. Wisconsin Avenue is the major north-south corridor through the northern side of the City, beginning at the center of the City as Baker Avenue, crossing over the railroad tracks at the viaduct and continuing out

of the city limits toward Big Mountain (Whitefish Mountain), the end of Whitefish Lake, and mountain trails.

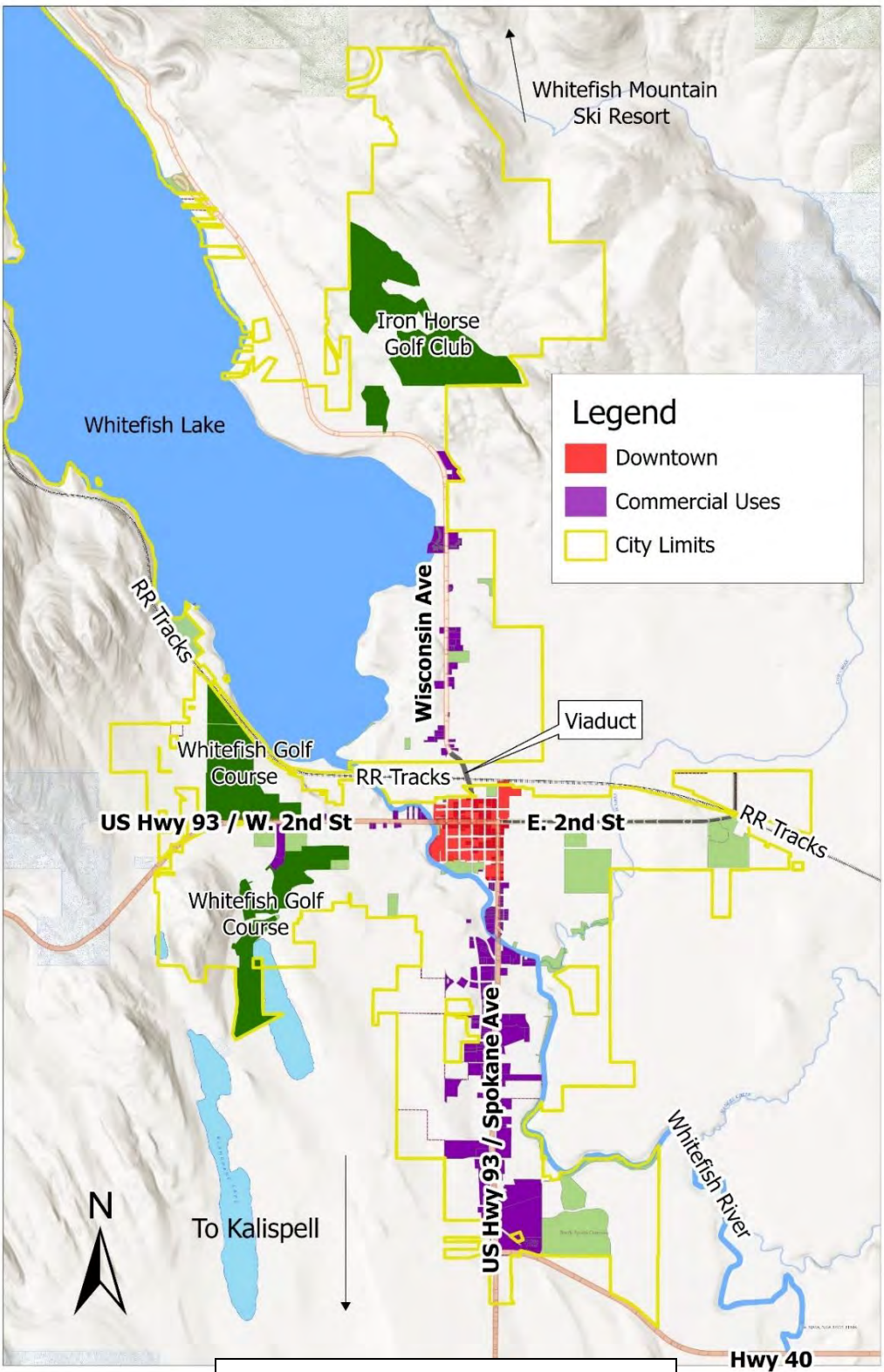


Figure S3: General Layout of the City

January 7, 2026

The historic downtown core is located roughly at the center of the City (west of the intersection of East 2nd Street and Spokane Avenue, south of the railroad tracks). It contains the majority of tourism, nightlife, and civic uses including the chamber of commerce, retail stores and boutiques, cafes, restaurants, music venues and mixed uses including residential above ground floor commercial. It is broken up into two distinct districts, the Old Town Central District and the Old Town Railway District.

Most commercial uses outside of the downtown are contained on Spokane Avenue, Second Street (east and west) and Wisconsin Avenue. Virtually all automobile-oriented uses such as strip malls, fast food restaurants, auto dealerships, industrial uses service stations and supermarkets are contained along US 93 South / Spokane Avenue from the southern city limits at Highway 40 to East Sixth Street. The remainer of commercial uses along this corridor to the western city limits is predominately neighborhood commercial type uses (small scale local restaurants, professional offices, tour agencies, etc.). Commercial uses along Wisconsin Avenue are also primarily neighborhood commercial, along with resort uses such as lodging.

Outside of the downtown and the commercial corridors is mostly residential uses. The oldest, densest and most historic single-family neighborhoods are in and around the downtown and directly east of Spokane Avenue, south of the railroad tracks. The newer and least dense single-family neighborhoods are located at the far northern city limits off East Lakeshore Drive and surrounding the Whitefish Golf Course west of Karrow Avenue on the south side of US Highway 93. The largest amount of high density multifamily residential is within two areas. The first is on the north side of town on both sides of Wisconsin Avenue between Denver Street and Edgewood Place. The second is at the south side of the city on either side of US Highway 93, particularly south of JP Road and north of Hwy 40.

Planning Boundary Area

The area encompassed by this Community Plan is generally the area the City could eventually annex or extend municipal water and sewer over the next 20 years. Figure S4 represents the Vision Whitefish 2045 Planning Boundary. The boundary at the time of the 1996 growth policy update was larger than the present area. During the 2007 update, the boundary was reduced in size pursuant to Montana Code Annotated Section 76-2-310, which only allows a city to extend the limits of its zoning up to two miles beyond the city limits. The boundary shown below is similar to the 2007 growth policy except it has been expanded at the northeast to contain Haskill Basin (the location of the City's water source) and to the west to include additional properties adjacent to Whitefish Lake. The boundary encompasses approximately 65 square miles, versus the 12.67 square mile existing city

limits. This means that approximately 80% of the boundary lies outside of the existing municipal limits, and final authority for land uses lies with Flathead County.

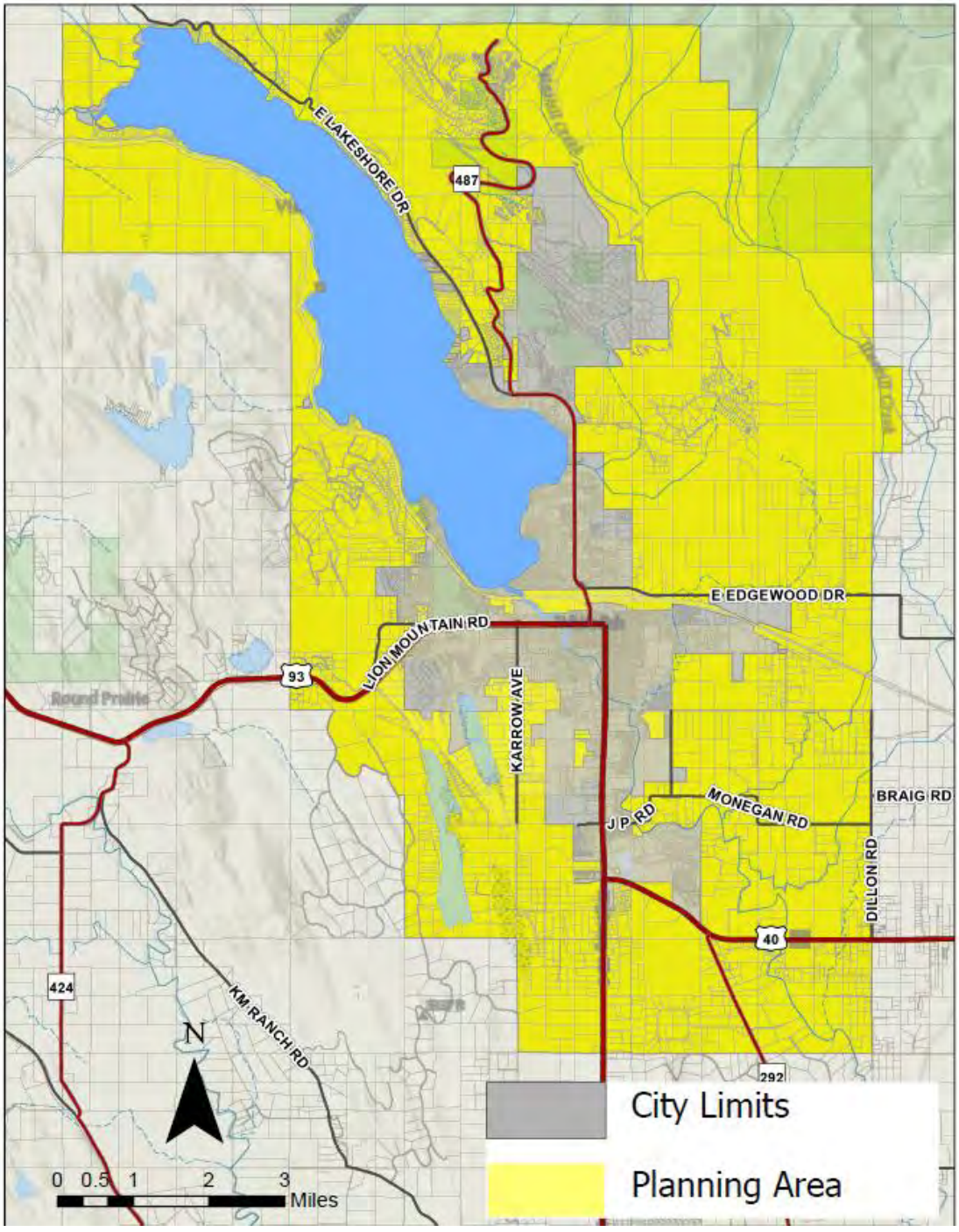


Figure S4: Vision Whitefish 2045 Planning Boundary

OUR VISION

Our Identity

Originally a gritty working-class railroad and lumber milling town, Whitefish is now known as a haven for active recreation. “Authentic community” and “small mountain town” is what was most frequently mentioned when residents were asked to describe the City of Whitefish during public workshops. When asked what they liked most about Whitefish, topping the list was walkability. Residents also frequently mentioned the people, the tight-knit community, the friendliness and feeling of safety, the access to the outdoors, the lakes and rivers, the historic downtown and neighborhoods, and the local businesses. Whitefish is highly regarded for its culture and amenities including good schools, an excellent library, parks and trails, several performing arts venues, the yearly events and a lively music scene. Whitefish is skiing, hiking, boating, biking, fishing, golfing, swimming, and snowshoeing with locals that know and care for each other. Whitefish is a small town with a big personality.

Our Challenges

The same qualities that make Whitefish special have also led to rapid change and development pressures. Housing is of particular concern. Affordability for the local workforce, a lack of housing diversity, the number of second homes, and investment properties and short-term rentals top the list of concerns. Also frequently mentioned includes an increasing amount of traffic, diminishing locally owned businesses, threats to water quality, forest fires, the current pace of development, a widening divide between working class locals and wealthy newcomers and investors, a disproportionate focus on tourism versus the local population, and the loss of historic character to contemporary or inappropriate development.

The Visioning Process

Visioning is a critical step in every planning process, laying a foundation for long-term public engagement and planning. Visioning ensures that the values and goals of our community are accurately reflected in our community plan’s policies and strategies. Before there can be a meaningful community plan, the residents must agree on a mental picture of what Whitefish should look like, feel like, and be like.

From February to June 2024 six visioning sessions were held. Several hundred people were involved in the visioning process. Sessions included interactive polling, mapping exercises, and group discussion topics. Participants were shown the existing vision statement from the 2007 growth policy and whether they believed this vision statement was still pertinent. For those who could not attend in person, online visioning participation was available through the public engagement website. (Please see Appendix for the

complete details on the public engagement process.) Although there were wide variations in the opinions and viewpoints collected, commonalities arose in how the participants saw our city in 2045. From these sessions, a vision emerged:

VISION WHITEFISH 2045

The citizens of Whitefish value the working-class origin of our city and embrace the future while honoring our past. We treasure the walkability, quality of life, and small town feel of our community. We will ensure Whitefish remains an exceptional place to live, work and play. We will protect and enhance our trails, parks and open spaces, water quality, wildlife, and natural resources. We will respect and support our local businesses, historic downtown, and existing neighborhoods. We will continue to pursue all opportunities to be an affordable, inclusive and diverse community. Six themes articulate our commitment and establish the foundation of VISION WHITEFISH 2045:

- *Fostering Responsible Community Development*
  We welcome new and infill development that supports the efficient use of land, respects existing neighborhoods and natural resources, and can be adequately and cost-effectively served by public facilities and services. Our downtown will remain the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of our community.

- *Encouraging a Diversity of Housing*
  "We encourage a diversity of stable housing types. We will provide for all demographic segments of our population, particularly our local workforce, to allow residents to move in, move up or age in place, ensuring everyone can remain here across multiple generations. New housing will be complementary to and respectful of existing neighborhoods."

- *Being a Multimodal Community.*
  We champion alternatives to private automobile use. We will be a connected, walkable community and will prioritize a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system for all modes of travel. We place equal emphasis on non-motorized and motorized forms of transportation while considering associated impacts on land use and existing transportation infrastructure.

- *Supporting a Robust Economy*
  We support local business retention and expansion and encourage a diverse year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities through policies supporting moderate economic growth for our community. ~~We will be self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs.~~

- *Leading in Environmental Sustainability and Community Resiliency*
  We will respond and adapt to climate change and employ sustainability principles, practices, and education. We will demonstrate environmental stewardship and preserve and enhance our natural resources while managing, preventing, and mitigating impacts from hazards.

- *Ensuring High Quality Public Services, Infrastructure and Amenities*
  We will prioritize the provision of high-quality municipal services, maintain appropriate service levels, use infrastructure to guide rather than respond to development, and provide exceptional parks and amenities to serve the needs of current and future residents and visitors.

PLAN ELEMENTS

As noted in the Vision Statement, based upon the results of visioning sessions and previously adopted growth policies, there are six themes which emerge that articulate Whitefish's commitment and establish the foundation of VISION WHITEFISH 2045. These themes are captured in plan elements, which represent the city's vision for the future, and provide a roadmap for how the city intends to grow and thrive over the next twenty years. Each element addresses a specific topic or functional area and provides guidance on how the city and community can achieve their vision and goals in this area while also meeting statutory requirements. The plan elements contained in this section are of equal weight and no particular order and should be used as a reference as questions arise or general guidance is needed about the city's position on a particular topic. The plan elements also guide the user to relevant background information and supporting maps when applicable.

For the purpose of this community plan, the term "goal" and "objective" are to mean:

GOALS articulate a general and broad policy statement driven by the vision such as "provide a wide variety of safe, decent, and affordable housing for the residents and workforce of the community."

OBJECTIVES are more specific statements or actions to be taken to attain the goal such as "the City shall review its codes and ordinances to determine which 5 of 14 state-required housing strategies will be implanted into its zoning regulations."

LAND USE ELEMENT PLACEHOLDER

HOUSING ELEMENT PLACEHOLDER

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT PLACEHOLDER

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What was originally an economy based on the timber and railroad industries is now primarily a visitor economy with some healthcare, education, railroad, information, retail and entrepreneurial and service industries.

BNSF is still a major employer in the city, employing approximately **280** people.

$71,110
Whitefish Median Household Income

$67,915
Montana Median Household Income

< $35,000
Average salaries of service workers

AREAS OF EXPECTED JOB GROWTH
Professional Services
Health Care
Tourism

AREAS OF JOB DECLINE
Transportation
Warehousing
Information Services

76% of employees who work for Whitefish businesses do not live in Whitefish.

Approximately **43%** of all jobs in the City of Whitefish are related to tourism.

21% of working Whitefish residents work remotely

TOP WHITEFISH EMPLOYERS (2024)	
Logan Health	483
BNSF	280
Whitefish School District	250

In 2023, non-resident spending in Flathead County was **1 billion** with the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau reporting tourism bringing in approximately **$390 million** for the City of Whitefish. Resort tax brought more than **6 million** dollars into the city in 2023.

BUSINESSES MOST LACKING IN WHITEFISH
Personal and business services
Construction
Clothing retailers (for locals)

Goods and services limited by zoning or availability in Whitefish results in Whitefish residents driving to other nearby communities for their needs.

"Availability of Attainable Housing, Traffic and Shift of Resource and Transportation Based Jobs into Tourism Economy"
Indicated as trends that will influence economic development opportunities

SUPPORTING A ROBUST RESILIENT ECONOMY

Vision: "We support local business retention and expansion and encourage a diverse year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities through policies supporting moderate economic growth for our community. ~~We will endeavor to provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs to serve our local population~~."

INTRODUCTION

Whitefish has weathered many economic ups and downs since its incorporation in 1905 after the Great Northern Railway made Whitefish a stop in 1904. In 1929, the Empire Builder rail service was completed from the east to west coast, bringing in visitors from far away, many of whom stayed for the outdoor beauty and jobs at local mills or the railroad. An early 1900s timber boom was tempered by the Great Depression that lasted from 1929 to 1939. In 1947, Big Mountain Ski area installed lifts and soon after skiers began finding their way here to recreate. Whitefish Lake also drew in visitors and summer resort cabin owners for its productive fishing. In the 1980s, many local timber mills shut down due to changing federal policies and timber jobs became scarce. At that time, there were homes and businesses that sported signs that stated: "Supported by Timber Dollars". Empty storefronts appeared downtown after businesses left to new malls constructed in Whitefish and Kalispell. The economy began to pick up in the late 1990s. The early 2000s saw a huge jump in real estate prices and new home starts as more people discovered Whitefish via the Internet and as a result of the housing bubble nationwide. In 2008, the Great Recession hit, causing many in the construction and real estate industries to lose their jobs and local families to move away. Fortunately, in 2003, local businesses partnered with the City to develop the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan. Implementation of the plan began in 2009 using a combination of resort tax funds and tax increment funds. This investment revitalized the town's commercial core resulting in the vibrant downtown we enjoy today.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and 2020 brought a huge influx of new people and businesses to Whitefish who were fleeing population centers for a more laid-back mountain lifestyle, many of whom were able to maintain their high-paying jobs by working remotely. A consequence of this was a steep increase in housing prices. This trend may reverse as remote workers are being called back to in-person work. Over the next twenty years, there will likely be other major economic shifts for reasons that are hard to predict.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

1. Encourage a balanced year-round base economy that continues to provide essential jobs, goods and services, recognizing that the needs of local residents and neighborhoods should not be less important than the needs and interests of businesses.

Diversifying the economy beyond a seasonal tourism base to attract "primary jobs" has been a recurrent strategy of the city. A common theme has been strengthening the economic base by seeking year round, high paying industries. During visioning sessions for this plan update, virtually all comments about economic development expressed the need for providing a greater diversity of goods, services, and jobs for the residents of Whitefish. However, some residents expressed economic development should not occur to the detriment of the existing small town character of Whitefish.

Objectives:

a. Pursue all feasible alternatives to provide affordable housing for those who work in the City of Whitefish.

b. Evaluate where commercial and industrial areas may need to grow or revitalize to meet expected demand over the next twenty years and beyond.

c. Preserve existing industrial and commercial zoning and only support rezoning for residential purposes if a significant public benefit can be demonstrated, such as workforce housing.

d. Consider incentive programs for certain business sectors to entice relocation or establishment of high-wage businesses within the city.

e. ~~Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers.~~

f. Investigate opportunities and partnerships to identify and recruit clean, community-compatible industry to Whitefish.

g. Support local and valley wide commuter public transportation to and from downtown to accommodate residents, visitors, and local employees.

h. Continue to support local businesses and accommodate growth that has already occurred.

Goal

2. Support local business retention and expansion and entrepreneurial opportunities.

The Whitefish community values locally owned businesses as well as the distinct commercial character of Whitefish. Locally owned businesses should be protected and incentivized, and franchise businesses should be discouraged. There are opportunities to capitalize on the unique geographic setting of Whitefish such as its proximity to rail and international commerce routes. Whitefish also has an educated and talented workforce which could prove advantageous to locally-compatible startup, technology or incubator type businesses.

Objectives:

a. Consider incentive programs or low-interest loan programs to retain and expand existing businesses within the city.

b. Coordinate with BNSF and compatible industries to identify available land and opportunities to capitalize on existing rail access, including adding a new rail spur to accommodate rail-served industry and local loading or unloading of shipped goods.

c. Encourage the development of primary-job creating enterprises through such strategies as timing of infrastructure improvements and/or emphasis on building or redevelopment of building types that allow for small business growth (such as business incubators or co-working spaces).

d. ~~Continue to restrict and regulate big box retail and explore adding an economic impact analysis requirement for proposals for those uses~~Prohibit big box retail.

e. Continue to prohibit formula retail and restaurants downtown and prohibit formula hotels and formula services downtown. Continue to regulate formula businesses in other commercial areas to support the unique character and shopping experience of Whitefish and promote locally owned businesses.

f. Create a local group, network, or committee that has recurring conversations regarding trends and specific areas of growth with other municipalities, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations to share information to help develop and encourage sustainable business-attracting strategies.

g. Actively pursue partners and grants to fund and establish business incubators to provide technical and logistic support to new businesses.

h. Continue to evaluate and simplify the process of starting a business in Whitefish

i. ~~Support creative lower-cost enterprises that cater to locals such as food trucks or temporary "pop-up shops" using existing under-utilized buildings, facilities or outdoor spaces.~~

j. Encourage all new commercial development, subdivisions and infrastructure upgrades to include the installation of conduit for high-speed internet, and congruently explore grant or funding opportunities for this type of infrastructure to meet the needs of the current population and potential growth.

~~k. Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood-serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas.~~

Goal

3. Maintain the downtown core as the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of the community.

The downtown historic core contains the majority of the tourism, retail, entertainment, food, and civic uses in the city. But downtown is more than a commercial center – it is a place of connection, where farmers markets, parades, and festivals foster civic pride and social cohesion. In 2006, the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan was first adopted. This master plan presents strategies to maintain the commercial integrity of the Downtown and ensure the heart of Whitefish remains intact.

Objectives:

a. Continue implementation of the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan.

b. Maintain zoning consistent with the uses desired downtown and the recommendations of the Downtown Business District Master Plan.

c. Create an overlay district for the downtown area to protect and enhance downtown character, scale and massing.

d. Consider possible programs for the downtown area that can evaluate and increase the diversity of year round local serving business.

e. ~~Consider a program for the downtown area that can evaluate and determine a limit of certain prolific business types. For example, create a maximum allowance on certain business types to be able to emphasize inclusion of other businesses – i.e. if there is a large number of art galleries or jewelry stores, consider a maximum number of those business types in the area to increase diversity of commercial offerings in the downtown core.~~

f. ~~Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit.~~

Goal

4. Protect the natural resources and unique character and qualities of Whitefish for the continued health of the visitation economy and quality of life for residents.

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Whitefish's economy. Tourists visit Whitefish and the Flathead Valley for its uniqueness and for the quality of the experience. The local economy is dependent upon clean air and water, scenic vistas, open spaces, and an abundance of fish and wildlife. Protecting these resources through properly managed development is not only good for the resource itself and a benefit to the community, it is vital to the economy as well. To provide a strategic, long-term vision and framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish community and reduce tourism impacts on the community, the city and the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau joined together to develop a Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan.

Objectives:

a. Work with Whitefish Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and local and state agencies to explore ways to promote sustainable resource-based tourism without endangering vital natural resources.

b. Support the goals and objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan.

c. Continue to work with the Montana DNRC, Whitefish Legacy Partners, Glacier Nordic Club and other public and private agencies to support, protect, and maintain

outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities such as the Whitefish Trail, Glacier Nordic Ski Trails, Smith Lake Disc Golf Course, and other public recreation facilities.

Goal

5. Support organic and other localized farming as a means to broaden the community's economic base and to preserve and enhance rural character.

Preserving and supporting local farms has a positive impact on the economy. Local produce grown nearby can be sustainably transported to market without using the quantities of fossil fuels required to send products from somewhere else to local grocery stores. As fuel prices continue to rise and as consumers become more sensitive to processed and genetically altered foods, organic local farming should become a growth industry.

Objectives:

a. Map active local agricultural operations as part of the land use database.

b. Explore incentives for the growth and retention of localized agriculture.

c. Determine appropriate zoning and locations in rural agricultural areas to allow limited farm-based produce stands, farmer's markets~~, and farm stops~~.

d. Continue to partner with the Whitefish Farmers Market.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES & HAZARDS

Whitefish residents repeatedly express their desire for clean air, clean water, scenic vistas, and protection of wildlife habitat, open space and forest lands.

Since the last adopted growth policy, Whitefish has adoped water quality and lakeshore regulations.

4-6° Fahrenheit is the average temperature Montana is projected to increase by mid-century.

LEADING CAUSES OF AIR POLLUTION IN WHITEFISH
1. Vehicle Emissions
2. Open Burning
3. Wildfires

There is a healthy bear population in and around Whitefish. There have been 381 bear incidents reported since 2018.

BIGGEST CONTRIBUTORS TO WHITEFISH WATER QUALITY DECLINE
1. Failing Septic Tanks
2. BNSF Spill Incidents
3. Polluted Stormwater

70% of the Whitefish Lake perimeter is adjacent to properties which require septic systems for development. As they age, septic tanks are prone to failure and leakage.

Climate change consequences **ALREADY AFFECTING** Whitefish include reduced snowfall, hotter summers, bigger wildfires and smokier air, more droughts, decline in water supplies, increased flooding, and increased sediment into water.

Whitefish has a **90% higher** risk of wildfire than other communities in the United States. The entire city is within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

Natural Resources have driven the early development and economy of Whitefish - farming and ranching, fishing and hunting, and healthy forests for logging.

LEADING IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY FROM HAZARDS.

"We will respond and adapt to climate change and employ sustainability principles, practices, and education. We will demonstrate environmental stewardship and maintain and improve our natural resources while managing, preventing, and mitigating impacts from natural hazards."

INTRODUCTION

Article IX of the 1972 Montana Constitution guarantees its citizens "the right to a clean and healthful environment[3]." Whitefish is defined by its natural environment. At community visioning sessions, Whitefish residents repeatedly expressed their desire for clean air, clean water, scenic vistas, and protection of wildlife habitat, open space, and forest lands. The natural environment is comprised of a complex system of many components. Disruptions to any part of this system can result in permanent ecological impacts that reverberate for generations. One of the greatest environmental threats is climate change, which is already producing local and global effects.

Whitefish has an abundance of natural resources. Some of these resources have driven the early development and economy of Whitefish. Natural resources and associated activities specific to Whitefish include farming and ranching, abundant wildlife for fishing and hunting, healthy forests for logging, and mineral extraction. Responsible management of these resources is imperative to the health of the local economy and the availability of food and materials. It is incumbent upon Whitefish to recognize the historic contribution of resource extraction while managing our natural resources wisely to ensure they are available for our present and future residents.

Hazards, whether natural or human-made, pose varying levels of risk to communities and environments, highlighting the need for awareness, preparedness, and mitigation efforts. There is potential for hazards in every community. Some of these hazards are unavoidable and are natural phenomena such as lightning-caused fires, earthquakes, and flood events. There are also hazards that can be avoided, such as human-caused fires and chemical spills associated with the railroad and other industries. The magnitude and frequency of hazards can be lessened, avoided, or mitigated through hazard planning and preparation. Forest fires and the resulting damage can be reduced through proper

[3] In a 2024 landmark case, the Montana Supreme Court upheld a district ruling in *Held v. Montana* in which it determined recent legislation passed by the Montana State Legislature which prohibited greenhouse gas emissions from being considering during environmental review was unconstitutional based on Article IX which guarantees "Montanans' right to a clean and healthful environment."

forest management and defensible space around properly constructed structures. Flood impacts can be reduced by avoiding development in or around floodplains. Stormwater runoff can be reduced by designing with green infrastructure that absorbs, stores, and purifies rainwater and uses porous surfaces rather than concrete or asphalt. Earthquake damage can be limited by building and engineering solutions and by having building codes county-wide rather than just inside city limits. Train derailments and / or chemical spills can be avoided by regular maintenance, adequate infrastructure, proper communication and personnel training. There is much that can be done to reduce the loss of life and property and to recover from hazardous events.

A sustainable community is a community that can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A resilient community is a community that can withstand, resist, absorb, accommodate, and recover quickly from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner. Through responsible stewardship of the land, thoughtful land use policy, regulatory updates, and citizen involvement, Whitefish will continue to demonstrate its commitment to being a sustainability and resiliency leader.

ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

AIR QUALITY

Goal

1. Maintain and improve air quality for the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, including through continued exploration of ways to further reduce air pollution.

Clean air is a valuable resource for residents and visitors alike. Community members and visitors appreciate clean air for outdoor pursuits including maintaining the visibility of the grand vistas of the surrounding mountains, the Flathead Valley, and Glacier National Park. The 2007 growth policy noted Whitefish was a non-attainment area, mostly due to dust generated from winter road sanding materials and vehicles tracking mud and dirt from unpaved surfaces. Paving of roads is now required, and salt deicers are now used rather than sand, although salt deicers have their own share of environmental impacts. Apart from the dust, the most predominant air quality contaminants in Whitefish and the community plan area include open burning, vehicle emissions, and wildland fires.

Objectives:

a. Continue to implement the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program.

b. Continue to monitor Whitefish air quality, and work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on a monitoring program.

c. Continue to identify additional sources of air pollution and explore programs and regulations that will improve Whitefish air quality. Examples could include measures the city could take to reduce automobile trips, championing for public transit and other alternatives to automobiles, encouraging electric versus fuel-powered equipment and promoting anti-engine idling policies.

WATER QUALITY

Goal

2. Maintain and improve water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams.

During the visioning process, the community overwhelmingly responded the top three most important features to protect were the Whitefish River, Whitefish Lake, and overall water quality. Much work has been accomplished concerning water quality since the 2007 Growth Policy. The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) has evolved into a significant local water quality leader and voice for Whitefish Lake. Water quality regulations and Lake and Lakeshore Protections have been adopted. There have been significant clean ups of BNSF-related fuel spills. An interceptor trench to capture effluent from boat bilge pumps has been constructed on the boat ramp at City Beach. The city has partnered with other agencies to begin a robust Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program. New and more efficient and effective water and wastewater treatment plants have been constructed.

Despite this progress, threats to Whitefish water quality remain. Some of these threats include additional development along waterfront property, more impervious surfacing and other contaminants being introduced into the water sources. The majority of properties adjacent to and near Whitefish Lake use on-site septic systems which can and have failed and leach into the Lake. Storm drains have the potential to drain oil and other pollutants directly into the Whitefish River. Chemicals and fertilizers associated with golf courses and agricultural practices can contaminate ground and surface water. There are still trace amounts of pollutants such PCBs and mercury in

Whitefish waters. The city's fireworks displays have been shown to release numerous particulates and heavy metals into the air, water and soil.

Objectives:

a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land maintenance or land disturbance, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, chemical contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the goal for all development activity.

b. Continue to partner with Whitefish Lake Institute and / or other entities to address and monitor water quality, identify and address sources of contamination, provide periodic reports, and public access to such information where feasible.

c. At least every five years, the City of Whitefish shall obtain or prepare reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake including benchmarks, facts, trends and scientific conclusions on the condition of the Lake.

d. The City of Whitefish shall track 303(d) non-compliance. A report on the facts leading to the listings, and probable sources, should be prepared.

e. Annually report on BNSF activities, cleanup and monitoring activities related to Whitefish Lake and Whitefish River.

f. Identify and mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake and Upper Whitefish River

g. Consider city policy which requires all properties remaining on septic systems to be inspected prior to annexation.

h. To mitigate impacts to neighborhoods with aging septic systems, provide incentives such as deferred annexation in exchange for wastewater agreements for a period of 20 years to match a rural special improvement district term length.

i. In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the city, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake for swimming, but not for watercraft, due to the risk of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species as transported by watercraft.

j. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups or agency partners, such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, Whitefish Legacy Partners and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront, riparian and watershed lands as open space.

k. Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

l. Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

m. Start planning for MS4 requirements applicable to cities over 10,000 population.

n. Continue to implement and monitor programs and coordinate with other agencies to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

o. Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to magnesium chloride deicer on City streets and sidewalks.

p. Continue to explore and implement more environmentally friendly fireworks alternatives with the goal of eliminating perchlorates.

q. Evaluate and prepare for impacts to surface municipal water supply in event of wildfire.

r. Proactively engage county, state and federal resource management agencies to reduce and prevent water quality degradation.

s. For recreational fields and golf courses, owned by the city but leased to another entity, the City of Whitefish should evaluate future lease renewal language to determine whether environmental certifications and additional practices could be required to limit and mitigate environmental contamination of ground and surface water and to conserve natural resources, including water and energy.

t. Encourage private recreational facilities such as sports fields and golf courses, to get environmental certifications from accredited environmental or professional organizations.

u. Continue to educate the public on the water quality impacts of non-organic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, promoting best practices and environmentally friendly alternatives.

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Goal

3. Minimize and/or mitigate impacts to both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and their habitats as development occurs.

The community and visitors appreciate the wildlife and its habitat. Wildlife in the city and community plan area ranges from herds of elk to bald eagles and grizzly bears. As the Whitefish population has grown and development has moved outward, wildlife interactions and conflicts have increased. When developing or expanding city limits, thoughtful planning needs to occur to help maintain wildlife corridors and habitats while ensuring development respects the needs of wildlife. The city should continue to re-evaluate its approach to solid waste and other animal attractants. Wildlife management programs specific to particular wildlife, such as deer, should be considered. There also needs to be increased attention of the introduction and increase of invasive species, such as noxious weeds.

Objectives:

a. Work with partner organizations such as the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to develop guidelines or regulations for development proposals in proximity to wildlife habitats, ranges, and migration routes, while not precluding development and still respecting individual property rights.

    i. Identify, prioritize, and preserve key wildlife habitat and corridors, including consideration of providing wildlife crossing areas.
    ii. Develop a city Wildlife Management Plan to mitigate conflicts between humans and wildlife, particularly the impacts of the urban deer population as well as addressing chronic wasting disease.

b. Minimize the use of fencing that is exclusionary or dangerous to wildlife, except when required for human safety, for protection of at-risk crops, or for domestic animal containment. All fencing in critical wildlife corridors and habitat should be wildlife friendly.

c. Continue to support streamside, wetland, river, and lake buffers and setbacks through both the Whitefish Water Quality Protection regulations and the Flathead Conservation District regulations. While such regulations provide water quality protection, they also provide habitat for plants and animals.

d. Develop trail design standards for public trails along the Whitefish River to be reviewed and approved by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Flathead Conservation District that protect water quality and habitat as much as practicable.

e. Support Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks *Living with Wildlife* program to reduce conflicts between wildlife and people. *Living with Wildlife* includes not feeding wildlife by promptly removing fruit from trees, securing bird feeders, pet food, and garbage, and installing wildlife friendly fencing.

f. Continue to support the city fruit gleaning program for fruit trees on public land and within city parks to discourage aggressive human-wildlife interactions.

g. Continue to implement animal resistant solid waste containers throughout town and identify the next areas of town for animal resistant solid waste containers.

h. Coordinate with residents, community groups and non-profits to encourage use of animal resistant garbage cans within the unincorporated planning jurisdiction.

i. Continue to enforce noxious weed regulations and support noxious weed public education.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Goal

4. Continue to fulfill the city's commitment to the implementation of the Climate Action Plan.

Climate change is expected to present numerous significant impacts, many of which are already occurring. In 2018, the City of Whitefish adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to prepare for climate change, improve local resilience to climate change impacts and make the transition to a clean energy economy. To implement the CAP, the city established the Whitefish Climate Action Plan Standing Committee. The Committee has enjoyed recent successes implementing the plan such as incorporating energy efficient fixtures into city facilities and revising landscape regulations to reduce water usage, but opportunities for improvement still exist. Potential improvements include regulatory updates, proactively supporting public transit and supporting more compact development to reduce vehicular emissions.

Objectives:

a. Continue to provide staff support to the Climate Action Plan Standing Committee.

b. Create an implementation schedule which outlines the city's responsibility in implementation of the plan, the timeline for action, and the responsible department.

c. Utilize the Electrification Recommendations from The Whitefish Climate Action Plan (3-7-2023) to lower greenhouse gas emissions within the city including:

    i. Transition public buildings to be all-electric.
    ii. Evaluate the feasibility of transitioning city landscape maintenance equipment from fuel-burning to battery-powered electric, where appropriate (e.g. lawn mowers, snow blowers, utility golf carts, sidewalk snowplows).
    iii. Pursue an all-electric bus fleet at a scale that is economically feasible.
    iv. Provide education and resources for students and community members on beneficial electrification.

d. Support local and valley wide commuter and visitor public transportation to and from downtown including the creation of a transit plan.

e. Continue to implement the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.

f. Review and revise regulations and engineering standards as necessary to provide incentives for climate-smart development practices. Examples include, but are not limited to:

    i. Allowance for reductions in landscaping, open space, or stormwater requirements when buildings incorporate green roofs.[4]
    ii. The use of above ground vegetated treatment for stormwater runoff rather than underground mechanical treatment and detention.
    iii. Reduced or eliminated off-street parking standards to reduce impervious surfaces, surface heat, and stormwater requirements.

[4] A "green roof" is a roof either fully or partially blanketed with vegetation. During Whitefish High School participation in the growth policy, 2024 Whitefish Senior Miki Flint wrote a senior paper and championed for green roofs at a Whitefish Community Development Board meeting.

iv. Adopting a complete streets policy, allowing narrower streets, creation of protected pedestrian/bike-only streets, and other techniques to encourage walkability.
v. Encourage new buildings to be EV and Solar Ready, especially if city funding is involved.
vi. Reviewing zoning and other development regulations to ensure infrastructure associated with renewable energy such as solar panels are supported.

g. Encourage density, when appropriate, in locations which provide efficient use of infrastructure and are walkable to goods, services, and places of employment.

h. Map green infrastructure assets and integrate them with the stormwater master plan update and proposed stormwater plans.

i. Explore the development of a heat island reduction plan with a strategy to introduce more shade structures and/or tree canopies in outdoor spaces such as above sidewalks, courtyards, pathways, and parking lots.

j. Expand small neighborhood parks when appropriate.

NATURAL RESOURCES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

WATER QUANTITY

Goal

5. Promote sustainable water management practices to ensure the availability and quality of water resources.

The City of Whitefish relies entirely on surface water for its domestic supply. Reliability and quality of surface drinking water could be threatened in the future by impacts of climate change, population increase, excessive water usage, contamination associated with landslides or wildfires, and excessive evaporation. Other potential water supply sources that are less sensitive to climate change should be investigated and the city should continue being proactive in reducing water consumption.

Objectives

a. Continue to review regulations, building standards, engineering standards and other best management practices for ways to improve water conservation.

b. Consider the creation of a city-wide water conservation plan that could include, but not be limited to, assessment of current water usage, benchmarks for progress, conservation goals, community outreach, potential infrastructure upgrades, regulatory changes and monitoring procedures.

AGRICULTURE

Goal

6. Encourage the preservation of prime farmland and productive agricultural lands.

During visioning sessions for this community plan, participants noted their fondness for the rural land and farms surrounding the city limits, particularly along the southeastern portion of the planning area. Farmland nationwide is being lost to development, increasing importance for local jurisdictions to preserve prime farmland and support local farms. There are numerous innovative approaches to encouraging the preservation or more efficient usage of agricultural land while still allowing adequate land for future development and respecting private property rights.

Objectives

a. The City of Whitefish shall give priority to infill development in and adjacent to established urban areas over plan amendments redesignating prime agricultural land for subdivision development.

b. Extending municipal services and roads into areas that would result in premature development of prime agricultural land should be avoided.

c. Support annexation of prime agricultural land for development purposes when it can be demonstrated it is needed for proper urban expansion, or the land is not productive.

d. Encourage the preservation of prime agricultural land through such mechanisms as conservation easements, zoning which supports farm operations by clustering development to retain the most agriculturally productive areas, establishing community gardens, or exploring the possibly of transfer of development rights.

e. Allow development in a way to make the most of the agricultural potential. Ensure land development, future regulations, easements or other restrictions do not unintentionally impact agricultural lands.

f. Review whether regulatory updates can be created that result in regulations or incentives to preserve or retain agricultural potential on productive and/or prime farmland.

TIMBER RESOURCES

Goal

7. Encourage sustainable forest management and future timber operations that support fuels reduction.

Careful forest management creates healthy forest ecosystems, preserves habitat and promotes the health and safety of residents by reducing the risk of wildfires. Although no sawmills remain in Whitefish, logging still occurs in the planning area. The largest private landowner is F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company. Much of this land is protected by conservation easements which allow continued logging by Stoltze, protect city water sources and allow for public recreation. The city should continue to support sustainable forest management practices to promote healthy forests while limiting impacts on local mill operations, the environment, and outdoor recreation.

Objectives

a. Ensure land development, future regulations, easements, or other restrictions do not unintentionally impact forest management or logging operations.

b. Encourage landowners in forested areas to consult with professional foresters on proper silviculture[5] and forest management techniques, particularly for hillsides and environmentally sensitive areas.

c. Encourage selective thinning over clearcut operations for forest management.

d. Continue to support Stoltze's sustainable logging operations, particularly within the Haskill Basin conservation easement.

[5] The US Forest Service defines Silviculture as the art and science of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, and health of forests and woodlands to meet the needs of landowners and society sustainably.

e. Encourage communication between Stoltze, the US Forest Service, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and non-profit conservation groups such as Whitefish Legacy Partners and Nature Conservancy to ensure forest management activities minimize impacts on outdoor recreation.

f. Support local milling operations including providing adequate zoning and land for these types of uses.

g. Ensure tree and water quality buffers are maintained during forest management adjacent to rivers, streams, wetlands, and other sensitive resources to reduce or mitigate adverse impacts.

MINERAL EXTRACTION

Goal

8. Mineral, gravel, and sand extraction is generally considered to be incompatible with the character, qualities, and environment of the Whitefish area, and is to be discouraged.

Mineral extraction can have severe impacts on groundwater, wildlife, and surrounding neighborhoods. The City of Whitefish has consistently held the position that mineral extraction is incompatible with the Whitefish area and is to be discouraged. However, the city is surrounded by unincorporated Flathead County land in which extractive industries are allowed by conditional use (or State law). When residential development is proposed within the city in areas adjacent to or in near proximity to unincorporated land with the potential of mineral extraction, strict development standards should be developed and property owners should be made aware of potential future impacts.

Objectives

a. Continue to coordinate with Flathead County on proposed opencut mining sites in unincorporated areas near existing Whitefish residential areas to ensure impacts are mitigated or eliminated.

b. When residential development is proposed within the city in areas adjacent to or in near proximity to unincorporated land with a reasonable probability of mineral extraction, ensure site design accounts for potential impacts from adjacent properties and encourage “buyer beware” statements of mineral extraction to be indicated through such means as a plat note.

c. Develop zoning performance standards for mineral and gravel extraction, including hours of operation, fencing and screening, noise and dust abatement, surface and groundwater quality monitoring, and reclamation plans.

HAZARDS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

WILDFIRE

Goal

9. Minimize wildfire risk to the Whitefish community, infrastructure, and amenities.

The risk of wildfire in Whitefish is 90% higher than other communities in the US. The entire City of Whitefish is within what is known as the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), the zone where development meets and intermingles with undeveloped wildland or forest. To prepare for the risk of potentially catastrophic wildfire events, the city should prioritize completion of risk assessments and a community wildfire protection plan to define and mitigate the areas of highest risk, assess firefighting capabilities, feasible evacuation routes, and how to manage emergency communications. Wildfire prevention is key, with recommended strategies including updating construction and development standards, supporting best management practices and proactivity encouraging wildfire education and preparation.

Objectives

a. Continue active participation in Firesafe Flathead.

b. Prioritize completion of an updated fire risk assessment in coordination with DNRC and USFS fire specialists.

c. Prepare an updated Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) within six months of this community plan approval. The plan should include a delineation of the Wildland Urban Interface, high risk areas, wildfire response times, community preparedness, firefighting capability, identify areas of insufficient water pressure, feasible evacuation routes, how emergency notification would occur and areas for most effective hazardous fuel treatments.

d. Develop regulations for future subdivision development in areas identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan as being “high” to “very high” wildfire risk in order to protect life and property.

e. Adopt requirements for Wildfire Defensible Space standards in Subdivision regulations.

f. Include Firewise® construction standards, mitigation of fire hazards, reduction of fuel loads, fire resistant landscaping materials and design, and adherence to defensible space requirements in City zoning regulations to supplement gaps in state building code WUI standards.

g. Compile a list of active local homeowner's associations and neighborhood associations and encourage their working together to become fire adapted or Firewise® communities.

h. Promote wildfire education, prevention and preparedness. This may include, but is not limited to, "buyer beware" plat notes in areas identified as high fire risk and Firewise® handouts with the issuance of building permits.

i. Consider additional changes to the subdivision regulations wildfire urban interface standards to include requirements for new subdivision homeowners' associations to include requirements for continued establishment and maintenance of WUI standards into their covenants as a condition of plat approval.

j. Work with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the US Forest Service, Firesafe Flathead, Stoltze Land and Lumber Company, homeowner's associations, fire districts and individual property owners to compile a map of mitigated areas and areas proposed for future mitigation, and date and type of hazard treatments/mitigation.

k. Support best management practices for reduction of wildfire risk, including but not limited to, commercial harvest and thinning of timber on public and private lands to reduce wildfire risks.

l. Support legislative efforts to reduce State limitations on WUI building code enforcement.

Goal

10. Assess and upgrade infrastructure to increase safety before fire events occur.

Concerns with inadequate infrastructure during an emergency event have been at the forefront of hazards and transportation discussions. Specific areas of discussion have been inadequate emergency egress from the top of Big Mountain, the need for another grade-separated crossing in addition to the existing viaduct, the present one-way-in

and one-way-out ingress-egress into Birch Point and recent fires in other locations caused by overhead utility lines.

Objectives:

a. Develop a feasibility study and preliminary design for a two lane alternative egress from Big Mountain.

b. If a secondary egress from Big Mountain is not established within five years of adoption of this Community Plan, City Council should consider implementing a public health and safety based moratorium on new subdivision approvals in the north and east sections of the future land use planning boundary.

c. Pursue opportunities for a grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street.

d. Begin negotiations with BNSF for alternative accesses into Birch Point and across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish.

e. Assess existing and potential evacuation routes, particularly those on unpaved forest roads, to determine improvements or strategies that could improve egress and provide directional information.

f. Coordinate with utility providers such as Flathead Electric to seek funding opportunities to identify and underground high risk utility lines.

FLOODPLAINS

Goal

11. Continue to fulfill the city's commitment to the National Flood Insurance Program.

Several areas in the Whitefish planning area lay within areas prone to flooding. Improper management or irresponsible development in or near floodplains can result in significant property damage, high insurance costs, loss of crops, displacement of communities, and environmental impacts such as loss of habitat and decline in water quality. The city should continue to work with state and federal agencies to identity and reduce flood risks.

Objectives:

a. Periodically update floodplain regulations to be consistent with State model ordinance.

b. Work toward participation in the Community Rating System Program with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reduce insurance rates for city residents.

c. Ensure any future city infrastructure reconstruction projects that affect floodplains or culverts provide revised floodplain mapping analysis and updated maps.

d. Seek better coordination on projects with the Flathead Conservation District on projects near rivers and streams that require floodplain permits.

SHALLOW GROUNDWATER

Goal

12. Continue to require groundwater monitoring in areas with known or suspected high groundwater.

Most areas in and around Whitefish are characterized by high seasonal groundwater. This can interfere with construction of infrastructure, homes and other structures. Although the city already has water quality protection regulations to address areas of high groundwater, the city should continue to accumulate and improve available groundwater depth data.

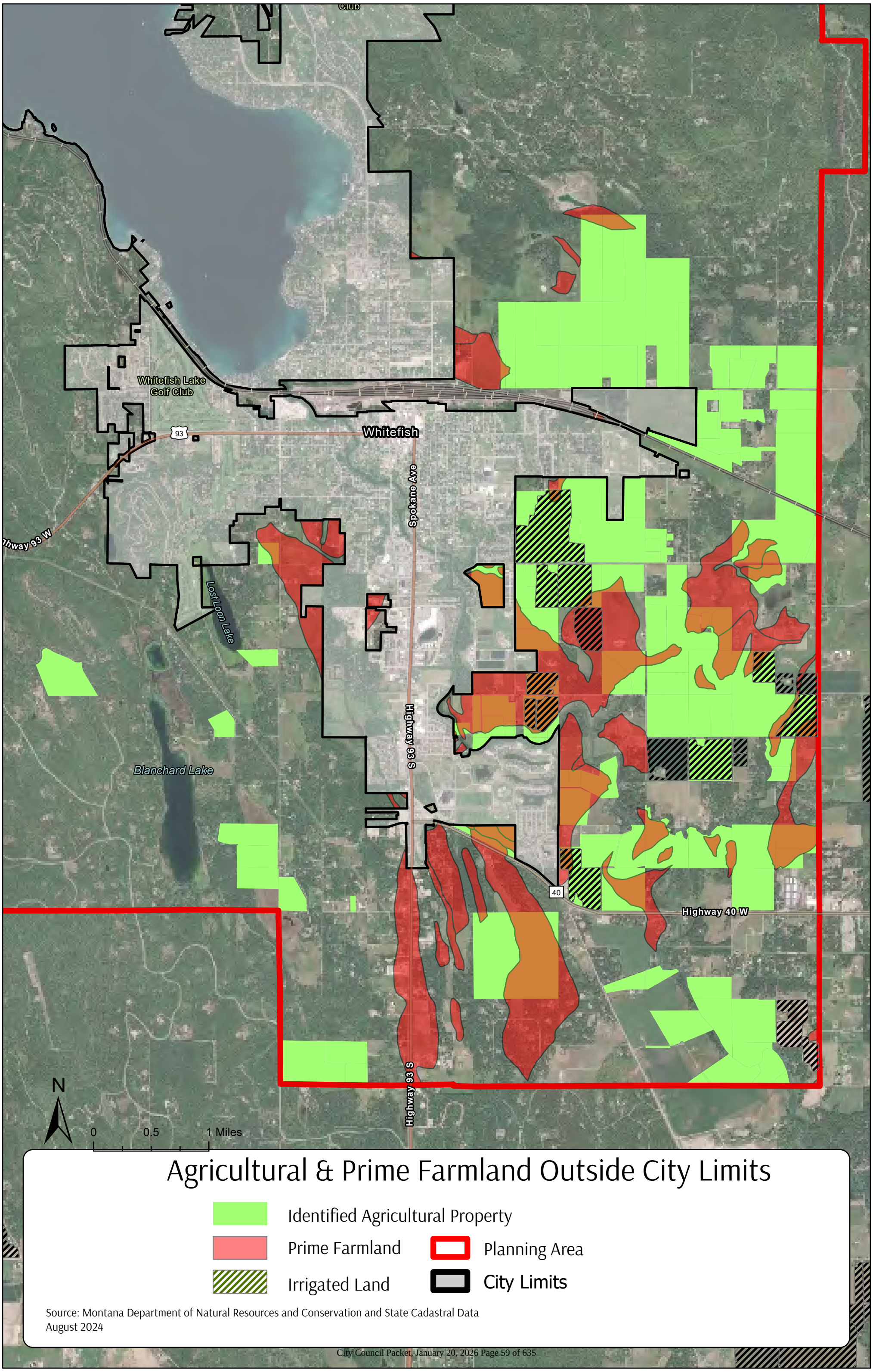
Objectives:

a. Continue to support proper construction methods in areas with the potential for high groundwater.

b. Continue to require plat notes regarding high groundwater.

c. As groundwater data is submitted to the city, catalogue this information for further refinement of areas with high groundwater.

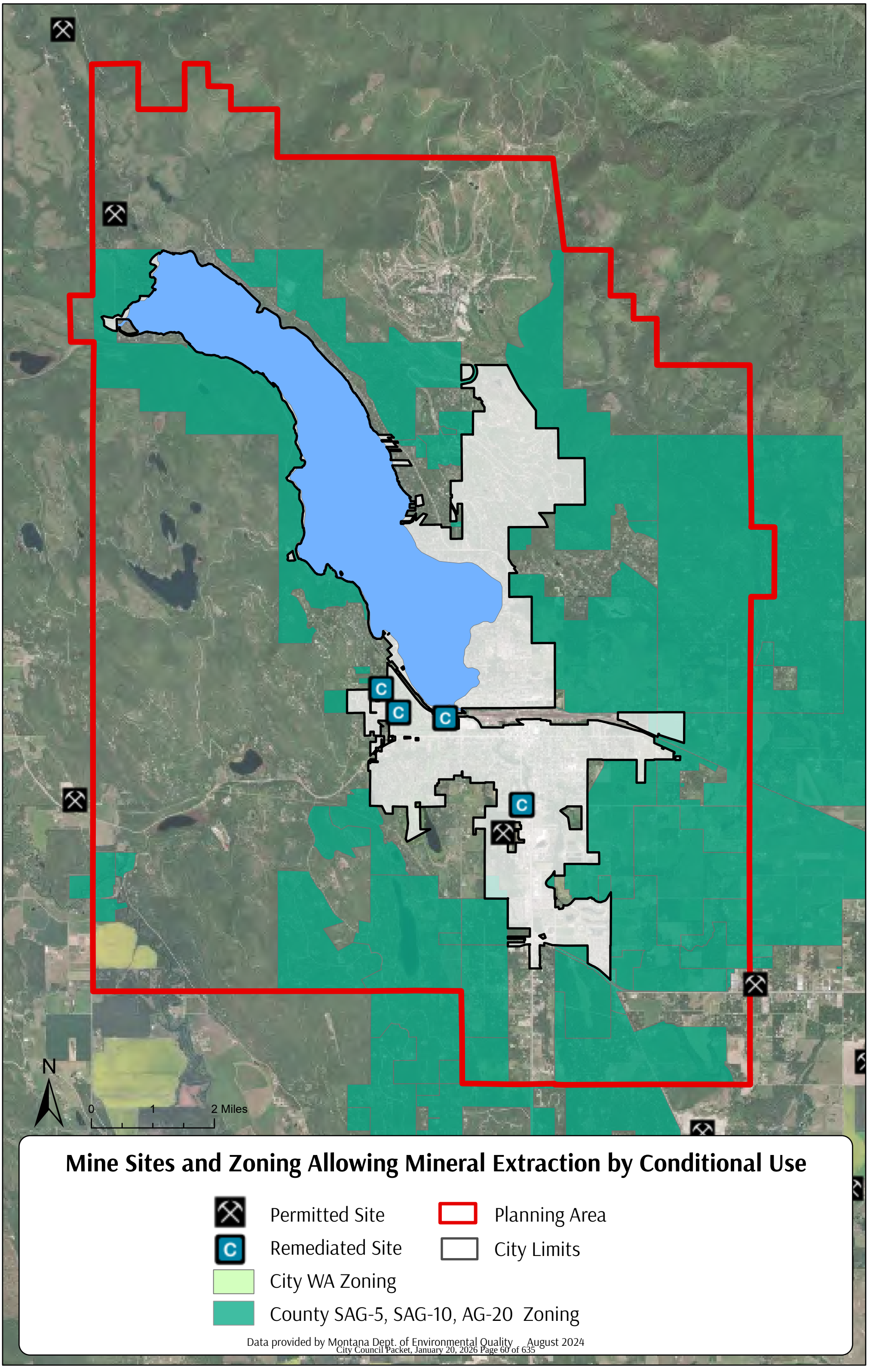
ENRH IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE



Agricultural & Prime Farmland Outside City Limits

- Identified Agricultural Property
- Prime Farmland
- Irrigated Land
- Planning Area
- City Limits

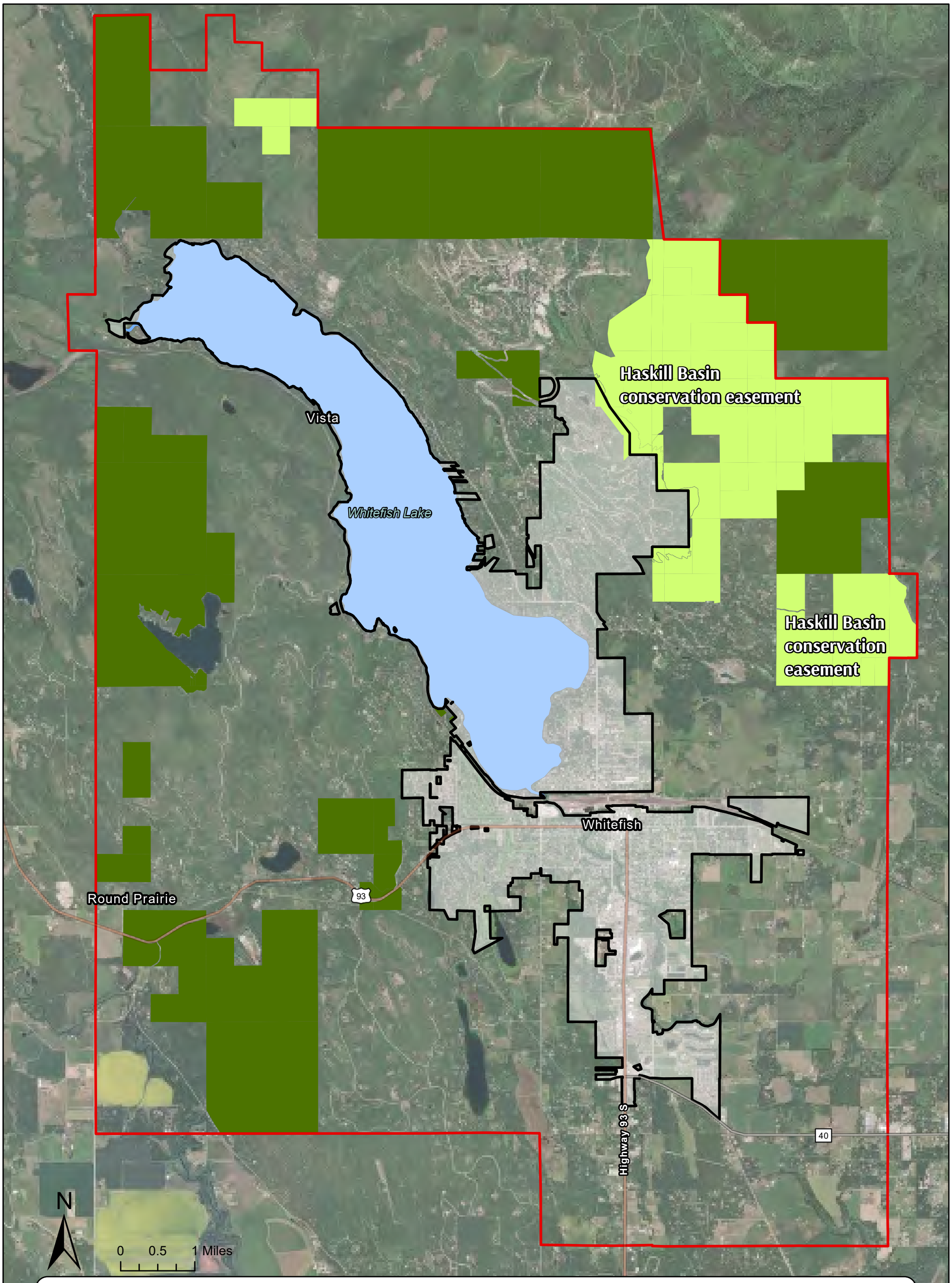
Source: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and State Cadastral Data
August 2024

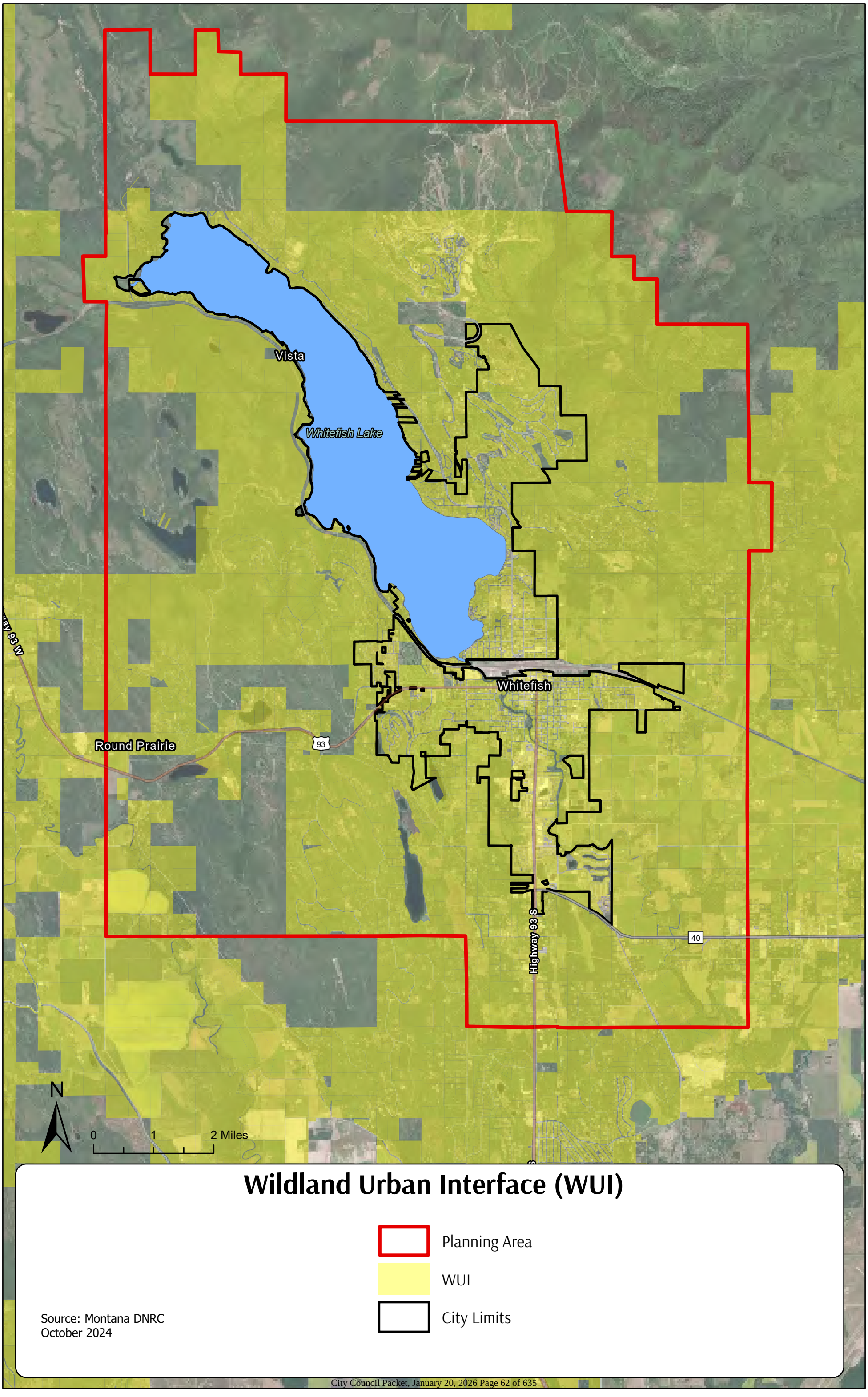


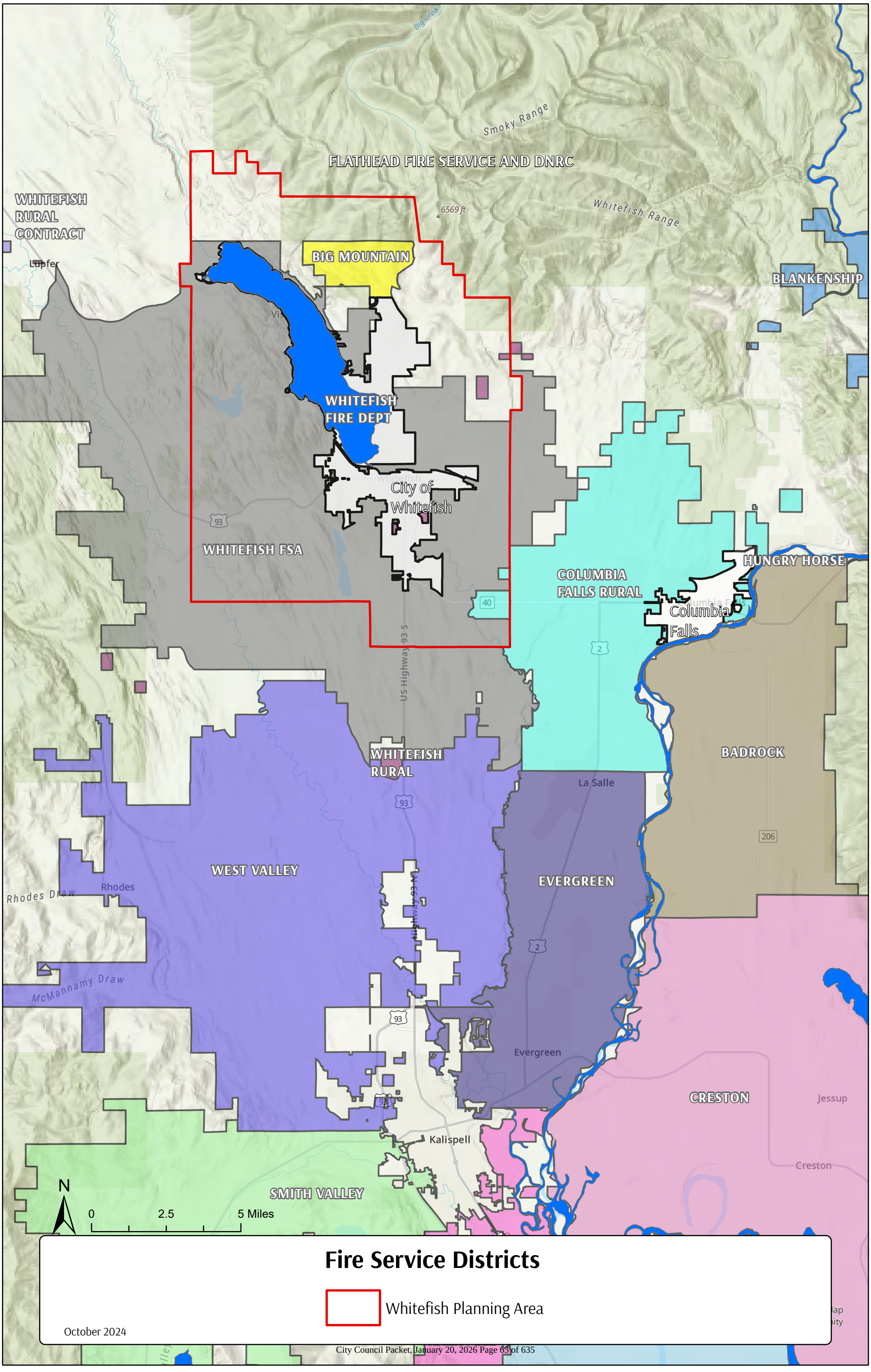
Mine Sites and Zoning Allowing Mineral Extraction by Conditional Use

Permitted Site
Remediated Site
City WA Zoning
County SAG-5, SAG-10, AG-20 Zoning
Planning Area
City Limits

Data provided by Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality August 2024


Haskill Basin
conservation easement
Vista
Whitefish Lake
Haskill Basin
conservation
easement
Whitefish
Round Prairie
93
Highway 93 S
40
N
0 0.5 1 Miles
Stoltze and Forest Lands
Forest Lands (State of MT and USFS)
Stoltze Land
Planning Area
Whitefish Lake
City Limits

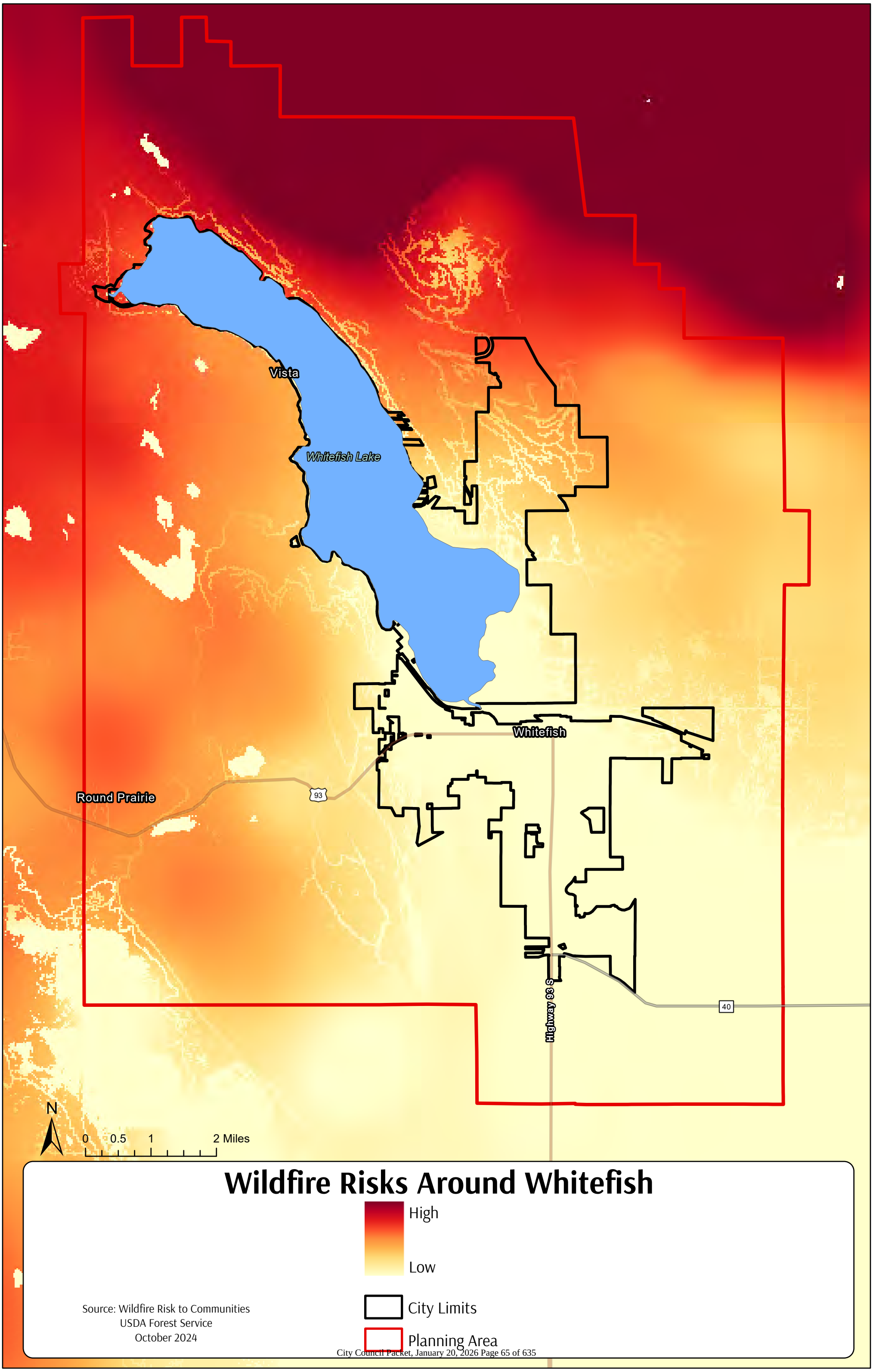

Vista
Whitefish Lake
Whitefish
Round Prairie
93
Highway 93 W
Highway 93 S
40
N
0
1
2 Miles
Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)
Planning Area
WUI
City Limits
Source: Montana DNRC
October 2024

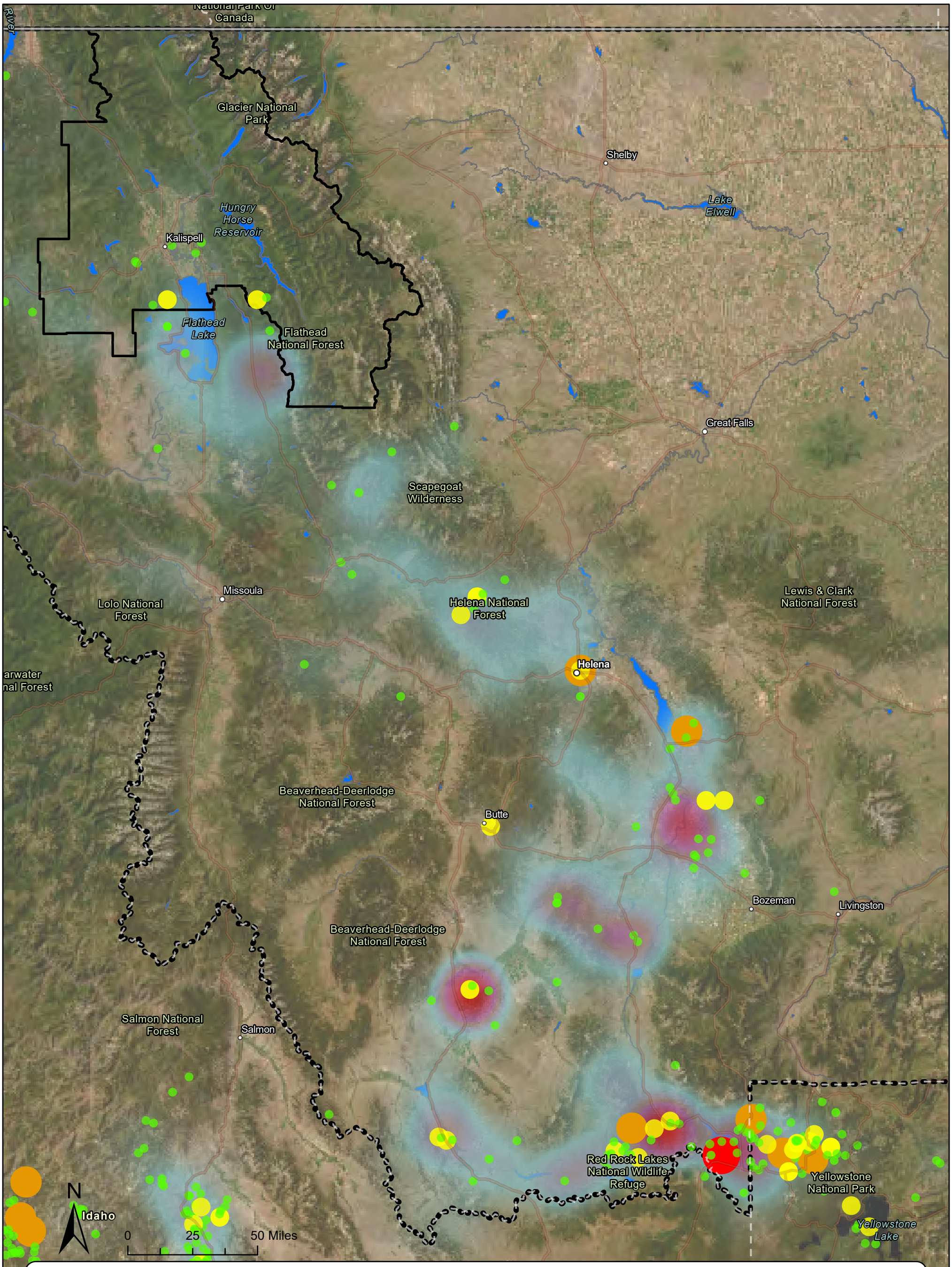

FLATHEAD FIRE SERVICE AND DNRC
WHITEFISH RURAL CONTRACT
BIG MOUNTAIN
BLANKENSHIP
WHITEFISH FIRE DEPT
City of Whitefish
WHITEFISH FSA
COLUMBIA FALLS RURAL
HUNGRY HORSE
Columbia Falls
WHITEFISH RURAL
BADROCK
WEST VALLEY
EVERGREEN
CRESTON
SMITH VALLEY
Kalispell
Evergreen
Jessup
Creston
La Salle
Lupfer
Rhodes
Rhodes Draw
McMannamy Draw
Smoky Range
Whitefish Range
6569ft
Big Creek
US Highway 93 S
N
0
2.5
5 Miles
Fire Service Districts
Whitefish Planning Area
October 2024

Big Mountain
Lower Whitefish Rd
E. Lakeshore Dr
Big Mountain Road
Haskill Creek Rd
Wisconsin Ave
E. Edgewood Dr
E. 2nd St
US Hwy 93 West
Karrow Ave
US Hwy 93 South
US HWY 40
N
0 0.5 1 Miles

Fire Evacuation Routes

- Arterial
- Collector
- Local Street
- State Maintained Highway
- Trail
- Unpaved Forest Road
- Viaduct
- City Limits
- Unimproved gated private road, not ideal evacuation route


Vista
Whitefish Lake
Whitefish
Round Prairie
93
Highway 93 S
40
N
0 0.5 1 2 Miles
Wildfire Risks Around Whitefish
High
Low
City Limits
Planning Area
Source: Wildfire Risk to Communities
USDA Forest Service
October 2024



Historic Montana Earthquakes of Magnitude 4 or Greater

Quakes Magnitude 4 or Greater

- 4 - 4.9
- 5 - 5.9
- 6 - 6.9
- 7 - 7.9

Low Seismic Activity
High Seismic Activity

State of Montana

Flathead County

November 2024
Source: USGS

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Two priorities regarding infrastructure have consistently been identified by residents: having the necessary infrastructure in place at the time of development, and ensuring development takes place where utilities are located or easily extended.

Residents of Whitefish enjoy **32 park & recreation facilities**, encompassing **90.1 acres** of developed and **56.1 acres** of undeveloped parkland.

During visioning sessions, **outdoor access and recreation ranked first** in what participants valued the most about Whitefish, and parks and open space ranked as the second most important element of the community.

A **5 mile** driving distance is a guideline used when locating fire stations. At least 18 percent of Whitefish residences are beyond the five mile radius.

WFD can serve the projected population but a second fire station located on the north side of the railroad tracks would benefit at least 400 residences.

The city's **existing water treatment plant and existing water sources can meet future population projections** but climate change impacts may require exploration of groundwater sources and an additional water storage tank is required.

Municipal water is primarily sourced from **Haskill Creek** with Whitefish Lake serving as a backup source of water.

The **city sewer treatment can serve the projected population** but sewer main upsizing and improvement of lift stations is required.

Whitefish has an unusually high number of public and quasi-public facilities for a city of its size. Some of these include:
Stumptown Ice Den
The Wave Aquatic Center
O'Shaughnessy Center
Whitefish Performing Arts Center
Whitefish Lake Golf Club

ENSURING HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND AMENITIES

"We will prioritize the provision of high-quality municipal services, maintain appropriate service levels, use infrastructure to guide rather than respond to development, and provide exceptional parks and amenities to serve the needs of current and future residents and visitors."

INTRODUCTION

This Public Facilities Element focuses on the infrastructure, facilities and services provided by the City of Whitefish, the Whitefish School District and other public or quasi-public entities in the planning jurisdiction. This includes general city administration, public works, police, fire and emergency services, schools, libraries, cultural and civic services, parks and recreational facilities, water, sanitary sewer, wastewater treatment, storm sewer, and solid waste disposal.

The transportation network, both motorized roads and the non-motorized bicycle and pedestrian network, are also essential city infrastructure. Due to their complexity, interrelationships, and importance, they are being addressed in the Transportation Element, although non-motorized trails are also related to the recreational parks discussed in this plan element.

Two priorities regarding infrastructure have consistently been identified by residents: having the necessary infrastructure in place at the time of development (known as concurrency), and ensuring development takes place where utilities are located or easily extended. New growth should be encouraged only in areas where adequate public water, sewer, fire protection and emergency services, schools, transit, and roads are currently available or planned. If development expands in areas without adequate planning or in areas difficult to serve, it could be inefficient or expensive to keep up with increased demand for utilities and services.

Cities generally incur disproportionate additional costs when development occurs at lower densities and further distances. For example, building and maintaining infrastructure such as roads and utilities is more costly over longer distances. Providing public services like police and fire protection over large areas can strain municipal resources, increase response times, and reduce the level of service. Infrastructure should be viewed as a tool to help guide growth, not as a service provided in reaction to growth pressures.

The purpose of this element is to identify the various public services and facilities, and ensure for their provision, maintenance and improvement required to fulfill the current and future needs of the area's residents and businesses as sustainably and efficiently as possible.

PUBLIC FACILITIES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GENERAL PUBLIC FACILITIES

Goal

1. Continue to plan for and provide a full range of efficient and quality services to meet the needs of the community over the next twenty years, within the limits of infrastructure expansion and financing to support it.

Whitefish's commitment to delivering efficient, high-quality services over the next twenty years is essential to fostering a resilient, equitable, and thriving community. Doing so within the limits of the existing and planned infrastructure with responsible financing ensures that development remains balanced, preventing strain on existing systems and avoiding financial excesses burdening existing taxpayers. By integrating infrastructure expansion with long-range planning, Whitefish can avoid costly inefficiencies, respond adaptively to change, and uphold our responsibility to serve both current and future generations.

Objective:

a. Proactively identify, pursue, and secure funding sources - through grants, impact fees, and capital planning - to support the expansion, maintenance, and enhancement of city facilities to accommodate existing and future needs.

CITY ADMINISTRATION

Goal

2. Ensure city administration buildings are adequate to serve the needs of the current and future population.

Whitefish's administration buildings are the backbone of civic operations. Investing in adequate public buildings is not only a matter of operational necessity but a reflection of a city's commitment to high quality service and attracting exceptional staff.

Objective

a. Plan for and find funding to expand city hall by adding a third story to accommodate staff growth over the next twenty years.

PUBLIC WORKS

Goal:

3. Provide efficient and high-quality public works services to support the health and safety of the current and future needs of the community.

Public Works encompasses a wide range of projects and services aimed at developing and improving the infrastructure and facilities of the community. In order to continue to provide high service levels for the existing and future population, expansions and upgrades are anticipated. The public works shop site is located on a former landfill. Additional engineering and remediation efforts may be required to determine the most efficient future usage of this property for necessary improvements and facilities. Additional public works staffing and establishment of a new stormwater utility is also anticipated as the city nears the 10,000 population threshold which would trigger new stormwater permitting requirements.

Objectives:

a. Prepare a public works facilities master plan to determine the adequacy of existing public works facilities to accommodate the projected population, including environmental assessment of the utility operations property, necessary site improvements and potential future land uses.

b. Begin preparations to become compliant with Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements for a MS4 community by ensuring accurate mapping of all public and private outfalls, stormwater facilities and green infrastructure. Prioritize the integration of eco-friendly, “green” stormwater management through collaboration with agencies and other organizations such as the Flathead Conservation District and the Whitefish Lake Institute.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

Goal:

4. Provide a clean, safe, healthy, and sustainable water supply for all residents, free from the threat of degradation or depletion.

The freshwater treatment system provides clean drinking water and plays a critical role in fire protection and emergency preparedness. Future plans include constructing a new water storage facility and improving the city's irrigation systems for efficiency. The existing water supply sources and treatment plant can meet the future population projection demand through the 20-year planning horizon but adjustments and policy changes may be needed due to potential droughts, wildfires, and invasive species.

Objectives

a. Investigate potential groundwater or other water supply sources that are less affected by climate factors and require less treatment.

b. Look into the feasibility of using water rights from Whitefish Lake and the Whitefish River to pull irrigation for applicable city facilities.

c. Investigate the feasibility of a floating cover or other ecologically sound and sustainable methods for the raw water reservoir to reduce evaporation and reduce water treatment requirements.

d. Continue the annual pipe replacement program to proactively replace pipes before a failure occurs.

e. Review, prioritize and implement the recommendations of the city irrigation and landscape master plan.

f. Pursue policies and incentive programs to increase the amount of drought-tolerant landscaping on public and private property within the city.

g. Continue to enforce the Water Conservation Ordinance for the City of Whitefish. Update conservation protocols and education as new scientifically-backed evidence of solutions and / or impairing conditions arise.

h. Consider preparing a report on the quantity of water pumped annually from Whitefish Lake, discuss the drop in lake levels and the effects of same, address

whether it is advisable to continue pumping from Whitefish Lake if financially feasible.

PUBLIC SEWER AND STORMWATER

Goal

5. Continue to provide cost-effective and efficient wastewater and stormwater collection, treatment, and disposal that protects the public health and does not compromise the environment.

The city's wastewater and stormwater systems are crucial for maintaining public health and environmental protection. These facilities have the capacity to handle the existing and estimated population with some limitations. Sewer main upsizing and improvement of lift stations is required under the present growth rate by the mid-2030's, with more extensive upgrades required if additional areas are annexed. Minor repairs are necessary to the stormwater system in the short term, but when the population reaches 10,000 people there will be increased federal requirements. The city should continue to be proactive in managing, maintaining and identifying water quality impacts associated with sewer and stormwater infrastructure.

Objectives:

a. Through the Land Use Element of this community plan and future regulations, direct new development to areas of the community already served by municipal sewer and stormwater infrastructure.

b. Prioritize upgrading and replacement of existing sewer and stormwater infrastructure prior to additional development (concurrency).

c. Continue to work with the Big Mountain Sewer District to develop a feasibility plan prior to future annexation of the Big Mountain Community.

d. Continue to develop and update the comprehensive program to reduce water quality impacts associated with the City's urban drainage system, as scientific evidence becomes available.

e. Continue to identify green-infrastructure alternatives and incorporate the most advanced technology for wastewater treatment and stormwater treatment.

f. Consider testing of all storm drainage outfalls into the Whitefish River and Whitefish Lake periodically, if financially feasible.

g. Map stormwater outfalls to Whitefish Lake and Whitefish River, including outfalls from BNSF properties.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Goal:

6. Continue to provide the most modern and efficient fire, public safety and emergency services to the visitors and citizens of the Whitefish area.

The Whitefish Fire Department and Police Department provide service to the 12.67 square mile city limits and have cooperative agreements with other fire districts, law enforcement agencies and jurisdictions elsewhere in Flathead County. Big Mountain Fire District provides fire service to the Big Mountain Resort and some of the surrounding residential communities adjacent to and below the resort. The Whitefish Police Department can adequately serve the existing and future population although additional staffing will be required. The Whitefish Fire District can serve most of the city limits with satisfactory response times, but north of the viaduct near Big Mountain Road response times begin to exceed desired thresholds. There is funding for a new fully staffed northern fire station in this general area, but land has yet to be acquired. Establishment of additional grade-separated vehicular routes across the railroad tracks would significantly improve emergency response times and evacuations.

Objectives

a. The City of Whitefish shall manage the cost of emergency services through prudent land use practices that reduce travel distances by encouraging infill development and discouraging sprawl and leapfrog development.

b. Continue to work with other public safety providers to evaluate mutual aid agreements and consolidation of service opportunities.

c. Future expansions of the city limits should be within areas served with adequate emergency response times unless otherwise in the best interest of public health and safety.

d. If city annexation of the Big Mountain community occurs, services of the Big Mountain Fire District Fire Station should be retained and improved to provide adequate response times.

e. Pursue the development of a fully staffed northern fire station in the vicinity of East Lakeshore Drive and Big Mountain Road.

f. Pursue opportunities for a grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street.

g. Pursue opportunities for alternative accesses into Birch Point and across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Goal

7. Expand and improve the diversity, of parks, open spaces, and high-quality recreational opportunities for the growing Whitefish area with design focuses on inclusivity, accessibility, and being welcoming to individuals of all ages and abilities.

Parks and recreational amenities are highly valued by the Whitefish community. The city should continue to explore ways to preserve, acquire and develop land for parks and open space. As Whitefish continues to experience sustained growth, there will be an increasing demand for parks and recreation services. The city last updated its Parks Master Plan in 2013. The community should assess whether expanded or additional parks are needed and whether recreational trends have changed. As new facilities are developed or upgraded, or master plans are developed, it is important to consider accessibility for all segments of the population.

Objectives:

a. The City of Whitefish shall adopt an updated comprehensive park and recreation master plan to assess current parkland and recreational programs and facilities, identify and anticipate future needs, and explore funding options for new and upgraded facilities.

b. Consider adoption of an Open Space Designation and Acquisition Strategic Plan that identifies, prioritizes, and sets forth realistic recommendations for open spaces of all types.

c. Develop and implement strategies to address maintenance challenges associated with aging facilities, ensuring continued functionality and appeal for all ages and abilities.

d. Parks facilities should promote physical activity, public health and active aging, and disability access through walkability, accessible universal design features, passive recreation, nature-based options and convenient locations to all neighborhoods.

e. Enhance trail and park connectivity to promote outdoor recreation and alternative transportation, including planning for water trails.

f. Collaborate with local organizations, area stakeholders and volunteers to plan for an integrated recreational system that expands recreational opportunities, achieves multiple objectives (recreation, sustainability, health) and fosters community engagement.

g. Establish sustainable practices, including upgraded irrigation systems and eco-friendly landscaping to support environmental conservation goals.

h. Promote green infrastructure and natural corridors that enhance stormwater management, preserve natural areas, provides wildlife corridors and improves air quality.

i. Identify a process for periodic accessibility audits of existing parks and recreation spaces.

OTHER PUBLIC AND CIVIC FACILITIES

Goal:

8. Support and expand cultural and public facilities to fulfill community need, enhance fitness, provide for the arts and culture and encourage learning and social opportunities.

Whitefish has historically been very supportive of the arts, recreation, and education and has an unusually high number of public and quasi-public facilities for a city of its size. Many of these facilities have been funded by the community at a grassroots level and rely on the city for funding and continued partnerships. The city should continue to partner with and support the operation, maintenance and expansion of its quasi-public facilities to meet the future needs of the projected population.

Objectives:

a. Engage with Whitefish Community Library in the planning for facility expansions and improvements.

b. Continue partnerships between the city and other agencies, non-profits, and jurisdictions that support and maintain civic, recreational and cultural opportunities.

c. Maintain and expand civic and public facilities through ongoing city support such as funding, promotion, and use of city facilities, land and staff.

d. Provide adequate cemetery space to meet future needs in a suitable location without environmental constraints.

SOLID WASTE

Goal:

9. Provide an efficient, sustainable, and environmentally responsible solid waste management system that minimizes waste generation, promotes recycling and composting, and ensures proper disposal to protect public health and the environment.

Solid waste management plays a critical role in protecting both public health and the environment. By minimizing waste generation and promoting recycling and composting, better management reduces the volume of material sent to landfills and incinerators, thereby conserving natural resources, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, and reducing pollution. Existing city plans such as the adopted 2018 Climate Action Plan and the 2024 Sustainable Tourism Management Plan all incorporate sustainability principles for solid waste management.

Objectives:

a. The city will strive to achieve 25% waste reduction throughout the Whitefish planning jurisdictional area over the next five years.

b. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to practice and promote reuse and recycling in all of its programs and activities.

c. The City of Whitefish and Climate Action Plan Committee should explore options for a community-wide recycling program (or an alternative), including public education and a community recycling center, if applicable.

d. Develop construction management guidelines and incentives for reduction of construction waste through reuse, recycling, and composting.

e. The City of Whitefish should support and promote recycling through the placement of recycling containers in all city facilities.

f. Institute a public education program for the proper use and disposal of household chemicals.

g. Coordinate community recycling for used electronics, which may include promoting regional options such as programs through Pacific Steel & Recycling, and electronics retailers.

h. Promote special events and promotions to emphasize the importance of recycling and sustainability to the community.

WHITEFISH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Goal:

10. Improve coordination of long range city and school district planning.

Joint planning between the City of Whitefish and the Whitefish School District helps anticipate demographic shifts, reduces traffic and overcrowding, and can optimize public investments in facilities and services. When land use and transportation planning is aligned with educational infrastructure, schools are more accessible by safe walking, biking, and transit routes, and housing and nearby commercial development supports student populations. Collaboration between city and school district leaders promotes shared accountability for the well-being of families and the long-term sustainability of the community.

Objectives:

a. Coordinate with the school district early when a large development is proposed to determine if there is a way to obtain land for a new school.

b. Develop a program to incentivize developers to dedicate adequate, suitable land for future schools.

c. Continue to work with the school district to improve traffic circulation around schools to create safe routes for students, parents and the public.

    i. Seek funding to design and construct safe routes in and around the schools.
    ii. Develop additional right-of-way connections around the Whitefish High School and Muldown Elementary campus to reduce overall congestion and provide transportation alternatives.
    iii. Implement the Memorial Park traffic, parking, drop-off area and sidewalk plan in the Safe Routes for All Plan to facilitate improved vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian circulation

FINANCING AND IMPROVEMENT MECHANISMS

Goal:

11. Ensure community services and facilities keep pace with growth so desired levels of service are maintained, and in a way that sustains the community and environment over the long term, integrating and balancing economic, environmental, and social goals.

> *Two priorities regarding infrastructure have consistently been identified by residents: having the necessary infrastructure in place at the time of development (known as concurrency), and ensuring development takes place where utilities are located or easily extended. New growth should be encouraged only in areas where adequate public water, sewer, fire protection and emergency services, schools, transit, and roads are currently available or planned. If new development is planned, there are a variety of tools available to ensure it "pays its own way" and does not burden the existing taxpayers.*

Objectives:

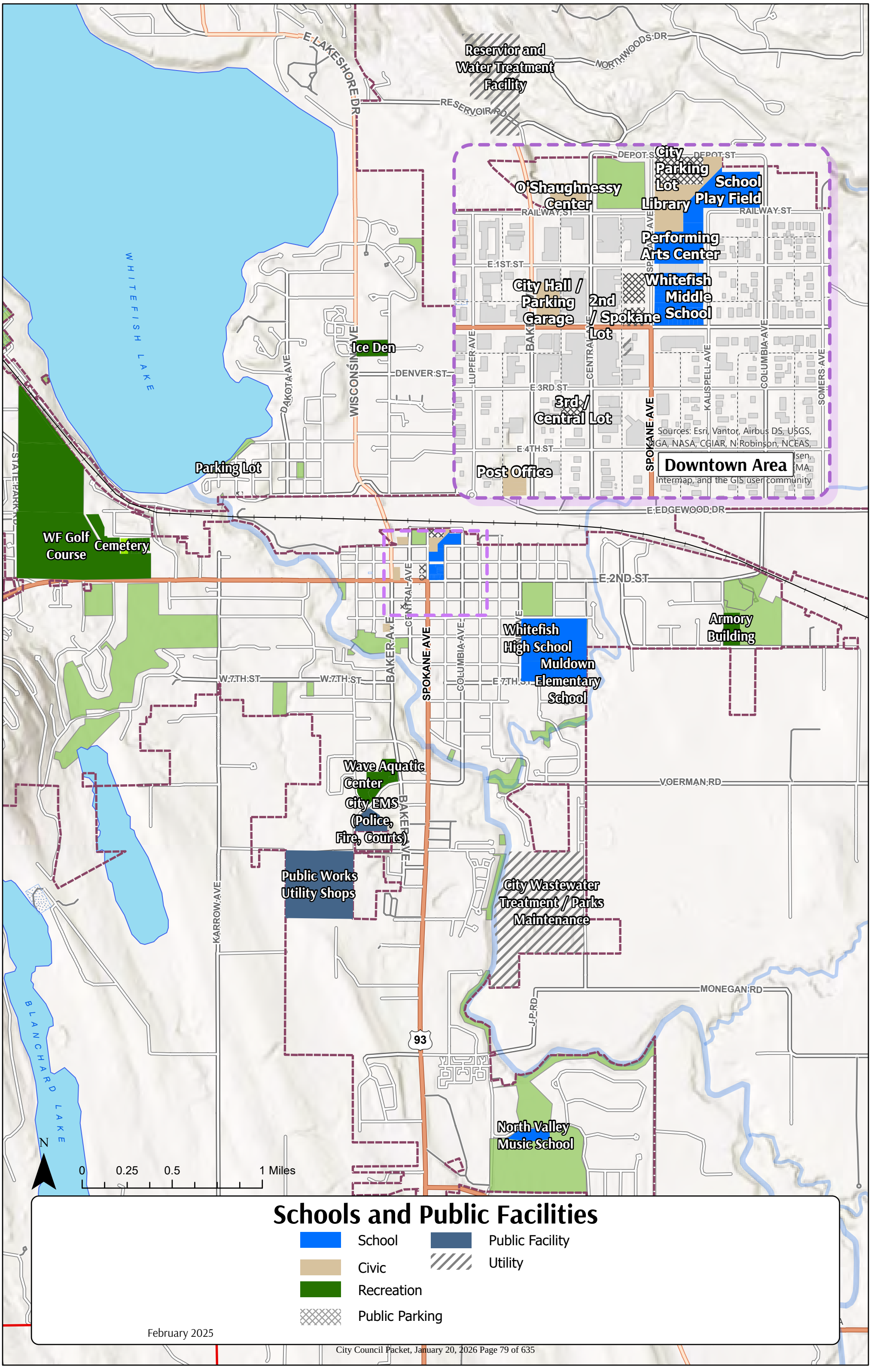
a. Ensure new development provides its proportionate share of cost for impacted infrastructure serving the property in accordance with the recommended policies of the 2021 Extension of Services Plan and consider alternative methods to finance public improvements.

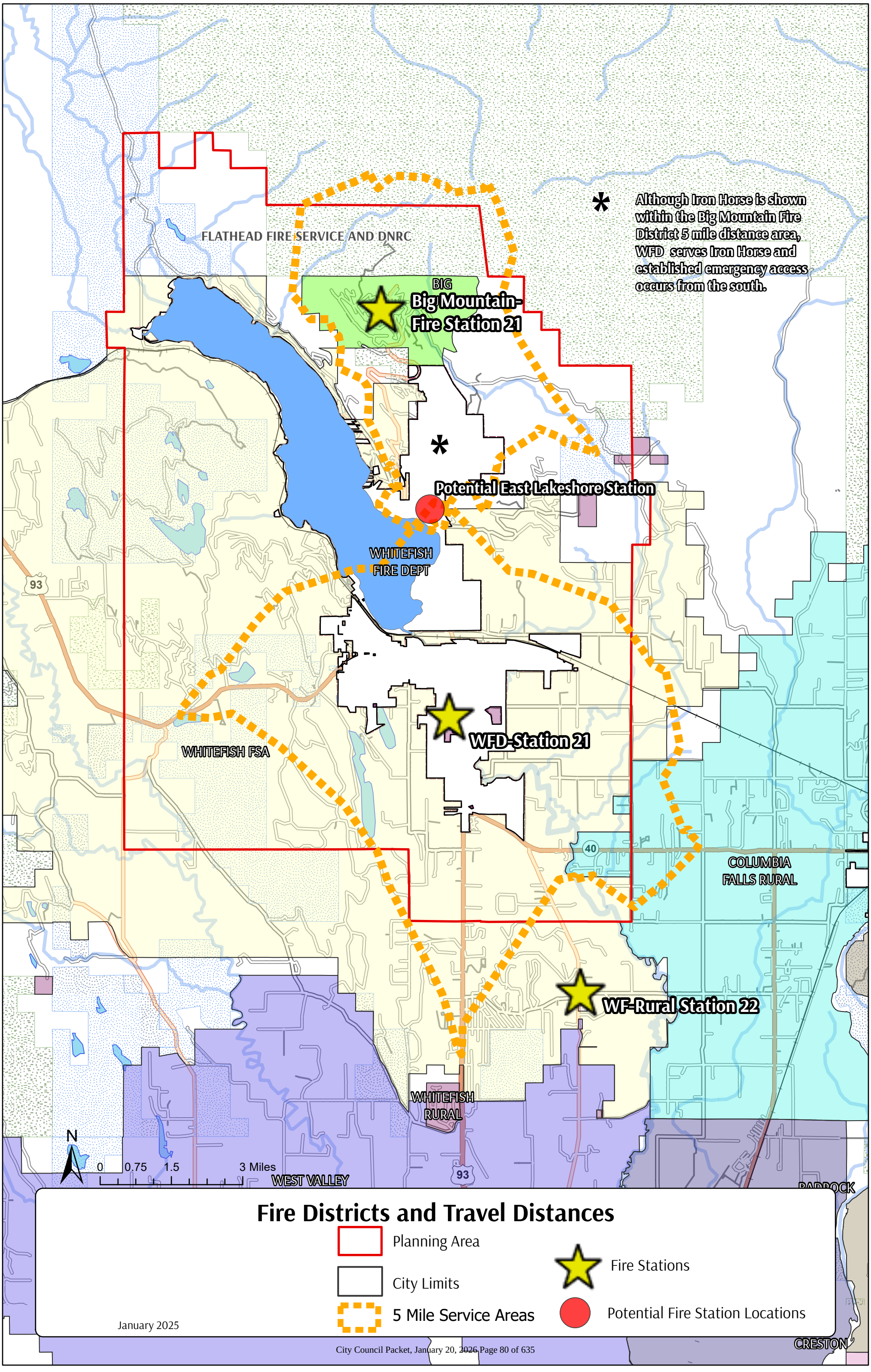
b. New developments should demonstrate that adequate infrastructure is available or will be available at the time of project completion or a financing plan is in place.

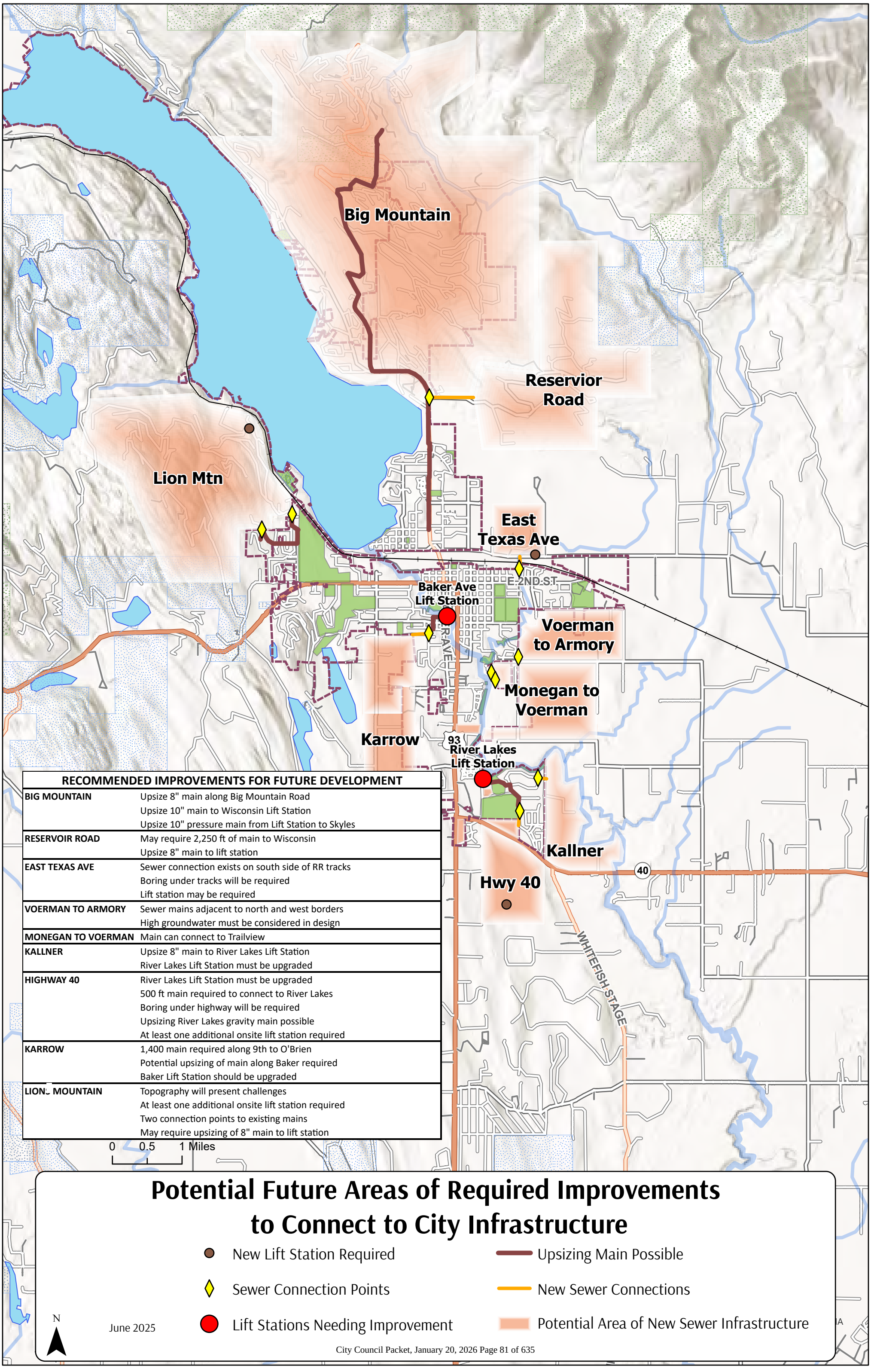
c. Formulate and adopt a concurrency policy for roads, sidewalks, parks, bike and pedestrian ways, and other related facilities integrating with an overall master plan for such facilities.

d. When large multiple property annexations are considered, such as the Big Mountain area currently using city sewer facilities, the city shall continue to do a cost benefits analysis that looks at infrastructure, personnel and services costs versus future tax revenue.

e. Continue to prepare an analysis of how much city taxes have risen over the last year in the budget memo, a public document, which shows what rises are attributable to, including public facilities.


Reservior and Water Treatment Facility
E LAKESHORE DR
RESERVOIR RD
NORTHWOODS DR
WHITEFISH LAKE
DEPOT ST
City Parking Lot
School Play Field
O'Shaughnessy Center
Library
RAILWAY ST
Performing Arts Center
E 1ST ST
City Hall / Parking Garage
2nd / Spokane Lot
Whitefish Middle School
Ice Den
DENVER ST
E 3RD ST
3rd / Central Lot
Sources: Esri, Vantor, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS,
Intermap, and the GIS user community
Downtown Area
E 4TH ST
Post Office
Parking Lot
E EDGEWOOD DR
WF Golf Course
Cemetery
E 2ND ST
Armory Building
Whitefish High School
Muldown Elementary School
W 7TH ST
E 7TH ST
Wave Aquatic Center
City EMS (Police, Fire, Courts)
VOERMAN RD
Public Works Utility Shops
City Wastewater Treatment / Parks Maintenance
MONEGAN RD
93
North Valley Music School
N
0
0.25
0.5
1 Miles
Schools and Public Facilities
School
Civic
Recreation
Public Parking
Public Facility
Utility
February 2025


FLATHEAD FIRE SERVICE AND DNRC
BIG
Big Mountain-
Fire Station 21
*
Although Iron Horse is shown within the Big Mountain Fire District 5 mile distance area, WFD serves Iron Horse and established emergency access occurs from the south.
*
Potential East Lakeshore Station
WHITEFISH
FIRE DEPT
93
WHITEFISH FSA
WFD-Station 21
40
COLUMBIA
FALLS RURAL
WF-Rural Station 22
WHITEFISH
RURAL
N
0
0.75
1.5
3 Miles
WEST VALLEY
93
CRESTON
Fire Districts and Travel Distances
Planning Area
City Limits
5 Mile Service Areas
Fire Stations
Potential Fire Station Locations
January 2025



RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT	
BIG MOUNTAIN	Upsize 8" main along Big Mountain Road
	Upsize 10" main to Wisconsin Lift Station
	Upsize 10" pressure main from Lift Station to Skyles
RESERVOIR ROAD	May require 2,250 ft of main to Wisconsin
	Upsize 8" main to lift station
EAST TEXAS AVE	Sewer connection exists on south side of RR tracks
	Boring under tracks will be required
	Lift station may be required
VOERMAN TO ARMORY	Sewer mains adjacent to north and west borders
	High groundwater must be considered in design
MONEGAN TO VOERMAN	Main can connect to Trailview
KALLNER	Upsize 8" main to River Lakes Lift Station
	River Lakes Lift Station must be upgraded
HIGHWAY 40	River Lakes Lift Station must be upgraded
	500 ft main required to connect to River Lakes
	Boring under highway will be required
	Upsizing River Lakes gravity main possible
	At least one additional onsite lift station required
KARROW	1,400 main required along 9th to O'Brien
	Potential upsizing of main along Baker required
	Baker Lift Station should be upgraded
LION MOUNTAIN	Topography will present challenges
	At least one additional onsite lift station required
	Two connection points to existing mains
	May require upsizing of 8" main to lift station

Recommended Wastewater System Improvements (existing conditions)

Houston Point Lift Station

Lacy Lane Lift Station

City Beach Lift Station

Baker Ave Lift Station

River Lakes Lift Station

3

2

1

WHITEFISH LAKE

BLANCHARD LAKE

E LAKESHORE DR

RESERVOIR RD

WISCONSIN AVE

TEXAS AVE

EDGEWOOD PL

STATE PARK RD

E 2ND ST

KARROW AVE

VOERMAN RD

HASKILL CREEK

WALKER CREEK

DILLON RD

CONN RD

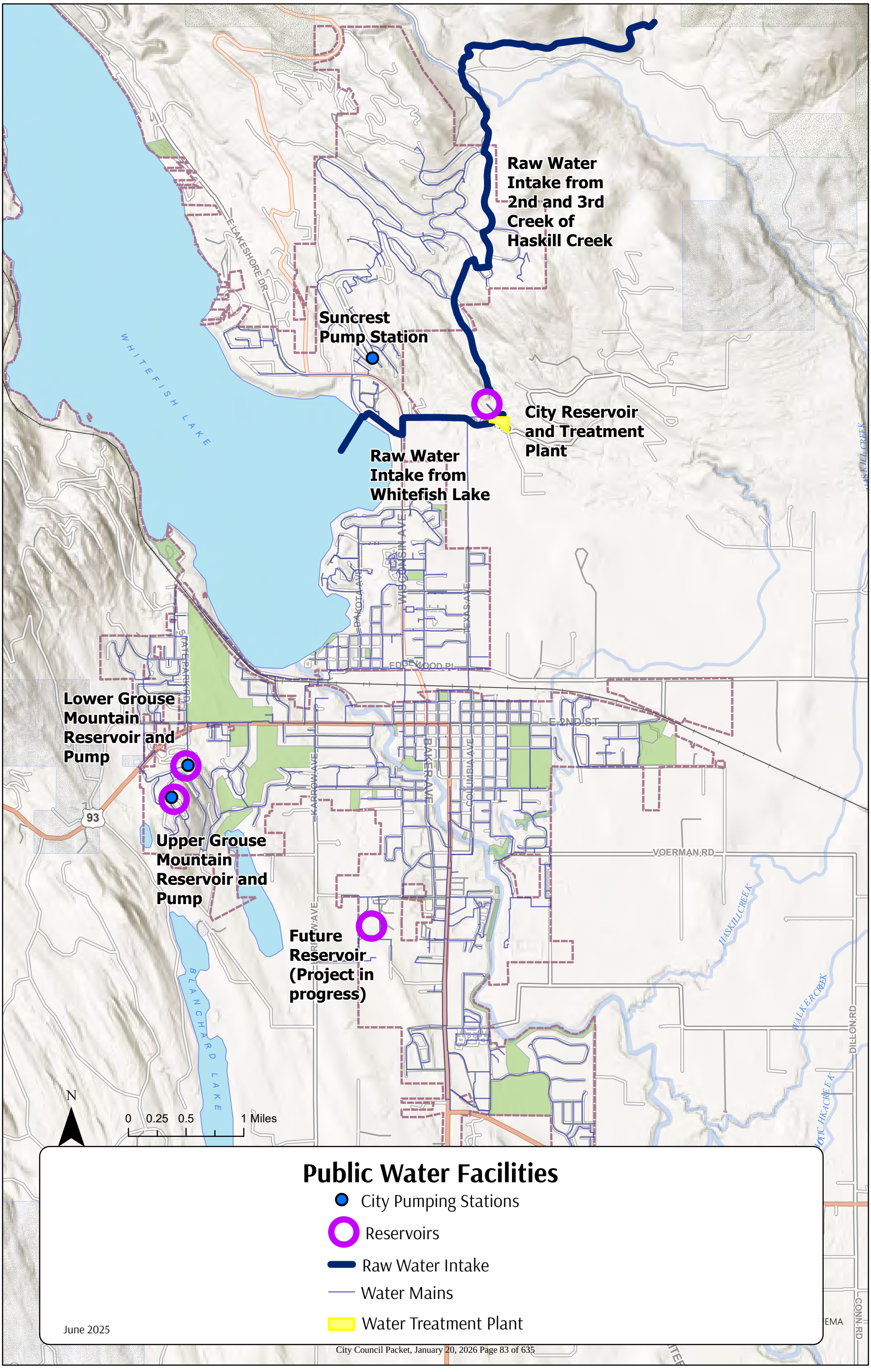
93

N

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

- Lift Stations Needing Improvements
- Sewer Mains to Upsize
- Clay Sewer Lines for Repair (priority 1-3)
- City Limits

June 2025


Raw Water Intake from 2nd and 3rd Creek of Haskill Creek
Suncrest Pump Station
City Reservoir and Treatment Plant
Raw Water Intake from Whitefish Lake
Lower Grouse Mountain Reservoir and Pump
Upper Grouse Mountain Reservoir and Pump
Future Reservoir (Project in progress)
WHITEFISH LAKE
BLANCHARD LAKE
E LAKESHORE DR
STATE PARK RD
DAKOTA AVE
WISCONSIN AVE
TEXAS AVE
EDGEWOOD PL
E 2ND ST
KARROW AVE
BAKER AVE
COLUMBIA AVE
VOERMAN RD
HASKILL CREEK
WALKER CREEK
DILLON RD
CONN RD
93
N
0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles
Public Water Facilities
City Pumping Stations
Reservoirs
Raw Water Intake
Water Mains
Water Treatment Plant
June 2025

City Parks, Trails and Recreation - South

Bike Lane
Bike Route
Cycle Track
Shared-Use Path
Whitefish Trail
Open Space
Developed Park
Recreation
Whitefish Trail trailheads
City Limits

February 2025

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA

WHITEFISH LAKE
Whitefish Golf Course
Shared-Use Path
RESERVOIR RD
NORTHWOODS DR
E EDGEWOOD DR
E 2ND ST
DENVER ST
TEXAS AVE
CENTRAL AVE
COW CREEK
Crestwood Park
Ice Den
City Beach
Soroptomist Park
Skye Park
Roundhouse Landing
Depot Park
Ted Kusumoto Park
WF Golf Course
WF Cemetery
Kay Beller Park
Memorial Park
Cow Creek Natural Area
Armory
Armory
Grouse Mountain Park
O'Brien Bluffs Park
Park
River Trail Park
93

City Parks, Trails and Recreation - South

Grouse Mountain Park
Kay Beller Park
Baker Park
Riverside Park
James R Bakke Natural Reserve
Memorial Park
Cow Creek Natural Area
Armory Park
Armory Building
Creekwood Park
Canoe Park
Wave Aquatic Center
O'Brien Bluffs Park
River Trail Park
Trailview Park
River's Edge Park
North Valley Music School
Smith Fields

VOERMAN:RD
W 18TH ST
KARROW:AVE
MONEGAN:RD
J P RD
BLANCHARD:LAKE:RD
BLANCHARD LAKE
WALKER CREEK
93
40

N
0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

Bike Lane
Bike Route
Cycle Track
Shared-Use Path
Whitefish Trail
Open Space
Developed Park
Recreation
Whitefish Trail trailheads
City Limits

February 2025

...aterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, ...ap, and the GIS user community

PART TWO

VISION WHITEFISH 2045 RESOURCE DOCUMENT

WHITEFISH DEMOGRAPHICS

The Earliest Inhabitants

Native Americans were the first inhabitants of what is now known as the State of Montana. Archeology suggests they had been in the area for at least 12,000 years. Tribes known to inhabit Montana include Kootenai, Salish, Pend d' Oreille the Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Gros Ventre, Little Shell, Chippewa, Sioux, and Northern Cheyenne. The Kootenai, Salish and Pend d' Oreille were the tribes that frequented the Flathead Valley.

Lewis and Clark were the first white explorers to cross Montana in their expedition from 1804 to 1806. Hunters, trappers, and fur traders began moving into the Montana Territory following this expedition. The first non-indigenous permanent settlement in Montana is considered to be Saint Mary's Mission in the Bitterroot Valley, established in the early 1840s. An 1860s gold rush began a flood of prospectors. By the time Montana had become a state in 1889, most indigenous tribes had been greatly diminished due to disease or had lost access to most of their lands and been moved to reservations[6].

Population

Population data is available from the U.S. Census Bureau in 10-year increments, with annual population estimates by the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The Montana Department of Commerce Census and Economic Information Center provides Montana specific adjusted population estimates and future population projections.

The largest population boom in Montana history occurred from 1900 to 1920. The population grew by approximately 305,560 people (100%) as settlers relocated into Montana drawn by the railroad and promise of free land under the Homestead Act of 1862 (see Table D-1). Since that time, population growth in Montana has slowed to less than 15% per decade with only a few of the early years of the Great Depression losing population.

[6] Source: Brief History of Montana, State of Montana, *montana.gov*

TABLE D-1: MONTANA POPULATION BY DECADE								
Year	**1900**	**1910**	**1920**	**1930**	**1940**	**1950**	**1960**	**1970**
Population	243,329	376,053	548,889	537,606	559,456	587,337	674,767	694,409
Rate		55%	46%	-2%	4%	5%	15%	3%
Year	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Population	786,690	800,204	903,773	990,730	1,087,075	1,106,227	1,122,867	1,132,812
Rate	13%	2%	13%	10%	10%	2%	2%	1%
Year	**2024**							
Population	**1,137,233**							
Rate	0.5%							

Source: US Census Bureau, Montana Dept. of Commerce

As the State of Montana is one of the least populated states (8th least populous in 2023), it is not particularly helpful to compare the percentage of population growth of Montana against that of other states. For example, from 2000 to 2020 California observed a 16.2% annual growth rate, and Montana observed a higher population growth rate of 20%. However, California is the most populous state and a 16.2% growth rate in California amounts to 5,513,676 people, whereas a 20% growth rate in Montana amounts to 183,302. At the time of the last adopted growth policy in 2007, Montana had a population of approximately 964,706 people. As of 2024, the population of Montana has increased to approximately 1,137,233 people, which is a 17.8% increase over a 17-year period or slightly less than 1% % annually[7].

For most previous decades until 1990, Yellowstone County was the fastest growing county in Montana in terms of numbers of people, although Missoula County had the most growth from 1960 to 1970. Beginning in 1990 and until 2020, Gallatin County surpassed Yellowstone County as the fastest growing county in numbers of people added each year, with Missoula County and Flathead County alternating for second fastest, depending on the year. After 2020 and to the present, Flathead County is now adding the most people per year as can be seen in Table D-3. Curiously, from 2019 to 2020, Gallatin County reported the largest number of people gained in a county in one year on record in the State (5,113), while at the same time Missoula County lost the largest number of people on record in a county in one year in the State (1,729). It should be noted these large fluctuations occurred at the same time as the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic with State-wide shelter-in-place orders and temporary closures, so it is possible there are errors in population statistics. Since the year 2000, Flathead County has been growing at a rate of approximately 2% to 2.5% annually.

[7] Provided by the Montana Department of Commerce

TABLE D-2: POPULATION OF 5 LARGEST COUNTIES												
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cascade	52,408	73,418	78,905	80,696	77,691	80,318	81,513	84,402	84,498	84,864	84,900	84,523
Flathead	31,412	32,965	39,460	51,966	59,218	74,774	90,863	104,862	108,725	111,814	113,679	114,527
Gallatin	21,718	26,045	32,505	42,865	50,463	68,375	89,662	119,585	123,051	124,857	126,409	126,984
Missoula	34,982	44,663	58,263	76,016	78,687	96,178	109,471	118,337	119,806	121,041	121,849	122,546
Yellowstone	55,763	79,016	87,367	108,035	113,419	129,570	148,405	165,196	167,397	169,852	170,843	171,583

TABLE D-3: CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE FOR 5 LARGEST COUNTIES												
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cascade	10,409	21,010	5,487	1,791	-3,005	2,627	1,195	2,889	96	366	36	-377
Flathead	7,141	1,553	6,495	12,506	7,252	15,556	16,089	13,999	3,863	3,089	1865	848
Gallatin	3,449	4,327	6,460	10,360	7,598	17,912	21,287	29,923	3,466	1,806	1552	575
Missoula	5,944	9,681	13,600	17,753	2,671	17,491	13,293	8,866	1,469	1,235	808	697
Yellowstone	14,581	23,253	8,351	20,668	5,384	16,151	18,835	16,791	2,201	2,455	991	740

The City of Whitefish is located within the Flathead Valley. The Flathead Valley contains two counties – Flathead County and Lake County - and is the economic hub for a five-county area (Lincoln, Glacier, Sanders, Lake, and Flathead). As of 2024, Flathead County is the fourth largest county in the State and is home to a population of approximately 114,527[8] persons, though its retail, financial, professional, and medical services are used by many of the nearly 200,000 people residing in the five-county trade area. The incorporated City of Whitefish, the second largest city in northwest Montana behind Kalispell, has an estimated population of 9,256 people as of 2024, approximately 8% of the population of Flathead County.

Table D.4 below reflects population estimates for unincorporated Flathead County and its three incorporated cities beginning in 1900, correlating with the years that Whitefish, Kalispell, and Columbia Falls were incorporated (from 1892 to 1909)[9]. As is demonstrated by Table D.4, Flathead County and Kalispell doubled in population from 1900 to 1910, attributed to the local development of the Great Northern Railroad. Kalispell served as the division point of the railroad (the local operational headquarters and railyard) until 1904. When this division point was relocated to the Whitefish area in 1904, it led to the incorporation of Whitefish and a population increase of more than 200% by 1920 (from 950 to 2,867 people). Whitefish experienced a population decline from 1930 to 1940 (presumably due to the Great Depression), and a significant increase from 1940 to the early 1950s due to the construction of the new Anaconda Aluminum Facility in Columbia Falls. In the late 1950s, there was one more sharp drop in Whitefish population due to a decline in railroad employment associated with new technology resulting in diesel trains replacing steam trains. Since 1960, Whitefish has continuously grown in population at a rate of between 10% and 25% a decade, or an average of 1.5% a year. Starting in 2010,

[8] Population estimates provided by the Montana Department of Commerce Census and Economic information Center.
[9] Based on historic census data

the Whitefish population began trending toward an average of approximately 2.5% a year which is comparable to Flathead County.

In the years from 1900 to 1960, the majority of the population in Flathead County lived within one of the three incorporated cities. This trend began to decline from 1970 to 2000 with more people living in the rural areas. The population moving into incorporated cities began to increase again from 2000 to 2023. As of 2024, 40% of the population of Flathead County lives within one of the three cities.

TABLE D-4. UNINCORORATED AND INCORPORATED FLATHEAD COUNTY POPULATION

	Flathead			Whitefish			Kalispell			Columbia Falls		
	Pop.	Decade growth	Annual Growth	Pop.	Decade growth	Annual Growth	Pop.	Decade growth	Annual Growth	Pop.	Decade growth	Annual Growth
1900	9,375						2526					
1905				950								
1910	18,785	100.4%	10.0%	1,479	55.7%	11.1%	5549	119.7%		601		
1920	21,705	15.5%	1.6%	2,867	93.8%	9.4%	5147	-7.2%	-0.7%	611	1.7%	0.2%
1930	19,200	-11.5%	-1.2%	2,803	-2.2%	-0.2%	6094	18.4%	1.8%	637	4.3%	0.4%
1940	24,271	26.4%	2.6%	2,602	-7.2%	-0.7%	8,245	35.3%	3.5%	637	0.0%	0.0%
1950	31,412	29.4%	2.9%	3,250	24.9%	2.5%	9,694	17.6%	1.8%	1,287	102.0%	10.2%
1960	32,965	4.9%	0.5%	2,965	-8.8%	-0.9%	10,151	4.7%	0.5%	2,132	65.7%	6.6%
1970	39,460	19.7%	2.0%	3,349	13.0%	1.3%	10,526	3.7%	0.4%	2,652	24.4%	2.4%
1980	51,966	31.7%	3.2%	3,703	10.6%	1.1%	10,648	1.2%	0.1%	3,120	17.6%	1.8%
1990	59,218	14.0%	1.4%	4,368	18.0%	1.8%	11,917	11.9%	1.2%	2,942	-5.7%	-0.6%
2000	74,471	25.8%	2.6%	5,032	15.2%	1.5%	14,223	19.4%	1.9%	3,645	23.9%	2.4%
2010	90,852	22.0%	2.2%	6,357	26.3%	2.6%	19,928	40.1%	4.0%	4,688	28.6%	2.9%
2020	105,840	16.5%	1.6%	7,847	23.4%	2.3%	24,558	23.2%	2.3%	5,308	13.2%	1.3%
2021	108,725		2.7%	8,503		8.4%	26,312		7.1%	5,580		5.1%
2022	111,814		2.8%	8,915		4.8%	28,450		8.1%	5,656		1.4%
2023	113,679		1.7%	9,163		2.8%	29,886		5.0%	5,723		1.2%
2024	114,527		0.7%	9,256		1.0%						

In 2020, during and immediately after the Covid-19 Pandemic, there was a significant rise in annual population growth for all three incorporated cities in Flathead County and the State of Montana in general. Since 2022, annual population growth in Whitefish appears to be trending downward.

Seasonal Resident and Tourist Population

U.S. Census data does not account for the number of second or vacation homes owned by non-residents[10] in Whitefish or the surrounding area. Given the tourism economy of Whitefish and the abundance of natural amenities, there is a sizable population of seasonal residents. The 2025 Whitefish Area Community Housing Needs Assessment, as well as the US Census Bureau, estimate the Whitefish seasonal population to be trending toward 30%. If 9,256 is 70% of the estimated full-time population, and 30% of the total population is seasonal residents, then the total estimated population would be **13,223** (9,256 full time, 3,966 seasonal)[11].

Visitation continues to be the unquestionable driver of the local economy. The proximity to Glacier National Park, Whitefish Mountain Resort, and the millions of acres of state and national forests and wilderness areas make Whitefish and Flathead County a top tourist destination. Data provided by the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau shows 1,217 hotel / motel rooms and 57 RV spaces within the Whitefish city limits. The University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research's *"Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures and Economic Contribution 2022 Estimates*" shows the average visitor size on a trip to Montana is 2.2 people. If all accommodation units were occupied, this would approximate an additional 2,803 guests staying at the hotels and RV parks during the high season. If all housing units and accommodation units were occupied at 100% capacity, the potential population would approximate 16,026 people. It is important to note, however, that the US Census Bureau indicates a typical resident occupancy rate of 78% and the Whitefish Visitors Bureau indicates a visitor occupancy rate of 77%. Accordingly, the full population of people at any given time is unlikely, and the actual population would likely be lower.

TABLE D-5: FULL TIME, PART TIME AND TOURIST POPULATION ESTIMATES	
2024 Census Fulltime Population (70%)	9,256
Remaining Part Time Population (30%)	3,966
Total Estimated Population	13,223
Number of Hotel / Motel Rooms	1,217
Number of RV Spaces	57
Estimated Visitors at 100% Capacity	2,803
Total at 100% Occupancy (13,223 + 2803)	16,026

Sources: 2022 Housing Needs Assessment, US Census Bureau, MT. Depart of Commerce and Whitefish Convention and Visitor's Bureau

[10] The US Census Bureau defines "resident" as people who are at their usual residence where they live and sleep most of the time.

[11] Using GIS data staff estimated approximately 5,700 dwelling units within the city limits. Based on the US Census Bureau indicating household sizes between 2.1 and 2.5 people per household, the number of housing units calculate to a comparable population estimate +/- 5%.

Age Distribution

The City of Whitefish is getting older and is experiencing a greater reduction in school age children as compared to Flathead County, the State of Montana and the United States. As can be seen by the table below, Whitefish had the largest decline in children younger than 15 years from 2000 to 2020 (31%). Whitefish has also seen a 13% decline in residents between 15 to 54 years old (the predominant working age group), with Flathead County having the greatest decline at 16%. At the same time, Whitefish experienced a large increase in residents over 55 years in age (57%) with the State of Montana doubling the number of residents over 65 years old. This trend of less school-aged children and increase of older adults as percentages of the population is echoed across all four comparison areas. Of the four comparison areas, in 2022 Whitefish had the highest median age at 43 years old.

Table D-6: Percentage Change in Age Groups between 2010 to 2020 and 2000 to 2022 (12 and 22 years)

	Whitefish		Flathead County		Montana		US	
	2010 to 2020	2000 to 2020	2010 to 2020	2000 to 2020	2010 to 2020	2000 to 2020	2010 to 2020	2000 to 2020
Under 5 years	-17%	-28%	-16%	-10%	-11%	-10%	-8%	-12%
<15 Years	-13%	-31%	-9%	-14%	-6%	-15%	-6%	-13%
15 to 54 years	-7%	-13%	-11%	-16%	-8%	-13%	-5%	-9%
55 to 64 years	-9%	62%	1%	44%	2%	51%	8%	50%
> 55 years	19%	57%	20%	46%	19%	43%	16%	37%
> 65 years	45%	53%	51%	59%	87%	107%	24%	29%

* Source: United States Census Bureau

Table D-7: Median Age Comparison

	Whitefish			Flathead			Montana			US		
	2000	2010	2022	2000	2010	2022	2000	2010	2022	2000	2010	2022
Median Age	37.3	43	43	38.9	40.5	42.3	37.5	39.7	40.1	35.4	37.2	38.2

Racial Composition

The City of Whitefish is a racially homogenous city. Census publications back to 1920 indicate the population to be 98% White or higher. Diversity has increased very slightly, although the permanent population of Whitefish is still predominantly White. People of two or more races are the next largest category at 4%. Hispanics follow at 1.7%. The

Hispanic category appears to on the decline and the two or more races category is increasing[12]. 2020 was omitted due to inconsistencies related to the pandemic.

Table D-8: City of Whitefish Racial Composition[13]

Year	2023	2010	2000	1990	1980
White	95.2%	95.8%	95.8%	98.0%	97.0%
Black	0.1%	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
American Indian	0.7%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Asian	0.0%	0.8%	0.6%	0.0%	
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	
Hispanic	1.7%	2.6%	1.9%	0.0%	1.0%
Two or more races	3.9%	1.5%	1.4%		

Educational Attainment

Whitefish has become a progressively more educated city. In 2000, residents with some amount of college without a degree made up the largest percentage of the population (25.2%). In 2022, the largest percentage of the population had a bachelor's degree (40.9%). This is in comparison with Montana and the United States, in which the largest percentage of the population in 2022 were high school graduates. There are approximately twice as many residents with a bachelor's degree in Whitefish as a Percentage of the population as there are in Montana or the United States.

Table D-9: Whitefish Educational Achievement: 25 Years or Older

	Whitefish			Montana			US		
	2000	2010	2022	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
Less than 9th grade	2.3%	1.3%	0.1%	4.3%	2.5%	2.2%	7.5%	6.1%	4.7%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	7.0%	4.3%	2.0%	8.6%	5.8%	3.8%	12.1%	8.3%	5.7%
High School Graduate	19.6%	27.6%	19.5%	31.1%	29.9%	27.7%	28.6%	28.5%	26.1%
Some college, no degree	25.2%	21.1%	18.4%	25.6%	25.1%	22.3%	21.1%	21.3%	19.1%
Associate degree	6.9%	7.9%	4.2%	5.9%	7.9%	9.5%	6.3%	7.6%	8.8%
Bachelor's degree	27.0%	27.4%	40.9%	17.2%	19.8%	22.9%	15.5%	17.7%	21.6%
Graduate or professional degree	12.1%	10.4%	14.9%	7.2%	9.0%	11.7%	8.9%	10.4%	14.0%

Source: US Census Bureau

Median Household Income

Household income represents the total income of all members of a household aged 15 and older, whether they are related or not. The Median Household Income is the exact middle figure among the range of incomes reported and is considered more

[12] Earlier than 1980, there is incomplete or unreliable data regarding Whitefish racial composition published by US Census.
[13] Provided by US Census of Population and Housing Summary of Population and Housing Publications.

representative than the mean or average household income, which can be skewed by households with very high incomes. Statistics for median household income do not include individual net worth. Table D-10 indicates the comparison of median household incomes between the United States, Montana, Flathead County and Whitefish from 2000 to 2024. Although the Whitefish median household income is lower than the national median, the October 2025 Whitefish median home sales price of $1,400,000 is approximately four times the national median home sales price ($412,000 in the second quarter). Please see the Housing Section for more information regarding housing.

Table D-10: Median Household Income, 2000 to 2024

	Whitefish			**Flathead County**		
Year	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024
Median Income	$33,038.00	$43,117.00	$71,110.00	$34,466.00	$41,854.00	$75,431.00
	Montana			**United States**		
Year	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024
Median Income	$33,024.00	$42,666.00	$75,340.00	$41,994.00	$50,046.00	$80,610.00

Sources: US Census Bureau, Montana Regional MLS, Flathead County Growth Policy

Employment

Tourism is the largest contributor to the Whitefish economy, comprising approximately 43% of all jobs. Table J reflects the top industries in Whitefish and Table D-11 reflects the top employers.

Table D-11: 2023 Whitefish Top Industries (percentage of jobs)[14]	
Accommodation and Food Service	21.1%
Health Care and Social Assistance	17.7%
Retail Trade	15.7%
Professional, Scientific, Technical	8.4%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	6.8%

Table D-12: Top Whitefish Employers 2023	
Logan Health	*650*
Winter Sports	*650 (winter high season)*
Averill Hospitality	*282*

Although tourism is the largest contributor to the Whitefish economy, nearly 70% of the residents of Whitefish are employed in management, business and financial sectors. Only

[14] Industry data provided by GSBS Consulting

8% of management, business and financial jobs are offered in the City of Whitefish[15]. It has been estimated that 21% of Whitefish residents work remotely. A majority of Whitefish residents commute out of the city to other locations for work. At the same time, because the average salary of a service worker in the tourism industry is less than $35,000, with the median home sales price being over one million dollars and average rents being well over $2,000 a month[16], according to GSBS Consulting approximately 76% of the employees who work for Whitefish businesses do not live in the city. Please refer to the Economic Development Element for a complete description of the Whitefish economy.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The Montana Land Use Planning Act requires a city to provide, at a minimum, a description, map and analysis of how the jurisdiction will accommodate its projected population over the next 20 years[17]. Demographics are required to be provided by the most recent decennial census or census estimate of the United States Census Bureau and must include both permanent and seasonal population projections. Population projections are to be obtained by one of the following:

1. Provided by demographics published by the Department of Commerce;
2. Generated by the local government; or
3. Produced by a professional firm specializing in projections.

When a population projection is not available, population projections for the jurisdiction must be reflective of the area's proportional share of the total county population and the total county population growth (8% of Flathead County population).

Methodology

The Montana Department of Commerce's Census and Economic Information Center provided population projections for both Flathead County and the City of Whitefish (see Table D-13). The projections are based on a complex population model. The model assumes natural growth versus in-migration growth resulting from large amounts of people recently moving to Montana for any number of reasons. The model considers that Whitefish's population skews older than the national average, and due to geographic constraints (availability of land) construction and housing costs and the rising cost of living, Whitefish's growth rate is expected to gradually decline (a flattening curve) as compared to Flathead County. Based on the model provided by the Montana Department of Commerce, 9,256 full time residents in 2024 results in a projected fulltime population of 11,087 in 2045.

[15] Provided by GSBS Consulting Economic Report
[16] Provided by 2022 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment
[17] MCA 76-25-203.

Table D-13: Flathead County / Whitefish Population Projections

	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045
Flathead County	119,494	128,038	133,040	136,552	139,611
YoY % Change	2.2%	1.1%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%
Whitefish 2024	9,477	10,168	10,565	10,844	11,087
YoY % Change	2.4%	1.1%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%

Model provided by the Montana Department of Commerce

The State Model projects a curve which generally flattens toward 2045. It is possible growth does not slow as much as this model predicts. If the historic 1.5% annual growth rate is projected, this amounts to a fulltime population of approximately 12,707 by 2045. Based on these two different methods of projecting population, it is estimated the 2045 Whitefish full time population will grow between 1,831 to 3,451 people.

It was calculated above that the existing fulltime population (9,256) is approximately 70% of the total population (13,223). This results in the following projections:

Whitefish 2045 Population Estimates

	Full time (70%)	Seasonal (30%)	Total
Existing Total Estimate	9,256	3,966	13,223
State Model 1	11,087	4,751	15,839
Historic 1.5% Growth Rate	12,707	5,445	18,153
Estimated increase in People	1,831 to 3,397	785 to 1,456	2,616 to 4,930

THE TOTAL FULLTIME AND SEASONAL POPULATION OF WHITEFISH IS ESTIMATED TO GROW BETWEEN APPROXIMATELY 3,000 AND 5,000 PEOPLE BY 2045.

It is important to note this number considers growth only within the existing city limits and does not account for annexations of any land within the planning boundary.

CLIMATE

Whitefish has a humid continental climate typified by four distinct seasons and large seasonal temperature differences. Summers are warm to hot, and winters are cold to severely cold. The hottest month is July, the coldest month is January. June is the month with the most precipitation, and December is the snowiest month in Whitefish.

The *1964 City of Whitefish Comprehensive Plan* shows the annual average temperature of the City of Whitefish as 42°F, with average precipitation of 15 inches and an average snowfall of 69 inches. Data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) appears to correlate with this. However, Western Regional Climate Center statistics from 1960 to 2015 show a decrease in snowfall, with an annual average of 80.63 inches in 1960 and a decline every decade to an average of 57.38 inches in 2010.

In 2017, the Montana Institute on Ecosystems at Montana State University completed a 2017 Montana Climate Assessment. This assessment concluded the annual average temperatures in Montana have risen between 2-3°F between 1950 and 2015. By midcentury, Montana temperatures are projected to increase by approximately 4.5-6.0°F, and by the end-of-century, Montana temperatures are projected to increase 5.6-9.8°F. In addition, the report finds Montana's snowpack has declined, particularly since the 1980's.

In 2018 the City of Whitefish joined with communities across the United States to address greenhouse gas emissions and plan for future change by adopting a Climate Action Plan (discussed in the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element). This Plan establishes the foundation for Whitefish to make the transition to a clean energy economy and improve local resilience to climate change impacts.

WHITEFISH CLIMATE NORMALS (1991-2020) SOURCE: NOAA[18]

Month	*Total Precip*	*Mean Max Temp*	*Mean Min Temp*	*Mean Avg Temp*
January	*1.84*	*29*	*15.9*	*22.4*
February	*1.26*	*33.9*	*16.4*	*25.1*
March	*1.27*	*42.8*	*22.7*	*32.8*
April	*1.61*	*53.2*	*29.9*	*41.6*
May	*1.99*	*63.5*	*38.9*	*51.2*
June	*3.2*	*69.8*	*45*	*57.4*
July	*1.4*	*80.6*	*50.2*	*65.4*
August	*0.89*	*80*	*48.2*	*64.1*
September	*1.25*	*68.7*	*40.2*	*54.4*

[18] https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/us-climate-normals/#dataset=normals-monthly&timeframe=30&station=USC00248902

October	*1.45*	*52.6*	*30.9*	*41.7*
November	1.7	37.5	24	30.8
December	2.07	28.9	17.9	23.4
Annual	19.93	53.4	31.7	42.5

AVERAGE ANNUAL SNOWFALL, 1950-2015 (Source: Western Regional Climate Center[19])

YEAR	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	TOTAL
1950-1960	0.95	8.71	18.34	23.13	16.98	8.92	3.35	0.25	80.63
1960-1970	0.08	9.36	21.75	27.43	11.41	6.82	0.58	1.22	78.65
1970-1980	1.00	7.51	20.01	20.00	10.83	4.43	1.13	0.00	64.90
1980-1990	1.88	7.51	20.86	17.84	11.89	4.95	4.23	0.00	69.15
1990-2000	0.75	11.20	19.34	14.70	9.30	6.14	2.24	0.00	63.67
2000-2010	0.22	4.98	17.27	16.54	7.67	9.92	0.67	0.11	57.38
2010-2015	1.63	7.15	14.13	17.88	10.63	6.55	2.67	0.50	61.12

[19] https://wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliMAIN.pl?mt8902

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHITEFISH

The name “Whitefish” comes from a species of fish abundant and fished by the Kootenai, Pend d’ Oreille and Bitterroot Salish tribes, the earliest inhabitants of the Whitefish Area. Based on archaeology, there is evidence these tribes lived in the Flathead Valley for more than 12,000 years. They would migrate throughout the year, gathering plants and berries in the warmer months and hunt during the colder seasons. They had a profound connection to the waterways, relying on fishing and other water-based activities for their livelihood. They are believed to have camped regularly near the outlet of Whitefish Lake.

The relatively peaceful tribes of the Flathead Valley lived under the constant threat of attack from Blackfeet (Niitsitapi) warriors while hunting bison on the plains. This led to an intertribal treaty and alliance with the US government against the Blackfeet known as the 1855 Treaty of Hellgate. The treaty ceded a huge amount of tribal land to the US government and set aside portions of Flathead Lake for reservations. The understanding was, among other things, the US military would provide military and financial support to what was termed the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The treaty allowed tribal hunting within the Flathead Valley but mostly restricted permanent American Indian settlements to reservations at the south and western half of Flathead Lake, moving the tribes away from what is now known as Whitefish.

In the mid-to late 1860s, one of many gold strikes occurred in British Columbia. This led to the first pioneers traveling through the Flathead Valley on their way to Canada and being introduced to the area. (Montana was still United States Territory as Montana did not achieve statehood until 1889.) The first known non-indigenous permanent settler in what would be Whitefish was hunter-trapper John Morton who arrived in the 1880s and built a cabin at the head of the Whitefish River. Because of the abundance of timber and forest land, other settlers soon arrived in Whitefish to develop logging operations. Lumber would be cut near Whitefish and floated down the Whitefish River to milling operations at the City of Kalispell. Getting to Whitefish was arduous; settlers came in on the Northern Pacific Railroad from the Midwest to Ravalli, took a stagecoach from Ravalli to the south shore of Flathead Lake, took a ferry across the lake then walked and camped along a 20-mile trail to Whitefish.

In the 1890s the Baker Brothers arrived at Whitefish from Michigan. The Baker Brothers’ impact on the history of Whitefish cannot be overstated. They constructed mills in and around the area, logged the forests, built the roads, infrastructure, churches and City Hall. They contributed money and labor and hauled water from the lake to sell to citizens before the water system was constructed. In addition to the Baker Brother’s construction of public facilities and infrastructure, early entrepreneurs began capitalizing on the lakeshore of the city for profit. One such businessman was Charlie Ramsey, who constructed a rooming house near his cabin on Whitefish Lake in 1891 to attract hunters and fishermen. It was

the first commercial building in town, became a summer resort and eventually was used to house workers associated with the railroad industry. One of the earliest areas of the City was located along the southern and southeastern side of the lake near what is known today as Dakota Avenue and was referred to as “Lakeside.”

It was the railroad that put the City of Whitefish on the map. The Great Northern Railway was brought to the Flathead Valley in the early 1890s by Canadian American railroad tycoon James Hill. Hill aspired to build a line from the West Coast to Chicago to open shipping lanes between Europe and Asia through the Great Lakes. However, the Rocky Mountains proved daunting to this objective. Hill hired Civil Engineer John F. Stevens to scout an appropriate passage through the mountains. Stevens was aware of rumors of a pass in this area, but the local Blackfeet Tribe was reluctant to reveal the specific location due to legends that it was haunted by evil spirits. In December of 1889, Stevens discovered Marias Pass. The first steam locomotive reached the City of Kalispell in 1892. A statute of Stevens now exists on Marias Pass.

Kalispell served as the original railroad division point (the local operational headquarters and railyard) from 1892 to only 1904 until it was discovered that getting through the Salish Mountains to the west would be difficult and costly with the present alignment. Instead, it was determined it would be a higher return on investment to run the line from Marias Pass to Rexford to connect to an existing north-south line which ran to Canada. This would open a new network, provide vast economic return with minimized cost and help finance the difficult engineering required to continue to the west coast. The Great Northern Railway Line was shifted 15 miles to the north from Kalispell to Whitefish, with Whitefish designated as the new division point. Although this had severe economic repercussions to Kalispell, workers relocated north, and this resulted in the incorporation of Whitefish in April of 1905. In anticipation of the relocation, the Whitefish Townsite Company was formed and purchased the original 160-acre townsite from a local resident. Population in Whitefish jumped considerably from 950 in 1905 to 1,479 in 1910 (56%) and then to 2,867 in 1920 (94%)[20]. Whitefish is still the busiest Amtrak stop between Portland and Minneapolis, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) still maintains a significant presence in the city, providing at least 280 jobs[21] and up to 50 freight trains a day.

At the time of incorporation, the City of Whitefish was little more than a swampy marsh. As development of the Great Northern Railway progressed, railroad workers cleared most of the townsite of its trees over a six-year period, although the stumps were not extracted. Roads were unpaved, often muddy, planks served as sidewalks, and there were so many tree stumps that it was difficult or impossible to navigate a horse cart down the street. For

[20] US Census
[21] Provided by BNSF

this reason, Whitefish was informally called “Stumptown.” Soon after incorporation of the City, one of the first actions of the City Council was to form a special improvement district to remove stumps from the streets with the adjacent property owners to pay the cost. Due to objections, major property owners such as the Whitefish Townsite Company took on the cost. Explosions resulting from dynamited stump extraction were commonplace throughout the town, sometimes causing foundation damage to structures. Early businesses at this time consisted of primarily bars, gambling halls and dance halls for the railroad workers and lumberjacks.

In 1907 a forest fire nearly destroyed the town. There was no water system at this point, so “bucket brigades” brought water from the Lake. The Great Fire of 1910 (the “Big Burn”) incinerated three million acres, killed 87 people and spread throughout Northern Idaho and Western Montana, but did not reach Whitefish. It did, however, result in the City establishing another special improvement district to begin replacing wooden sidewalks with concrete ones. By 1919, a gravity water system with a water tower and wooden pipes had been built and all concrete sidewalks had been completed. Electricity came to the City of Whitefish in 1909. All wooden buildings were incrementally replaced with brick and masonry. US 93 through Whitefish and north to Canada was constructed in the 1920’s as was the Baker Street Bridge across the Whitefish River. US 40 connecting Columbia Falls to Whitefish was constructed in 1933. A grade-separated viaduct was likewise constructed in the 1930’s after a child was killed crossing the railroad tracks.

In the late 1930’s two recreational industries began in Whitefish that serve as major contributors to the Whitefish economy today. The first began when land on the west side of town was purchased by the City for the purpose of an airstrip. Although an emergency airstrip in this location never came to fruition, the City eventually planned for a park in this location, which through a cooperative agreement with the Whitefish Lake Golf Association has now become the Whitefish Golf Course. Over the years, the course has expanded and is now the only 36-hole golf course complex in Montana.

The other recreational industry began with adventurous individuals skiing down the slopes of Big Mountain on wooden planks. In the early 1940’s, the Great Northern Railway was a major transporter for troops, supplies and equipment for World War 2. Some of the residents of Whitefish with ski expertise were recruited to serve on ski-combat divisions such as the US Army 10th Mountain Division. After the War, Great Falls businessmen Ed Schenck and George Prentice recognized the area’s potential and worked with the Whitefish Chamber of Commerce to develop what was to become Big Mountain Ski Resort. Some of the Veterans who had served in the US Army 10th Division – such as Karl Hinderman and Toni Matt – came back to Flathead County to become ski instructors at the fledgling resort. As of 2024, Whitefish Mountain Resort is one of the largest employers in the City with 100 full time employees, 650 employees in the winter season

and 250 employees in the summer season. Skier visits in the 2024-25 season were estimated at 497,000.[22]

In the years following the War, industries important to the Whitefish economy such as timber, farming, and ranching in the area declined. Technology led to a slowdown in the railroad industry, and construction of a dam in Libby which provided jobs to local Whitefish residents was completed in the 1970s. An Aluminum Plant in Columbia Falls which opened in the 1950s and employed 1,600 workers at its peak (the largest employer in the Flathead Valley), began scaling back operations starting in the early 1990s and completely closed in 2015[23]. Many of the cottages and bungalows used for worker housing for these industries still exist today east of downtown and south of the railroad tracks.

The 1980s began a period of increasing activity and expansion of the City, particularly south of the Whitefish River. In 1984, the nearly 200,000 square foot Mountain Mall was built at the south end of the City along US 93 South. The construction of this mall resulted in downtown businesses vacating to relocate to the mall as well as new businesses in the mall affecting the downtown. It eventually led to zoning becoming progressively more restrictive and specific to existing uses along the corridor. The construction of the mall was followed by a large annexation of land south of the mall on the east side of US 93 South to Hwy 40 in 1985. In 1995, US 93 South to Highway 40 was annexed in anticipation of a major reconstruction project to widen the corridor from two to five lanes to West 13th Street. Water and sewer mains were extended to the Highway 40 intersection in 2002. This resulted in many residential projects of various densities and commercial developments being constructed along this segment of the corridor. In 2007, North Valley Hospital, which had been on the east side of US 93 South at Greenwood Drive since 1974, was abandoned and eventually demolished. It was rebuilt as a much larger medical campus at the US 93 South / Highway 40 intersection (now called Logan Health). Today, this is the largest employer in the City, providing more than 600 jobs.

Recent notable expansions of the city have not been confined to just south of the Whitefish River. Approximately 800 acres were annexed and developed as the Iron Horse development at the northeastern portion of the City, near Big Mountain, in the early 2000s. There was a controversial widespread and concurrent annexation of multiple locations totaling nearly 500 acres that began in 1998 and was completed in 2004. This annexation generally included areas east of Karrow Avenue and south of West 3rd Street, northwest of the Whitefish Lake Golf Course, north of the railroad tracks in the vicinity of Colorado Avenue and Denver Street, and existing neighborhoods between the railroad tracks and Armory Rd. In 2005, the City doubled in area when it annexed 3,347-acre Whitefish Lake.

[22] Provided by Whitefish Mountain Resort
[23] Tabish, Dillon. “The Rise and Fall of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant.” Flathead Beacon, September 14, 2016, https://flatheadbeacon.com/2016/09/14/rise-fall-columbia-falls-aluminum-plant/

Since the last growth policy, adopted in 2007, the City has annexed approximately 900 additional acres.

The historic downtown core has seen change from the original business district of the early 1900s, but remains the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of the community. Much of the original train depot was converted to a museum and there has been recent redevelopment of nearby Depot Park. Additional public parking lots have been added. There has been road reconstruction, and improvements to water and sewer, streetscapes, sidewalks, lighting and landscaping. Numerous new buildings abound, and the downtown commercial footprint has expanded south to East 4th Street (which was previously a residential area). In 2015, the original city hall building that had existed since 1917 at East 2nd Street and Baker Ave was demolished and a new and much larger city hall with a public parking structure was constructed in the same location. This was preceded by the fire, police and court departments that had been in and behind the original city hall moving out of the downtown to a new emergency services building at the south end of the City in 2010.

Philanthropy and local fundraising in the community have significantly changed the face of Whitefish since the 1990s. Whitefish Community Foundation, organized in 2000, is dedicated to fostering philanthropy and supporting charitable local health and human services, recreation, conservation, arts and education organizations. Fundraising efforts within the community added new amenities for residents - an indoor skating rink, public library, two performing arts centers, sports field complex, food bank, music school, and an aquatic and exercise center. The Whitefish community has also been supportive of bonds for public facilities and amenities. Measures were supported to construct three new school buildings, and a bond passed in 2024 to fund an addition to the high school and new football field and track facility.

Whitefish experienced another period of rapid population growth and development during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic when a significant in-migration of new residents relocated to Whitefish due to the allure of a small mountain town and new advances in working remotely. Whitefish grew from an average rate of roughly 1.5% a year to 8.4% for 2020 and 2021 and 4.8% for 2021 and 2022. This is more than three times the historic annual growth rate and the highest growth rate since the early development of the railroad in Whitefish. In January of 2020, prior to the pandemic, the median home sales price in Whitefish was $520,000; in July of 2025 the median home sales price exceed one million dollars[24].

Today, Whitefish is a thriving community which still prides itself on its blue-collar origin. Although the mills have shut down and the railroad is no longer the City's economic engine, Whitefish's past is still ingrained in old buildings which have been kept alive,

[24] Provided by Northwest Montana Association of Realtors.

unique events such as its Winter Carnival which has been celebrated annually since 1960, local traditions and its image in the eyes of the residents. Despite the reduction in working-class jobs, Whitefish has managed to sustain itself by capitalizing on its natural resources and recreational opportunities while still retaining major employers not associated with the recreation industry. Whitefish is a vibrant, walkable, authentic community with a bright future.

Primary Sources

1. Cooper, Ahote, "*Native American History in Montana.*" https://americanindiancoc.org/native-american-history-in-montana, 2024
2. Betty Schafer and Mable Engelter, "*From Stumptown to Ski Town*"
3. Stumptown Historical Society. "*https://www.stumptownhistoricalsociety.org/stories-of-whitefish*
4. City of Whitefish Council Minutes, 180 to Present
5. US Census Bureau

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BACKGROUND

It is vitally important for a community to not rely on one industry for its economy, as economies change and downturns or closures in that industry can have catastrophic effects on small towns. Economic diversity is critical in achieving a strong, stable, resilient community. A healthy economy adds to all aspects of the community, from jobs to infrastructure to community services. A diverse economic base with a trend toward higher paying jobs for residents provides the ideal framework on which a city prospers.

Logan Health is the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, and health care and associated services is considered an industry of potential growth in the area. ~~However,~~ Approximately half of the Whitefish economy is driven by visitation, second homes and tourism ~~tourism is by far the largest contributor to the Whitefish economy,~~ providing the majority of businesses and jobs and bringing nearly $200 million into the city in 2024. The tourism industry is highly seasonal; there are wide fluctuations in tourism-related employment and revenue throughout the year.

Many Whitefish residents are employed in high-paying professional-level jobs who work remotely or commute out of the city into other nearby areas ~~due to lack of these jobs in Whitefish.~~ Conversely, many workers in the lower-paying tourism-related service industry can no longer afford to live in Whitefish and must commute into the city by car since there is no local commuter transit. Rising land costs, employee shortages and housing affordability make it difficult for local businesses to retain and find workers. Due to factors such as ~~restrictive zoning,~~ high lease rates ~~downtown~~, low inventory~~, sky~~ high property prices and construction costs, it can be difficult for new businesses to afford or find locations to open~~, leading to a deficit of locally available essential goods and services that residents rely on.~~.

The City of Whitefish enjoys numerous assets – it is in a highly desirable location, surrounded by lakes and mountains, with an abundance of natural resources and a wealth of available outdoor activities. It is vital to protect those assets, as they are a major economic driver. Whitefish has locational advantages as well, including being along an international highway corridor, having major rail access, being near an airport, and in proximity to Glacier National Park. The vibrant downtown strengthens Whitefish's unique identity, and the educated and talented citizenry and visitors generate beneficial social interaction to facilitate idea-exchange. Whitefish is uniquely poised to capitalize on its assets to broaden its economic base compatible with a visitor economy and enhance its economic sustainability and resilience.

ECONOMIC DRIVERS

The City of Whitefish was formerly an economy heavily reliant on the timber and railroad industries but by the early 2000's the largest industry had become tourism. At the time of the 2010 census, the three major industries in the City were accommodation and food service, retail trade, and health care and social assistance. In 2024, the same three major industries dominated the Whitefish economy. However, 69% of Whitefish residents are employed in the management, business and financial sectors. As only about 10% of jobs offered in Whitefish are in those same industries, a large number of Whitefish residents commute to other areas or work remotely[25].

TABLE E-1: CITY OF WHITEFISH TOP INDUSTRIES (percentage of jobs)			
Year		Year	
2010		2020	
Accommodation and Food Service	20.5%	Accommodation and Food Service	21.1%
Retail Trade	16.6%	Health Care and Social Assistance	17.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	16.4%	Retail Trade	15.7%
Educational Services	8.8%	Professional, Scientific, Technical	8.4%
Finance and Insurance	6.1%	Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	6.8%
* Source: 2010 and 2020 Census			

TABLE E-2: CITY OF WHITEFISH TOP EMPLOYERS			
Year	Employees	Year	Employees
2007		2024	
Whitefish Mountain Resort	535	Whitefish Mountain Resort[26]	650 (peak season)
North Valley Hospital	249	Logan Health	483
Whitefish School District	240	Averill Hospitality	282 (peak season)
BNSF	230	BNSF	280
City of Whitefish	101	Whitefish School District	250
*Source: 2007 Growth Policy		*Source: Whitefish Chamber of Commerce	

[25] The source of recent statistics comes from the 2023 Whitefish Economic Growth Policy Update prepared for the city by GSBS Consulting.
[26] Winter Sports maintains 100 year-round employees, with 650 during the winter ski season and 200 in the summer season.

As of 2025, the City of Whitefish median household income is **$71,110**[27]; higher than $66,395 for Flathead County and $67,915 for the State of Montana, but lower than the $74,755 national average. Gallatin County has the highest median household income in the State at $83,064 [28]

Contribution of Tourism to the Whitefish Economy

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Whitefish's economy. - 43% of all jobs are at least partially reliant on visitor spending. According to the Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, (ITRR) non-resident visitors spent $1 billion in Flathead County during 2022 and 2023, the highest of any county in Montana. Explore Whitefish, the city's official tourism organization, estimates that in 2024, 57% of every dollar spent in Whitefish was by a nonresident, contributing to an annual visitor economy of approximately $200 million[29].

Whitefish holds a unique position as a small town because of the intersection between the visitor economy and the local economy. Locally owned businesses earn most of their profits during the busy summer months and rely on local patronage throughout the rest of the year. Tourism brings substantial benefits to Whitefish—excellent restaurants and unique shops are possible because of visitor spending—but these businesses also depend on consistent local support.

Whitefish benefits from its proximity to Glacier National Park, which recorded 3,208,755 recreation visits in 2024, marking the second-highest visitation year on record. Meanwhile, annual visitation to Whitefish has remained relatively steady. The top three visitor activities in Whitefish and the surrounding area (including Glacier National Park) are identified as scenic driving, hiking and wildlife watching. However, the tourism industry remains highly seasonal, with significant fluctuations in employment and revenue. July and August consistently represent the peak season in the City of Whitefish. To mitigate these fluctuations, Explore Whitefish works to manage visitation during the peak summer months through destination management messaging and promotes tourism during the shoulder seasons.

Outdoor recreation is a huge driver for local tourism. The Whitefish Trail, which features 47 miles of non-motorized multi-use trail and 15 trailheads, attracts mountain bikers and hikers. A study by Headwaters Economics and Whitefish Legacy Partners indicated that the Whitefish Trail contributes $6.4 million in annual spending by visitors and locals, supporting 68 additional jobs and $1.9 million in labor income. Overall, outdoor recreation

[27] Provided by the 2025 Housing Needs Assessment
[28] US Census https://data.census.gov/profile/Whitefish%20city,_Montana?g=160XX00US3079825

spending by visitors to Whitefish amounts to about $101 million in spending, supporting 1,460 jobs, and $41 million in labor income.

Montana has no state-wide sales tax. In 1996, the voters of Whitefish approved a 3% "resort tax" that applies to lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail to offset visitor impacts to tax-funded services. In 2023~~3~~4, ~~approximately six million dollars was collected~~resort tax collections exceeded $6 million. According to VisaVue data, 57% of spending in Whitefish is attributable to visitors. Since VisaVue data does not include lodging expenditures—which contribute significantly to resort tax collections—it is reasonable to estimate that nonresidents contributed approximately $3.75 million to the resort tax in 2024.

As of 2025, the allocation of these funds is as follows:

- 48% for streets, sidewalks and underground utilities,
- 25% for property tax relief
- 10% for community housing
- 10% for paths and other park acquisitions and improvements
- 2% to the Whitefish Trail for maintenance
- 5% goes to merchants for the administration of the tax.

Thus, visitors have contributed significantly to the livability of the community for residents.

TOURISM RELATED IMPACTS

Despite its economic benefits, the success of the tourism industry in Whitefish has created certain challenges. Two of the top issues relate to employee housing and availability of employees. Service industry employees, who typically earn less than $35,000 per year, are finding it increasingly difficult to secure adequate housing in Whitefish, where the median home sales price exceeds $1 million and median monthly rents are $2,500 – 32% higher than the national average, according to aggregated data from rental listing websites.

It is also difficult to attract workers willing to commute from nearby communities for relatively low wages. As a result, businesses are hesitant to locate in areas with limited access to employees. According to a report from GSBS consulting, 76% of workers employed in Whitefish do not live in Whitefish. Recent efforts by Housing Whitefish—a local nonprofit that provides workforce housing assistance—have aimed to reduce rents for qualified applicants. According to the Executive Director of Housing Whitefish, based on data collected from the Whitefish Workforce Rental Assistance Program applications, applicants are paying on average $1,200 for a studio, $1,267 for a one-bedroom, $1,707 for a two-bedroom, $2,038 for a three bedroom, and $2,728 for a four bedroom in the Winter of 2025.

Other commonly cited impacts of tourism include the rise in second and third home purchases and proliferation of short-term rentals additional summer traffic, the wide seasonal fluctuations in business and employment, and the difficulty protecting the natural resources and character which draw residents and visitors to the area. STRs have a range of effects: they impact local hospitality businesses, alter residential neighborhoods, increase summer traffic, and reduce market share for hotels that contribute to the 3% resort tax.

According to AirDNA, as of 2025, the 59937 ZIP code—which includes the city of Whitefish and surrounding unincorporated areas—had approximately 1,700 STR listings. Of these, about 400 were licensed within city limits, suggesting that roughly 1,300 STRs were located outside city boundaries but still within the same ZIP code.

To provide a strategic, long-term vision and framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish community and reduce tourism impacts on the community, the city and the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau joined together to develop a Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan. A steering committee was formed in 2017 and the final plan was adopted in 2020 and updated again in 2024.

Public support for tourism declined following the surge in visitation during the 2020 pandemic. According to the Whitefish Community Tourism Survey (developed by the STMP committee), tourism sentiment has evolved significantly since 2023. In that year, only 30% of respondents agreed with the statement, “The overall benefits of tourism in Whitefish outweigh the negative impacts,” while 47% disagreed. By 2025, over 50% of respondents agreed with that statement, and more than 69% agreed that tourism benefits the community via resort tax collections: “Resort tax revenue generated supports vital city infrastructure and residential tax credits.”~~Results from a survey conducted by the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2018 showed 69% of residents agreed with the statement that tourism makes Whitefish a good place to live. This dropped to only 22% of residents in 2023. Visitor spending has declined since 2021 and is now at pre-pandemic levels.~~

Overall, tourism has brought lasting benefits to the broader Whitefish community by helping to build and sustain the amenities that make the town attractive to residents, small businesses, and future employers. Whitefish is distinct from other recreation-focused towns in the Rocky Mountains in that it is more than just a winter ski town or a summer gateway to Glacier National Park—it is a year-round community that strategically reinvests its visitor economy into local infrastructure, trails, parks, and public spaces.

With slightly more than half of all spending in Whitefish coming from nonresidents, visitor dollars help keep small businesses open during the shoulder seasons and slower periods. This stabilizing effect not only supports jobs and tax revenue but also helps keep prices lower and services more viable for year-round locals. In this way, tourism has helped

Whitefish preserve its small-town character while offering the amenities of a much larger community. Economic growth and development plans would be wise to build on the success of tourism in Whitefish. Accordingly, growth policies should be designed to leverage the visitor economy to grow business sectors beyond tourism.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIES IN WHITEFISH

Healthcare and social assistance is the next largest industry in Whitefish, comprising approximately 18% of the jobs. The main contributor is the 25-bed Logan Health critical access hospital along with supporting medical clinics and services. The hospital, formerly known as the North Valley Hospital, formed in 1905 until it merged with the Kalispell regional healthcare system in 2016 before becoming part of Logan Health. They are the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, providing 650 year-round jobs. Healthcare employment offers career-oriented jobs (often called “primary jobs”) which pay significantly higher wages than tourism. Healthcare is one of the industries projected for future growth in Whitefish. Other industries projected for future growth in Whitefish include tourism, professional, scientific, and technical services and manufacturing.

Whitefish School District is a major employer in the city, providing approximately 250 jobs in 2023, about the same number of jobs reported in 2010.

Although no longer the main economic driver of the Whitefish economy, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corporation (BNSF) still maintains a significant presence in the city. The Whitefish location generates at least 280 local jobs, hosts the busiest Amtrak Station between Portland and Minneapolis, and is an integral component of the freighting network between the east and west coasts. In the past, there was a rail spur that served a local timber mill. That has been removed, but the railyard and adjacent industrial properties have the potential to help accommodate a rail-served industrial site or a site with the ability to load or unload goods from railcars, eliminating the need for intermediate transport of large goods by truck from Seattle and other international shipping ports.

There was a national trend of residents of urban areas moving to rural and mountain towns during the COVID-19 pandemic and working remotely. It is estimated that 21% of Whitefish workers are remote workers, many of which are employed with out-of-state jobs. This trend has brought households with higher incomes into the community, which raises prices and exacerbates the lack of affordability in the Whitefish housing market.

COMMERCIAL AREAS IN WHITEFISH

There are generally four commercial areas in the City of Whitefish (see Figure S-3, the “General Layout of the City Map” in the “Setting” Chapter of the Plan). The first is the downtown core, which contains the majority of the retail, entertainment, food, and civic uses in the city. The downtown area also provides the highest density of jobs (see the Job Density Map – Exhibit X). The second commercial area is neighborhood-oriented

businesses, restaurants and professional offices located in pockets along Wisconsin Avenue north of the railroad tracks. The third commercial area contains a gas station, residences, professional offices and three lodging establishments along East Second Street (US 93 West) west of the Whitefish River to the western city limits. The fourth and largest commercial area is located along the US 93 South/Spokane Avenue corridor from the Whitefish River Bridge on US 93 south to the city limits near Highway 40 West. Virtually all automobile-oriented uses such as a mall, fast food restaurants, hotels, auto dealerships, service stations, supermarkets and most light industrial uses are located in this area.

The community values locally owned businesses as well as the unique commercial character of Whitefish. To protect those values, zoning has been implemented which prevents franchise or formula style chain businesses downtown and limits them in other commercial zones. While not currently regulated, formula services and formula hotels should also be limited downtown in order to further safeguard the unique business climate. The city's architectural review standards have strict limitations with regard to franchise business design and color schemes.

Outside of the downtown, most of the US 93 South corridor from East 6th Street to Highway 40 West is zoned WB-2, Secondary Business District. There have been concerns over the years regarding businesses along this corridor negatively impacting revenues of the downtown businesses, particularly the impact of "big box" style retailers. To better regulate those uses, the city instituted bulk and scale restrictions which require conditional use permits for buildings over 10,000 square feet so that impacts can be reviewed with more scrutiny. A new requirement for an economic impact study with any proposal for such businesses would better help decision makers weigh their effects on the local economy.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Diversifying the economy beyond a seasonal tourism base to attract "primary jobs" has been a recurrent strategy of the city. Both the 1996 Growth Policy and the 2007 Growth Policy (as well as previous economic studies) discuss the need for economic diversification. A common theme has been strengthening the economic base by seeking year round, high paying industries. The 1996 plan mentioned public opinion rates "small and non-polluting industries" as the most preferred type of economic growth in Whitefish. The 2007 Growth Policy stated it should be a policy of the City to promote beneficial job growth in the base economy, especially in areas that tend to diversify it beyond visitation-based business and industries. During visioning sessions for this plan update, virtually all comments about economic development expressed the need for providing a greater diversity of jobs for the residents of Whitefish.

AVAILABILITY OF LOCALLY NEEDED GOODS AND SERVICES

The WB-2, Secondary Business District has very prescriptive zoning with regard to allowed retail and service uses, listing a few very defined permitted uses. This was intentional, to provide locations for auto-oriented businesses that require large display space and large parking areas, and to create the opportunity for local businesses to expand into larger spaces. This zone also prevented direct competition with the downtown WB-3 General Business District, which allows all types of retail sales and services. This was initiated because several downtown businesses left Central Avenue to relocate in the Mountain Mall when it was built in 1985 during a time when the economy was struggling. While the mall is grandfathered for all retail and service uses, the downtown core was meant to be the center of financial, retail, governmental, professional, institutional, and cultural activities. Through such measures as the implementation of the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, the downtown has become a vibrant retail and entertainment hub and a significant resident and visitor draw. ~~This has led to retail offerings becoming mostly visitor-serving due to the escalating cost of real estate. Uses such as art galleries, boutique western wear, and jewelry stores have replaced the hardware store, electronics store, drug store, and other retailers of necessary goods for residents that were historically prevalent on Central Avenue.~~

Over time, the retail offerings have become more visitor-serving due to changing patterns of customer demand. Existing community-serving downtown businesses include a toy store, record store, independent book store, sporting goods stores, jewelry stores, kids clothing store, thrift stores, food markets/grocery stores, snowboard shop, third-generation shoe and clothing store, liquor store, bakery, kitchen store, florists, pet supply store, yarn store, bicycle shops, yoga studios, coffee shops, barber shops, and art education studio. Uses such as art galleries and boutique western wear stores have taken the place of the third-generation hardware store, which relocated to the WB-2 district for a larger space, and an electronics store and drug store, which were replaced by formula stores in the WB-2 district. Shifting consumer preferences for nearby big box general merchandise stores and online shopping have repeatedly caused general merchandise stores in the WB-2 district to cease doing business.

During visioning sessions and the most recent economic study, ~~many~~ a few public comments regarding economic and commercial development expressed the desire for more locally available goods and services. Some comments suggested more mixed use as well as opportunities for limited neighborhood-serving commercial in populated areas distant from downtown. There have also been discussions about how to reduce operating costs to keep locally serving businesses more affordable, particularly restaurants. ~~In addition to zoning review, strategies discussed in the study included encouraging more~~

~~"temporary" businesses such as "pop up shops"[30] or food trucks.~~ While using Vision Whitefish 2045 as their senior project, several Whitefish High School students provided their arguments for more available and affordable goods and services in Whitefish.

Economies do not follow jurisdictional boundaries. When local residents drive to other communities or shop online for everyday goods and services such as clothes, shoes, or school backpacks, this results in "leakage" of income, jobs and finances to areas outside the city. There are also residents who are too young or old to drive, or who cannot afford an automobile, for which traveling to other areas for essentials is difficult due to limits on public transportation. Such leakage also causes an increase in vehicle trips, which conflicts with sustainability, climate action, and emission reductions goals in this plan and plans such as the Whitefish 2018 Climate Action Plan and 2022 Transportation Plan.

While there is no simple solution to these issues, ~~further evaluating city commercial zoning districts and~~ supporting retention and expansion of current community-serving businesses is recommended to maintain local sustainability. Finding ways to reduce vehicle trips, including strongly pursuing valley-wide commuter public transportation partnerships and improving community walkability and bikeability while maintaining a strong centrally located commercial core, is important for both the economy and environmental sustainability.

IMPACT OF AGRICULTURE ON THE WHITEFISH ECONOMY

Preserving and supporting local farms also has a positive impact on the economy. Local produce grown nearby can be sustainably transported to market without using the quantities of fossil fuels required to send products from somewhere else to local grocery stores. This "direct sale" puts more of the revenue in the grower's pockets by eliminating intermediaries typically involved in brokering and distribution of produce. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)[31], local produce stands and farmers markets significantly reduce operating costs, and these savings can be passed on to consumers at the same time increasing profits for the farmers. As fuel prices continue to rise and as consumers become more sensitive to the issues of processed and genetically altered foods, organic local farming should become a growth industry. Whitefish School District's Center for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship facility includes a greenhouse, production gardens, and orchards. Flathead Valley Community College offers courses in organic agriculture, including working on a certified organic farm. But all agriculture in Flathead County faces

~~[30] A "pop up shop" is a temporary retail space that is set up for a short period of time, typically ranging from a few days to a few months.~~

[31] Community Supported Agriculture is a model where consumers directly buy shares of a farm's harvest in advance in a "subscription" scenario. CSA members receive fresh products on a weekly basis throughout the growing season.

challenges due to development pressures and real estate prices rising at much higher value than the price of farm products.

PREVIOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

There have been several previous economic studies completed for the City of Whitefish. In 2002, there was a study prepared by a Jobs for Whitefish Taskforce (*Baker Avenue City Property Development Program - Phase 2A Report*). This study was intended to determine highest and best uses to attract favorable high wage jobs along Baker Avenue in the vicinity of Flathead Avenue. Recommendations included creating incentives to attract or grow "desirable" businesses, fostering "incubator businesses" to help local startups grow and succeed, and considering the needs of present and future industries when determining location and types of infrastructure improvements. This report also states that the "do nothing" alternative would move Whitefish away from quality jobs and diversification as has happened to resort towns such as Jackson Hole, Ketchum or Aspen. Similar recommendations are repeated in a recent 2023 economic study (discussed below).

In 2015, the *Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan* was updated (first adopted in 2006). This plan presented strategies such as regulatory changes to address scale and massing of buildings to protect and enhance downtown character and synergy and the types and timing of public projects, such as pedestrian-friendly retail parking projects to stimulate private investment. It called for expanding the retail core into an expanded shopping loop into the Railway District.

In 2018 and 2019, an economic performance analysis was completed as part of the *Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan* and the *Highway 93 South Corridor Plan*. Finally, an economic analysis and market study was completed by GSBS Consulting for the entire city as part of this community plan to inform this chapter and to meet statutory requirements (discussed below).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS FOR STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) has specific requirements regarding economic development. These include assessing existing and potential commercial enterprises, summarizing job composition and labor force, assessing local constraints to commercial enterprises, inventorying existing and potential commercial sites, and analyzing local facilities and financial feasibility of supporting existing and potential commercial enterprises for the projected population.

Due to the expertise needed for this analysis, staff retained a consultant to complete this study. (The complete report is included as an Appendix.) The consultant reached out to more than 30 business and industry stakeholders over a 6-month period, met with many stakeholders individually, held two group economic forums and coordinated extensively with staff. Seventeen stakeholders ended up participating.

Stakeholders were engaged in discussions of the following topics:

- Attainable Housing
- Economic Diversification
- Areas of Growth and/or Opportunity
- Tourism
- The Downtown Area and Commercial Expansion
- Public and/or Private Infrastructure
- Policy

The consultant's report was presented to the Community Development Board in June of 2024 and serves as a resource for this plan element. Key takeaways from this report include:

TABLE C: STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN GSBS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY

AppCOM	Heart of Whitefish
Averill Hospitality	KCM Enterprises
BNSF	Montana West Economic Development
Chamber of Commerce	Mountain Mall
City of Whitefish	National Parks Realty
Explore Whitefish	Two Bear Capital
Garden Wall Inn	Whitefish Mountain Resort
Glacier Bank	The ZaneRay Group
Haskill Creek Farms	

- The three industries of expected job growth are professional services, health care and tourism.
- Industries expected to decline are transportation, warehousing and information technology.
- Trends that may have an impact on Whitefish's economic future include an increase in remote workers, unavailability of employee housing, ongoing consolidation of economic activity into the tourism sector, and increases in commuting.

- Economic strengths include a strong tourism economy, proximity to Glacier National Park and airport, and the opportunity to capitalize on a significant rail network which is advantageous to industries that rely heavily on transporting large volumes of goods.
- Economic weaknesses and constraints include lack of economic diversity, ~~lack of affordable restaurant establishments for local residents, hyper-specific zoning,~~ proliferation of short term rentals removing potential housing from the market, job opportunities, housing and basic needs and services being more available in other communities, and manufacturers and businesses leaving due to ~~cost of land,~~ unobtainable housing and low employee pool.
- There is an increasing amount of development pressure for housing on properties presently zoned for industrial or commercial uses.
- ~~A recommendation to further study the pros and cons of a potential downtown electronic paid parking program to increase parking turn-over in front of businesses and discourage employee parking in these areas.~~
- Benefits of forming a community group focused toward facilitating discussions between municipalities and other economic development organizations to ensure goals are in alignment and do not conflict with each other.
- ~~Considering regulatory changes to ensure the downtown is not dominated by one particular type of business (such as all art galleries or jewelry stores).~~
- A review of properties ideal for commercial development and recommended types of industry.

The State Legislature in 2023 enacted laws that require cities to allow multi-family and mixed use by right in all commercial zones while also limiting parking requirements for such uses. As such, there is increasing pressure on the remaining vacant commercial properties to be developed into housing rather than typical commercial uses. While housing is an important need, we also need to consider whether there is enough available commercial and industrial property to meet the economic needs of our growing community over the next twenty years and beyond.

SUMMARY

A healthy city economy is balanced, resilient, and inclusive, supporting both current and future generations. It should be diversified across multiple industries, reducing dependence on a single sector. The economic benefits should be shared broadly among the population. Goods and services should be readily available locally to all residents. The *vision* is to balance the availability of needed jobs, goods and services with the community's desire to support local businesses and retain its scale, identity and charm.

ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND

AIR QUALITY

Introduction

Clean, clear air is a valuable resource for residents and visitors alike. Community members and visitors appreciate clean air for outdoor pursuits including maintaining the visibility of the grand vistas of the surrounding mountains, the Flathead Valley, and Glacier National Park. Certain groups, such as children, older adults, and people with health conditions are especially vulnerable to the effects of poor air quality.

Nonattainment Status:

In 1993, Whitefish was designated as a 'Moderate – Nonattainment' area by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for PM-10 (particulate matter less than or equal to 10 micrometers) under the Clean Air Act. The major contributor to this designation was dust generated from winter road sanding materials and vehicles tracking mud and dirt from unpaved surfaces. As a result of this designation, the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program was developed requiring pavement of roads, alleys, parking lots, driveways, implementation of deicing and sweeping program for city streets, and erosion control methods for construction sites to control fugitive dust particulates.

The city has used magnesium chloride road deicer since it was forced to stop using sand due to air quality concerns. While there are currently no practical alternatives to magnesium chloride, it does come with environmental impacts. It can wash into storm drains and water bodies such as Whitefish Lake and the Whitefish River. It has been shown to negatively impact aquatic species. It kills roadside vegetation and attracts wildlife such as deer to the road resulting in vehicle-animal collisions. It prematurely rusts vehicles which is costly to residents. No affordable practical alternatives currently exist, but the City should continue to monitor various technologies and approaches that other municipalities with winter road issues use to eventually find and implement a more environmentally friendly solution.

In 2022, the EPA redesignated the City as 'Moderate – Maintenance' because five years of data from 2015-2020 showed the City met National Ambient Air Quality Standards. While this updated designation shows an improvement, the requirements of the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program continue to apply so air quality in our area does not decline. The City continues to require paving, erosion control, deicing, and sweeping in compliance with this Program. The air quality monitoring station at West 10th Street near

Spokane Avenue continues to monitor air quality for both the County Environmental Health Department and the State of Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Contributors to Air Quality Impacts

Apart from the dust issue, the most predominant air quality contaminants in Whitefish and its planning jurisdiction include open burning, vehicle emissions, and wildland fires.

Open burning is regulated and permitted by the County and the Fire Chief depending on weather conditions. The burn permits only allow for the burning of natural debris and do not include the burning of man-made materials. Air quality complaints are filed with the County.

The 2007 Growth Policy noted the impacts of vehicle emissions on air quality. The County does not monitor these types of emissions since our rural populations do not require it; however, as the valley continues to grow, this issue will continue to become more prevalent, further compounded by the local topography which often results in winter inversions. Some of the ways the city could promote reducing emissions resulting from vehicular traffic include encouraging responsible development to reduce vehicular travel (such as development in connected and walkable areas) and ensuring viable transportation alternatives such as public transportation.

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With increasing wildland fires in the west bringing summer smoke annually, the County monitors air quality for public health using the Air Quality Index (AQI). The AQI indicates a range of air quality from Good to Hazardous for public health. The County Health Department has the authority to issue public warnings when air quality is diminished and can cancel outdoor events in the event of exceptionally bad air quality.

The 2007 Growth Policy noted the prevalence of wood stoves and their impact on air quality. While this is still monitored by the County, it is less of a concern than in the past due to newer stoves having EPA certification for particulate matter emissions.

WATER QUALITY

Introduction

Equally important as clean air is clean water. During the Visioning process, the community overwhelmingly stated the top three most important features to protect were the Whitefish River, Whitefish Lake, and overall water quality.

Water quality was identified as important in the 2007 Growth Policy and much work has been accomplished concerning water quality since then. The plan noted concerns about the lack of water quality monitoring and lack of regulations protecting our lakes, rivers, and streams. Since that time, the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), a local nonprofit, has evolved into a significant local water quality leader and voice for Whitefish Lake. WLI collects water data, authors water quality-related studies and promotes water quality protection policies.

The City of Whitefish has adopted water quality protection regulations that go above and beyond state and county requirements, including an additional 10-foot setback from the 20-foot lakeshore protection zone (Lake and Lakeshore Protection Regulations, adopted 2007). Buffer and setback regulations were added along streams, critical stormwater conveyances, wetlands, lakes, areas of high groundwater and Whitefish River to protect water quality and riparian areas. Geotechnical analysis and review were added for steep slope development. (Water Quality Regulations, adopted 2008). Additionally, in early 2024, the City adopted updated, more stringent lakeshore protection regulations aimed at better protecting water quality. The City's Engineering Standards (2018) added standards and requirements for stormwater detention and treatment facilities, groundwater monitoring and impacts, and geotechnical site analysis.

303(d) Listed Waters

A 303(d) listed water is a body of water determined to be impaired or threatened by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Whitefish Lake, despite being a significant source of municipal drinking water, is listed as a 303(d)-water body for contaminants. However, in 2014 Whitefish Lake's 303(d) listing for sedimentation was removed. This is because in 2008, Swift Creek, the major contributor of sedimentation to the Lake, was removed from the list as it was determined the sedimentation was naturally occurring. Whitefish Lake still has a 303(d) listing for polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) and mercury. PCBs were once used in industrial and commercial applications until banned by EPA in 1979. PCBs are contained in many products ranging from electrical transformers, plastics to paint and can be introduced into the environment in ways such as improper dumping, burning, or leaking. PCBs do not readily break down once in the environment and have been linked to a variety of adverse health effects. They can remain for long periods cycling between air, water and soil. PCBs can be carried long distances and found in areas far from where they were released into the environment. Mercury is likely from the atmosphere and is released through the burning of products that contain mercury such as coal-fired power plants.

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is a regulatory term in the US Clean Water Act that calculates the maximum amount of pollutant a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards (not being listed as a 303(d) impaired body). In 2014, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) produced a report[32] for the Flathead-Stillwater TMDL Planning Area, which includes the Whitefish River. Although at that time the Whitefish River was not indicated to be contributing excessive pollutants, it is still listed on the 303(d) for temperature, which can impair aquatic life. The report indicated the rise in water temperature is attributed primarily to reduction in the riparian canopy cover providing shading along the Whitefish River. The canopy reduction is caused, among other things, by residential and commercial development along the river, present and historical agricultural activities, timber harvest, and some limited areas of recreational activity. To help minimize the influence of upland activities on stream temperature, continued planting of riparian buffer vegetation (trees) was recommended. Although shading from vegetation will help reduce water temperature, there could still be continued rising caused by the increasingly hotter temperatures associated with climate change. In addition, according to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, there are measurable amounts of oil and grease in the Whitefish River. This is likely caused by pollutants in stormwater, including runoff from the BNSF railyard. The Whitefish River, despite upgrades to the sewer treatment plant, still suffers from increased eutrophication due to nutrient loading (primarily phosphorous and nitrogen), likely from fertilizing private lawns and sports fields. A public education program about the effects of lawn chemicals on water quality that also identifies more environmentally friendly alternatives could help decrease those impacts in the future.

Other Significant Influences on Whitefish Water Quality

There has been significant progress in improving and maintaining water quality since the 2007 Plan. The following is a brief description of various issues, projects, plans, or studies conducted related to water quality since the adoption of the last growth policy.

- 1989 Mackinaw Bay Train Derailment: On July 31, 1989, a BNSF freight train derailed approximately 4 miles northwest of Whitefish. Several tank cars rolled down the west shore of Whitefish Lake and leaked between 20,000 and 25,000 gallons of diesel into the lake. The Governor of Montana declared a state of emergency, the lake was temporarily closed, and cleanup efforts ensued. Although the majority of the contamination was contained or removed within two weeks, contamination (including

[32] *The Flathead-Stillwater Planning Area Nutrient, Sediment, and Temperate TMDLs and Water Quality Improvement Plan*

an oil sheen) was still detected in the lake as long as 24 years later. In 2012, soils with petroleum hydrocarbons were detected near the shoreline by the Whitefish Lake Institute and under the direction of EPA, BNSF removed additional contaminated sediment from the bay, which was brought to Whitefish City Beach and eventually transported to a waste facility in North Dakota. Approximately 97% of the contamination has been removed. BNSF continues to conduct groundwater monitoring and follow-up cleanup if/when contaminants are detected

- 2007 Whitefish River Clean Up: After a 2007 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigation and sampling of a reported petroleum sheen on the Whitefish River, the EPA ordered BNSF to clean the river along the Whitefish West rail yard. The river cleanup was conducted from 2009 through 2013, from the train trestle to JP Road. The problem with nutrient or pollutant loading of the Whitefish River is that the river is a slow moving (low gradient) river. As a result, sediment and pollutants have a tendency to build up over time due to the minimal downstream flushing velocities.

- Septic Leachate in Whitefish Lake: The presence of septic leachate in Whitefish Lake is a water quality concern. While the entire lake is in the city limits, only approximately 30% of the lake perimeter is directly adjacent to properties within the city limits with ready access to municipal sanitary sewer. The majority of properties adjacent to and near the lake use on-site septic systems. In 2012, the *Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline Area of Whitefish Lake, Montana* prepared by the Whitefish Lake Institute, was completed to identify the extent of septic leachate in Whitefish Lake. The Study identified areas of contamination and areas with the threat of contamination along with mitigation recommendations including education and outreach to maintain water quality (see Exhibit E.1 *Septic Leachate Risk Assessment*). Since completion of the report, specific preliminary engineering reports were completed for two areas to encourage connection to municipal sanitary sewer. Because this is an issue across the County and State for lakes in Montana, the topic of improving technologies and improving incentives for upgrading to municipal sanitary sewer and/or septic systems is also being addressed at a statewide level. Locally, encouraging connection to city services and developing local incentives will help to reduce septic leachate and protect water quality in Whitefish Lake.

- Aquatic Invasive Species: Preventing Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) from entering Whitefish Lake and other waterbodies protects the ecological integrity of area waterbodies, the municipal drinking water supply, and the local economy. In 2013 the City, in partnership with the Flathead Conservation District, Whitefish Lake State Park, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and the Whitefish Lake Institute, began an Aquatic Invasive Species

(AIS) program to inspect watercraft before entering Whitefish Lake public access points through City Beach and at Whitefish State Park. Watercraft are inspected for Zebra and Quagga Mussels, Eurasian Watermilfoil, Curlyleaf Pondweed, and other invasive plants and animals. Inspections occur from May 1st – September 30th and are in addition to watercraft inspections occurring in areas surrounding the Flathead River Basin including Browning, Clearwater Junction, Ravalli, St. Regis, Thompson Falls, Troy, and Eureka. Since 2013, the AIS inspection program has become more robust and includes city staff training by FWP, statewide data sharing, and a preventative decontamination station for high- risk watercraft at City Beach. The City of Whitefish also partners with WLI for AIS early detection monitoring on Whitefish Lake and other local waterbodies.

- City Beach Interceptor Trench: In 2015, based on evidence collected by the Whitefish Lake Institute of petroleum hydrocarbon loading at City Beach, the city installed an interceptor trench at the boat ramp to capture effluent from boat bilge pumps which can prevent gasoline constituents from entering the lake directly. This drain is engineered to separate hydrocarbons and then release the treated water back into the lake. Watercraft users are encouraged to drain their boats when leaving a waterbody to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (Clean, Drain, and Dry).

- Haskill Creek Conservation Easement: In 2016, the City, in concert with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and The Trust for Public Land, established a conservation easement on 3,020 acres of F. H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company for: “(i) the protection and preservation of the City's water supply, including the primary source drinking water supply for 90% of the City's municipal water system, (ii) the aesthetic protection of the scenic backdrop to the City, (iii) the preservation of important wildlife and fish habitat, (iv) the securing of nearby and accessible recreational opportunities, and (v) the preservation of sustainable timber harvesting, along with all of the associated local job and economic benefits that come with such benefits.” In order to purchase the easement, the City and FWP secured grants and were able to gain the support of the citizens of Whitefish to pass an increase in resort tax to fund the remainder. (See the Stoltze and State Forest Lands Map for location information regarding the Haskill Basin Conservation Easement.)

- Fireworks: The City of Whitefish is a partner in annual fireworks displays sponsored by the Whitefish Chamber of Commerce. Although beautiful, fireworks displays have been shown to release numerous particulates and heavy metals into the air, water and soil. Of particular concern is a chemical called perchlorate, which provides the oxygen necessary for vigorous combustion. Perchlorate has been shown to impact air and water quality, particularly drinking water, and is linked to health conditions which

can interfere with thyroid function and cause birth defects. In 2021, the Whitefish City Council passed a fireworks ordinance which aims to reduce perchlorate fireworks in city displays to less than 50% by 2025. The city should continue to monitor various technologies to find more environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional fireworks.

- New Wastewater Treatment Plant: In 2021, the City completed the construction of a state of the art mechanical wastewater treatment plant. The previous wastewater treatment facility was constructed in 1975 for an average daily flow of 1.25 million gallons. The process consisted of a device that clumped suspended particles together to settle to the bottom of aerated lagoons[33]. Treated effluent was discharged to the Whitefish River under a permit from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

  The City was issued an Administrative Order of Consent (AOC) by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality in 2012. The AOC was issued based on excess levels of nitrogen and ammonia than are permitted over a 5-year period. In addition, since the construction of the existing facility, more stringent requirements permit requirements for the removal of ammonia, nitrogen, and phosphorous were implemented. While the lagoon system had served the City well, it was approaching the end of its useful design life and could not be upgraded to meet the new standards without major reconstruction.

  The new wastewater plant, designed by Aqua Nova Engineering, uses a patented technology[34] which effectively treats an average daily flow of 2 million gallons and a maximum daily flow of 6 million gallons while meeting the new permit requirements.

- Upgraded Water Treatment Plant: Maintaining high quality water is vital to providing water to the city. The City's water treatment plant was constructed in 2001 and designed to treat up to 4 million gallons per day. The facility was upgraded in 2021 to provide an additional 2 million gallons of treated water per day to handle the City's growing demand during the peak irrigation season. During the upgrades, the building was expanded to allow room for two additional filters to bring the total treatment capacity up to 8 million gallons per day[35].

[33] Known as a flocculating clarifier
[34] This new technology treats wastewater in a single tank using microorganisms to combine contaminants that settle to the bottom of the tank and then removing the treated water (effluent), leaving the sludge. This technology is called a "sequencing batch reactor utilizing aerated granular sludge technology."
[35] The system is known as a "contact adsorption clarifier" that works by combining fine particles into larger clusters of particles (flocculation) and then filtering these larger clusters out of the water (clarification).

Municipal water is sourced from surface water including 1st Creek[36], 2nd Creek, and 3rd Creek of Haskill Creek. Water is also pumped from Whitefish Lake, primarily during the summer months due to higher demand and to maintain downstream flows in Haskill Creek. Whitefish Lake is classified by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) as an A-1 water body meaning it is "suitable for drinking, culinary, and food processing purposes after conventional treatment for removal of naturally present impurities." There have been concerns regarding the potential impacts of climate change on the water system, particularly Haskill Basin. These include droughts leading to reduced stream flows or the increase in wildfires creating additional contamination. It is possible Whitefish Lake could serve as a greater source of water supply in the future.

- Updated Lakeshore Protection Regulations: In January of 2024, the City Council updated the Lakeshore Protection Regulations to incorporate modern best practices for erosion control, including advocating the use of bioengineering, soft-structure armoring, and dynamic gravel beach design over the old practice of using concrete retaining walls, stacked rock, or riprap. While hard surfaces such as riprap reduce erosion on a property, they also redirect the wave energy onto adjacent properties, creating more erosion issues, and wave bounce-back scours the shoreline of valuable habitat for invertebrates, reducing biodiversity.

  The living or nature-based shore protection and bioengineering promoted in the amendments maintain a natural shoreline to reduce erosion while also enhancing the ecosystem. Compared to riprap or seawalls, a naturally functioning riparian zone (the interface area between the waves and the shore) reduces wave energy, minimizes erosion, filters pollutants from surface runoff via biofiltration, provides habitat diversity and is a source of aquatic nutrients, and it traps and hold sediments and woody debris in order to replenish soils and rebuild banks and shorelines. Dynamic gravel beaches are created by adding sand and gravel along the shoreline and in the lake at varying depths and sizes of substrates to naturally dissipate wave action. This method has been used successfully on Whitefish Lake and Flathead Lake in several locations to restore natural beaches and reduce erosion. Additionally, requirements were added to require aquatic invasive species inspections for private boat ramps, additional safety measures were added for sewer lift stations and fuel stations, and requirements were added for water lines to be horizontally bored rather than trenched in the lake.

- Sports Fields: Sports fields (including golf courses) can have a significant impact on the environment. While they provide important greenspace and outdoor recreation

[36] The City has a right to take water from 1st Creek but has not since the 1980s due to natural contamination.

opportunities, their generous use of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides can contaminate ground and surface water, including Whitefish Lake, and kill pollinator species such as bees. They also use a significant amount of water for turf maintenance. Waste associated with sports field maintenance such as chemical-contaminated rinsates and packaging, used motor oil, electric batteries and unused solvents can add pollutants. Such facilities should join programs such as the Environmental Facility Certification from the Sports Field Management Association, or the GEO or Audubon International environmental certifications for golf courses. At a minimum, they should adopt practices and technologies that conserve natural resources, including water and energy, as well as minimize contamination of ground and surface water from chemical fertilizers and pesticides. For recreational fields owned by the city but leased to another entity, the City of Whitefish should evaluate future lease renewal language to require those practices.

- Climate Change Impacts on Water Supply: Climate change could have impacts on water quality and quantity in the Haskill Basin watershed. Reduced snowpack and increasing flash droughts would likely reduce ground water replenishment. During fire events, streams, lakes and water reservoirs can become contaminated with materials such as ash and fire retardant. This process can be exacerbated when the vegetation that previously held soil is burned away, and rainstorms create conditions conducive to erosion and flooding. This leads to large amounts of contaminants entering into water sources, impeding utility systems, impacting water quality, discoloring recreational waters, and contributing to harmful algal blooms. Drinking-water utilities face a considerable challenge to develop plans and strategies for managing floods and treating polluted water. Continuing forest management is key for preserving water quality in Haskill Basin, but it is possible Whitefish Lake would need to serve a larger role in the city's water supply in the future. With that in mind, it is imperative that the water quality of Whitefish Lake be protected for potability.

Water Quality – Looking Forward

Stormwater – Once Whitefish's fulltime population reaches 10,000, the City becomes subject to a state stormwater permit.[37] The permit contains limits on what can be discharged, as well as monitoring and reporting requirements. Implementation of this permit will involve lengthy coordination and require additional staff. This is discussed in more detail in the Public Works Section of the Public Facilities Element.

[37] *The General Permit for Storm Water Discharges Associated with Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s), authorized to discharge under the Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES).*

Stormwater – Community Awareness: Storm drains in the city rights of way in the older part of town, including the downtown, drain into the Whitefish River. This can introduce numerous pollutants that can severely affect water quality such as oil, antifreeze, snowmelt chemicals, as well as many others. Starting in 2022, with permission from the City of Whitefish, a partnership between the Whitefish Lake Institute and the Whitefish High School Art Department started a storm drain mural project to heighten awareness of the issue. Student art is painted on the sidewalks at stormwater outlets along with a 'Water Only – Drains to River' stencil to raise public awareness. The City will continue to support this program and encourage additional usage of the stencil at City storm drains. The City should continue a strong working partnership with WLI and other partners to further the community's understanding of water quality trends and issues.

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Introduction

Terms such as nature, forests, trees, rivers, and lakes were often cited during the community visioning process pointing to a strong community bond with all things wild. The abundance of local wildlife both within and outside the city is something most residents and visitors appreciate. However, living in an area frequented by wildlife can pose challenges for residents and visitors. As the Whitefish population has grown and development has moved outward, wildlife interactions have increased, causing the City to re-evaluate its approach to solid waste and other animal attractants such as fruit trees in public parks, and consider a more proactive approach, particularly with regard to bears and the urban deer population.

Noxious Weeds

The City has adopted and enforced noxious weed regulations to protect native plant communities and lands used for agriculture, forestry, livestock, and wildlife. The list of weeds ebbs and flows with new plants being added and others removed at the state and County levels. The City will continue to monitor these lists to keep up to date on the most recent noxious weeds. In addition, the recently updated landscaping regulations also require 50% of landscaping to be species native to Montana or a cultivar of a native species to conserve water and promote native plants.

Important Habitat

The growth policy adopted in 2007 recognized there was no local comprehensive program to protect critical fish or wildlife habitat. Since that time, the City has enacted wetland, stream, river, and lake buffers and setbacks to protect riparian areas. While the buffers and setbacks were developed to protect water quality and not for the purpose of preserving habitat, they also protect riparian areas - the area where land meets water -

important habitats for all animals. Riparian habitat provides a protected corridor for animals to move through town and, if left in a natural state, can provide cover, food, and shade for waterways. Other habitat areas to consider through the development process include winter range. While there are no winter range areas within the city limits, as development expands into the planning jurisdiction, careful consideration of these areas should occur.

Wildlife

Wildlife in the city and planning jurisdiction ranges from herds of elk to bald eagles to grizzly bears. Some animals such as elk move through the area seasonally while others make Whitefish and its surrounding environs their year-round homes. When developing or expanding city limits, thoughtful planning needs to occur to help maintain wildlife corridors and habitats while ensuring development respects the needs of wildlife. Since much of the vital habitat occurs outside the city limits, the city should encourage the County to also incorporate wildlife-friendly practices into development proposals including consulting with a professional wildlife biologist on project designs to maintain wildlife corridors and important habitats.

Prominent Animal Species Native to Whitefish			
Bald Eagle	Canada Goose	Great Gray Owl	Red Tailed Hawk
Beaver	Coyote	Great Horned Owl	Weasel
Bobcat	Elk	Moose	
Black Bear	Gray Wolf	Mountain Lion	
Golden Eagle	Great Blue Heron	Osprey	
Threatened Species Native to Whitefish[38]			
Bull Trout	Canada Lynx	Grizzly Bear	Wolverine

Living with Wildlife

There is a healthy bear population in and around Whitefish. In 2019, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks staff met with the City to discuss bear activity and outline various strategies. As a result, the Parks Department installed animal-resistant garbage cans in all city parks and trails and developed a fruit gleaning program for fruit trees in City parks and other public trees. The fruit gleaning program, developed in coordination with the

[38] The Endangered Species Act (ESA) defines a threatened species as a plant or animal that is likely to become endangered in the near future in a significant portion of its range or throughout its entire range. Threatened species are typically federally protected

North Valley Food Bank (NVFB), included mapping all public fruit trees while Food Bank volunteers agreed to remove all fruit regardless of whether it is edible or not. In 2023, the Food Bank reported 700 pounds of fruit picked to feed the community. Successful as this program is, there have also been discussions and debates regarding whether fruit trees should be removed from city properties because they attract wildlife.

Local bears have learned to tip over trash cans for a quick snack, scattering garbage and creating a nuisance. Due to an uptick in bear-human conflicts in town (381 reported incidents since 2018), in 2022, the city provided residential properties with single family homes and two or tri-plex residential buildings with 95-gallon animal-resistant solid waste containers. This has resulted in fewer in-city bear complaints. During 2024, the City began to replace the downtown pedestrian trash cans with the same parks department bear resistant cans with a goal of completing the downtown area in 2025. The city should continue to monitor the efficacy of this program and determine if animal-resistant cans should be installed more broadly throughout town.

Over the years, the Whitefish City Council has heard increasing concerns from community members regarding resident deer inside city limits. Other communities in Montana have attempted to address the number of deer within city limits with limited success. Strategies had ranged from deer culling to sterilization. Any plan to reduce the deer population requires approval from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and will include an assessment to determine the extent of the problem before any reduction measures are approved. Approved plans require testing for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)[39] and a plan to process and donate game meat so it does not go to waste. During the summer of 2024, a Whitefish Police Department analysis found 475 deer incidents (likely collisions) dating back to 2018. Increases in wildlife interactions can be attributed to population growth, rural sprawl, and fewer hunting areas due to private development of previous game land. A deer management plan should be developed in coordination with Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

[39] Chronic wasting disease affects deer, elk and similar animals. Although there is no direct evidence that it can be transmitted to humans, as a precaution, the CDC recommends against eating meat from infected animals.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Escalating greenhouse gas emissions are warming the climate at a quickening rate. The Montana Institute on Ecosystems at Montana State University completed a 2017 Montana Climate Assessment showing annual average temperature increases of 2-3°F between 1950 and 2015. By midcentury, Montana temperatures are projected to increase by approximately 4-6°F, and 6-9°F by the end-of-century. As a result, the assessment finds Montana's snowpack has declined since the 1980's.

Climate change is expected to present numerous and significant impacts. Consequences already affecting Northwest Montana include reduced snowfall, hotter and drier summers, larger, more prolonged and intense wildfires resulting in decreased air quality, decline in water supplies, increased flooding, increase in invasive species, and greater sediment supply into streams and lakes due to wildfire. Whitefish is a major ski destination, and it is anticipated that the season will begin progressively later and end earlier, with more rain on snow events and less reliable skiing conditions.

The Whitefish Climate Action Plan (CAP)

In 2015, the United States was one of 196 countries to agree to an international treaty on climate change negotiated at a United Nations Climate Change Conference near Paris, France (also known as the "Paris Agreement.")[40]. This agreement involved participating countries working together to take action to limit global temperature rise to less than 2° Celsius (3.6° Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial temperature levels, and to achieve carbon neutrality[41] by the middle of the 21st century. In 2018, the City of Whitefish joined partners and communities across the United States to support the Paris Agreement by adopting a Climate Action Plan (CAP) that included the Paris Agreement emissions reduction goals.

The CAP establishes the foundation for Whitefish to make the transition to a clean energy economy and improve local resilience to climate change impacts. The plan has two main goals – reducing emissions to be carbon neutral by 2050 and preparing for climate change. It does this through strategies intended to reduce energy use in city facilities, consider the transportation and land use relationship during city planning, improve infrastructure, better manage forests and watersheds, encourage more local production of local food, and reduce waste. The plan also incorporates actions that can be taken by the Whitefish School District, who was a partner in the development of the plan.

[40] The United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement in 2020, rejoined in 2021 and once again withdrew in 2025.
[41] "Carbon Neutral" is defined as having no net gain in greenhouse gas emissions.

The Climate Action Plan Standing Committee

Following adoption of the CAP, the Whitefish City Council established the Whitefish Climate Action Plan Standing Committee to assist in implementation. The committee is comprised of Whitefish city staff and community members. The committee's goals include establishing a working timeline for implementation, recommending actions and budget priorities to the city council or city management, tracking progress towards the plan's goals, updating a greenhouse gas inventory, and updating the plan as necessary.

Recent Successes Regarding the Climate Action Plan

Since the establishment of the committee, the following plan objectives have been accomplished:

- The construction of the new 2017 city hall incorporating energy efficient features.
- All streetlights converted to LED bulbs.
- Construction of a new wastewater treatment plant in 2021 resulting in greatly reduced energy consumption.
- Plans for development of a solar PV farm to provide partial energy needs for new wastewater plant in partnership with Flathead Electric.
- Revised landscape regulations to promote climate resiliency, incorporating native and water tolerant plants, and enforcing preservation of tree cover.

Areas for Improvement

There are additional actions the city could take to fulfill its commitment to supporting the goals of the CAP. Although the plan discusses how its goals could be implemented, there is not a schedule for what role the city has in the process, or which departments are responsible. Recommendations of the CAP within the purview of the city include additional regulatory updates to encourage development of green infrastructure and retention of urban forests, addressing environmental impacts related to transportation/land use, and subdivision design which is more compact, walkable, and preserves existing trees. Although larger amounts of preserved trees and open space in subdivisions reduces the urban heat island effect, care must be taken to safeguard from creating greater wildfire risk, including appropriate requirements for defensible space.

NATURAL RESOURCES BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Whitefish has an abundance of natural resources. From Whitefish Lake, the Whitefish River, the area's many streams, its abundant wildlife, its mountain backdrop, and its forests, the natural resources of the North Flathead Valley help make Whitefish a world - class destination as well as a great place to live and work. Natural resources have also driven the early development and economy of Whitefish - including farming and ranching, abundant wildlife for fishing and hunting, healthy forests for logging, and mineral extraction. While timber and mineral extraction no longer provide the jobs and economic boom they once did, the enjoyment of our outdoor amenities as well as clean air, local farms, and the vast local trail network is a huge part of what draws both residents and visitors to our community. A community that protects and manages its natural resources for the benefit of future generations is a sustainable community; one that will enjoy economic success and a high quality of life for generations to come. Natural resources specifically addressed by this section include water, agriculture, timber resources, and mineral extraction.

WATER QUANTITY

Water Supply

The City of Whitefish relies entirely on surface water for its domestic supply, as do many residents around the shoreline of Whitefish Lake. There are two primary sources: Second and Third Creek in the Haskill Basin, and Whitefish Lake. The Haskill Basin water source is the main source of water. Water quality in the Haskill Basin is protected by conservation easements which limit development in the area to timber management. (Please see the Public Facilities elements for additional details regarding water availability and infrastructure.) In times of low flow (which is expected to be more frequent as climate change impacts accelerate), the city augments the water system by intaking water from Whitefish Lake from a pipe located approximately 1,200 feet out into the lake. The city has water rights to First Creek in the Haskill Basin, but this source was abandoned in the 1980s following E. Coli contamination from the former sewage system for the Whitefish Mountain Resort. The city is also studying the feasibility of groundwater wells to supplement the water supply. The Parks and Recreation Department has installed a well at Armory Park for irrigation of a portion of the park, thereby conserving water by reducing the use of treated water for irrigation purposes. The department continues to evaluate the feasibility of future wells and river and lake water rights for irrigation.

Water Conservation

The City of Whitefish is proactive in reducing water consumption. In 2019, the city enacted water conservation regulations to encourage reduced water usage. These include limitations on watering hours, allowing water usage audits and procedures during times of water shortages. In 2022, the city adopted landscape regulations that incorporate native and water tolerant plants and water conserving design principles. Reducing water waste is also a primary goal of the 2018 Climate Action Plan.

In 2023, the City of Bozeman adopted a water conservation and efficiency plan. This plan includes educational incentives, potential code revisions, utility infrastructure management and other policies related to more water related growth. A similar tool would be beneficial for the City of Whitefish. Whitefish should continue to assess methods for water conservation and more sustainable water management practices.

Agricultural Water User Facilities

There are no known agricultural water user facilities, such as irrigation ditches, within the city limits, although GIS data obtained from the State of Montana indicates irrigation-equipped agricultural fields in the planning area. The State did not identify the sources of the water. (See the Agricultural and Prime Farmland Map.)

AGRICULTURE

Introduction

“Agriculture” is the cultivation of the soil, production of crops, raising of livestock and the preparation and sales of resulting products. Although the agricultural sector, including ranching, is no longer a major industry in the planning area, it has historic importance to the Flathead County and Montana culture. Crops grown in the planning area include barley, hay, alfalfa, oats, potatoes, sod and peas. In addition to food production, farmland provides open space, wildlife habitat, ground water recharge, and reduces the urban heat island effect caused by increasing amounts of impervious surfacing and development. Agricultural lands are an integral part of Whitefish’s aesthetics and quality of life.

Agricultural Land in the Planning Area

The majority of land within the city limits has been developed for urban and suburban uses. There are no major farming or ranching operations within the planning area, although there are smaller-scale operations targeted to farmer’s markets and community gardens. According to Land to Hand, a community organization founded by farmers, business leaders, and food system planners from around the Flathead Valley, there are at least 7 small farms, cattle ranches, or community gardens within the Whitefish Planning Area as of 2024. Recent demand has increased for mini farms where people buy small acreages for a rural residence, hobby farms, tax shelters, and/or land speculation.

Additionally, a local non-profit, Save Farmland, has been securing permanent farming conservation easements on many acres of agricultural land around Whitefish to protect it from future development while also offering flexible land, equipment, and resources to the farming community.

Importance of Farmland to the Community

During visioning sessions for this community plan, participants noted their fondness for the rural land and farms surrounding the city limits, particularly along the southeastern portion of the planning area. These lands are a finite natural resource of local, state, and national importance. Agriculture produces food, meeting a basic need. As farmland nationwide is being lost to development, combined with the low wages associated with farming, many farmers are selling their properties and leaving the industry altogether. This scenario leads to the increasing importance for local jurisdictions to preserve prime farmland and support local farms, including sustainable practices such as regenerative agriculture.

Types of Farmland

The United States Department of Agriculture partners with various federal, state, and local agencies in an effort called the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS)[42]. Among the duties of the NCSS, the partnership inventories, documents, and publishes information about soils. For the purpose of this element, the survey identifies two soil types of particular importance:

1. *Prime Farmland.*

   Prime farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Soil properties are only one of several criteria that are necessary. Other considerations include land use, frequency of flooding, irrigation, water table, and wind erodibility. Prime farmland is of major importance in meeting the Nation's short- and long-range needs for food and fiber. Because the supply of high-quality farmland is limited, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognizes that responsible levels of government, as well as individuals, should encourage and facilitate the wise use of prime farmland.

[42] Obtained from the US Department of Agriculture; nrcs.usda.gov

2. *Farmland of Statewide Importance*

   In some areas, land that does not meet the criteria for prime or unique farmland is considered to be farmland of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Generally, this land includes areas of soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmland if conditions are favorable.

Geographic Information System (GIS) data obtained from the Montana State Library and developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service indicates significant acreages of prime farmland at the eastern and southern planning area boundary in the areas surrounding Monegan Road and Voerman Road (see Prime Agricultural and Farmlands Map). Nearly all of this land is zoned AG-20 Agricultural or SAG-10 Suburban Agricultural with the majority of it already being used for agricultural uses[43] or low-density single-family residential. Most of this land is either wooded or pastureland for horses or cattle and is important for the production of high-quality hay that is very much in demand both in and out of the Whitefish area.

Preserving Prime Agricultural Land Versus Development Pressure

A dilemma is presented between balancing the desire of the city to preserve prime agricultural land just outside the city limits when these same lands have the greatest pressures for annexation and rezoning. These lands tend to have lower land costs, larger vacant parcels for development, and high incentives for landowners to sell because of the low profitability of farming. There are numerous approaches to encouraging the preservation of agricultural land while still allowing adequate land for future development and respecting private property rights. Infrastructure improvements can be used to steer where future growth occurs. Conservation easements on agricultural lands can set aside portions of a subdivision for community gardens or leased for farming purposes. Subdivision designs could allow for development, even development of various residential product types at high densities, or clustered designs, provided some significant portion of the land is kept in open space or agriculture. Another popular approach is the transfer of development rights (TDRs) or the outright purchase of development rights through open space bonds or other means, in order to establish conservation easements.

[43] Existing agricultural uses determined by aerial map analysis, site visits and records from the Montana State Library's Cadastral Data.

TIMBER RESOURCES

Introduction

Logging was the earliest industry in Whitefish, as the city is surrounded by forests of larch, spruce, Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, white pine, and alpine fir. In 1881, the Baker Brothers constructed the first mill near the head of the Whitefish River. This required the construction of a dam to raise water levels high enough to float logs down the river to Kalispell for transport. The Baker Mill was later sold to the O'Brien Lumber Company and later to the Somers Lumber Company. Somers Lumber Company operated in this location until the mill was disassembled and relocated to the north side of Flathead Lake in 1924.

The introduction of the Great Northern Railway into Whitefish created a tremendous demand for timber, particularly railroad ties. Timber was also used locally for bridges, sidewalks, fences, tunnels, buildings, and telegraph poles. After a 1907 fire that nearly destroyed the town and the “Big Burn” of 1910 which devastated three million acres in North Idaho and Western Montana, Whitefish buildings and sidewalks were built of less flammable materials such as brick and concrete. The timber industry began a decline after World War Two, and the last mill in town, owned by Idaho Timber, closed in 2009. As of 2024, the former Idaho Timber Millsite is being redeveloped as a mixed-use development.

Logging Operations in the Planning Area

Although no sawmills remain in Whitefish, logging still occurs in the planning area. The largest private landowner is F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company (Stoltze), which owns approximately 3,020 acres of forest land in the northeast quadrant (see Stoltze and State Forestland Map). Stoltze has been logging and operating a mill for more than a century off Half Moon Rd, west of Columbia Falls. Lumber is obtained from private property as well as through agreements with the State of Montana and the US Forest Service. There is another timber mill in the Columbia Falls area operated by Weyerhaeuser, but they do not log in the planning area.

Stolze Land Management and Conversation Easements

Stoltze has a long history of good stewardship of the land and cooperation with adjacent municipalities. In the past, Stoltze sold land for private development; some of this land is now used as part of Whitefish Mountain Resort. All of the Iron Horse development was originally Stoltze land. The remaining Stoltze land in the planning area is protected by conservation easements held by the Trust for Public Land (TPL). These conservation easements allow continued logging by Stoltze, protect the city water source in Haskill Basin, and allow for public recreation. Public recreation is subject to Stoltze’s “open lands” policy which allows recreational use of their forests with restrictions as a “neighborly accommodation” subject to termination. Stoltze utilizes sustainable forestry practices

such as distributing their logging between private and state land to limit impacts, reducing understory materials from below to leave the healthiest trees to benefit from the increased sunlight, water, and nutrients, and reforestation to establish the next generation of trees.

Forest Management

Careful forest management creates healthy forest ecosystems, preserves habitat and promotes the health and safety of residents by reducing the risk of wildfires. It is important to practice environmentally responsible logging practices and continue ongoing communications with professional foresters and the logging industry. Forest management practices can also significantly influence outdoor recreation by how it affects the landscape, thereby enhancing or limiting recreational experiences. Forest management and associated land restrictions should promote healthy forests while limiting impacts on local mill operations, the environment, and outdoor recreation.

MINERAL EXTRACTION

Montana State Statute (76-35-209, MCA) requires a community plan to include an inventory and maps of minerals (including sand and gravel resources) and describe the natural resource characteristics including historic and existing utilization.

Although there has been minimal mining for precious metals and coal in the Flathead Valley, sand and gravel are important mineral resources extracted in the area. These materials are used in nearly all infrastructure and construction projects. Permits for opencut mining for mineral extraction are issued by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Negative Impacts from Mineral Extraction

Mineral extraction (also known as extractive industries) can have severe impacts on groundwater quality and quantity. Dewatering of groundwater in open pits can lower the water level on nearby properties and affect the production of existing wells. However, equally as serious, is any opening in the earth can act as a conduit for the entry of contaminants into groundwater supplies. Depending on where the extraction is occurring, gravel extraction can have severe impacts on wildlife habitat as well. Sand and gravel extraction can present severe impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, including increased noise, dust and vibrations, increased truck traffic, damage to roads, and a decline in visual quality relating to disturbed landscapes.

Mineral Extraction in the Planning Area

Data provided by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) indicates one permitted gravel pit near the southwest quadrant of W. 18th Street and Flathead Avenue, not within the city but completely surrounded by the city limits (see Mine Sites and Zoning Allowing Mining by Conditional Use map). That is adjacent to an abandoned

and reclaimed sand and gravel pit where The Wave Aquatic and Fitness Center is now located. There are three other abandoned mine sites within and one directly adjacent to the city limits which have been deemed completely remediated by MDEQ. There are no other active or inactive opencut mining sites indicated within the planning area. There is a cluster of mines approximately one-and-a-half miles from the southeast corner of the planning area.

There are no zoning districts in either the City of Whitefish or Flathead County that presently allow extractive industries as a by-right-use. This use is only allowed by conditional use in the Whitefish WA Agricultural District and Flathead County SAG-5, SAG-10, and AG-20 zoning districts. There are approximately 397 acres of land within the city limits zoned WA, but 137 acres of this land is parks and the sewer treatment facility owned by the city. There is a significant amount of county-zoned SAG-5, SAG-10, and AG-20 land within the planning area and adjacent to the city limits.

MCA 76-2-209, a new law passed in 2021, states a county can reasonably condition but cannot prevent the complete use, development, or recovery of sand and gravel operations on a site located within a geographic area zoned as residential. The State Statute does not extend this same preemption to city zoning. Flathead County does have minimal conditional use standards for extractive industries, but this use could still significantly impact neighboring properties. The City of Whitefish has consistently held the position that mineral, gravel, and sand extraction is generally considered to be incompatible with the character, qualities, and environment of the Whitefish area, and is to be discouraged. Strict development standards for such activities should be developed.

HAZARDS BACKGROUND

A hazard is a dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition. It may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, or environmental damage. In the context of hazards, the risk is the likelihood of harm or adverse consequences resulting from exposure to the hazard.

Risks, whether natural or human-made, pose varying levels of impacts to communities and environments, highlighting the need for awareness, preparedness, and appropriate mitigation. There is potential for risks in every community. Some of these risks are unavoidable and are natural phenomena such as lightning-caused fires, earthquakes, and flood events. There are also risks that could have been avoided such as human-caused fires and chemical spills. Risk management can reduce the impact and consequence of unplanned events, both natural and human-caused. The damage from forest fires can be mitigated to a greater or lesser extent, depending upon a number of variables such as weather at the time of ignition, building construction design and materials, community preparedness, and forest management. Flood impacts can be reduced by avoiding development in or around floodplains, designing with green infrastructure such as absorbing, storing, and purifying rainwater, and using, where possible, porous surfacing rather than concrete or asphalt. Earthquake damage can be limited by appropriate building and engineering solutions. Risks associated with train derailments and / or chemical spills can be avoided by regular maintenance, adequate infrastructure, proper communication and personnel training. There are many preventative things that can be done to reduce the loss of life and property and to help recover from hazardous events.

WILDFIRE

Background

Fire has always been an important part of the landscape in Montana, but there is consensus in the scientific community that extreme fire weather will occur more frequently as the climate warms. Wildfires are getting bigger, starting earlier, lasting longer, and causing more damage to property. Wildfire season in Montana historically began in May and ended in October but is now trending from March to November. The USDA Forest Service indicates Montana's populated areas face greater wildfire risk than 42 of the 50 states in the country[44].

Wildfire is defined as the uncontrolled burning of trees, grass and brush with a spread or movement that is unchecked. Wildfires can be ignited by lightning or by human activity such as smoking, campfires, fireworks, sparks from overhead utility lines, unsecured trailer safety chains, equipment use, and arson. Wildfires are a natural part of ecosystems

[44] *Community Wildfire Protection Plan Guidebook,* Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, 2024

that clear dead and diseased plants, stimulate new growth, improve habitat for wildlife, and reduce insect infestations. While fire is a natural part of Montana, 3 out of 4 wildfires in Montana are ignited by humans[45].

Historic Fire Suppression Practices

As development has moved into forestland areas, this has led to more aggressive fire suppression. While originally intended to protect human settlement and forest resources, the practice of fire suppression proved to be short-sighted. Fire suppression has led to an unnatural accumulation of woody biomass in forested areas not being actively managed and greater cover and density of vegetation from the forest floor to the upper forest canopy (ladder fuels). This, coupled with hotter and longer summers, a reduction in logging activity, drought, and various forest insect and disease infestations, has resulted in increasingly destructive fires. The consequences of these fires are numerous – loss of life and property, affected wildlife, impacts to air and water quality, overburdened fire departments, and higher homeowner's insurance costs (or inability to obtain homeowner's insurance, which is becoming increasingly more common).

Whitefish and Fire Risk

The City of Whitefish is surrounded by forestland and mountains. Some locations in Whitefish are especially susceptible to fire due to poor accessibility, steep terrain, ample forest fuels, lack of water supply, winding roads, long cul-de-sacs, extended driveways, and delayed response times. Catastrophic fires (high intensity wildfires that cause widespread destruction and harm) are started by natural events (lightning), human causes (arson, fireworks, unattended fires, escaped prescribed fires) or a combination (uprooted or broken trees hitting powerlines in a poorly maintained powerline right-of-way). The *Wildfire Risk to Communities Model*[46] produced by the USDA Forest Service is a tool to help communities identity their level of wildfire risk (see Wildfire Risks to Whitefish Map). According to this model, the risk of wildfire in Whitefish is 90% higher than other communities in the US. Headwaters Economics rated Whitefish as one of the 1,110 communities most at risk of wildfires,[47] with eight being in the State of Montana, and one of two in Flathead County. Even areas of the city that are not directly in forested or mountain areas are highly susceptible to wildfire, particularly ember showers - wind-borne embers carried by winds for miles from active fires. It is estimated that 90% of the homes destroyed by wildfires are a result of ember fires[48].

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[45] *Fire Prevention and Preparedness,* Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
[46] *Wildfire Risks to Communities*, https://wildfirerisk.org/explore, USDA 2024
[47] *America's Urban Wildfire Crisis*, Headwaters Economics, 2025, https://headwaterseconomics.org/wildfire/more-than-1100-communities-urban-wildfire-risk/
[48] National Fire Protection Association, *How Do Homes Burn in a Wildfire?*,https://www.nfpa.org/videos/how-do-homes-burn-in-a-wildfire

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

The US Forest Service defines the Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) as the zone where structures and other human development meet and intermingle with undeveloped wildland or forests (where fire can spread from forest to structure). The US Fire Administration indicates Montana is one of the eight states in which 60% to 80% of the houses statewide are within the WUI.[49] According to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) the entire City of Whitefish has been determined to be within the WUI (see the Whitefish Wildland Urban Interface Map). Within a WUI zone, "WUI Codes" are recommended. WUI codes are typically adopted with zoning or as part of building codes. Examples of WUI codes include fire-resistant materials for structures, locational restrictions, vegetation management, and emergency access and egress standards (such as road widths and turn-arounds).

The City of Whitefish has adopted the 2021 International WUI Code and created WUI Subdivision Regulations. These regulations include building materials requirements, defensible space, vegetation management plans, restrictions on building on greater than 30 percent slopes, and access requirements (such as the requirement for at least two access points). The building standards are applied at time of building permit or building construction, but the State of Montana prohibits the city from further enforcement of WUI building code maintenance, including defensible space requirements[50]. Fire mitigation measures, once completed, must be maintained by the responsible parties. These preemptions do not appear to apply to the WUI subdivision regulations. In 2022, the City of Whitefish updated its landscaping regulations to include integration of fire-resistant plants and fire adapted landscaping techniques into landscape plans. Certain types of building types such as single-family and duplex residential are exempt from the landscape regulations.

Fire Service

The Whitefish Fire Department provides fire service to the entire planning boundary and beyond with the exception of Big Mountain Fire District, which provides service to Whitefish Mountain Resort and its immediate communities. Outside of the Whitefish Fire Department boundary, Whitefish Fire Department coordinates with the Flathead Fire Service Area and the Whitefish Fire Service Area for primary fire service based on availability and fire location (see Fire Districts Map). Whitefish Fire Department has noted there is a need for a northern fire station in the vicinity of East Lakeshore Drive and Big Mountain Road to decrease response time. It is possible there are areas in the planning

[49] US Fire Administration, *What is the WUI?* https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui.html#:~:text=While%20the%20wildland%20urban%20interface,unoccupied%20land%20and%20human%20development.

[50] Section 24-301-181 of the Administrative Rules of Montana

boundary in which there is not sufficient water pressure to maintain fire flow capacities to comply with the Uniform Fire Code. Please refer to the Public Facilities Element for a full description of fire service capabilities.

Evacuation Routes

If there is an emergency event necessitating evacuation, there are at least five different through-roads which provide public egress out of the city (see Fire Evacuation Routes Map). South of the railroad tracks, evacuation is possible by US Highway 93 South, Karrow Avenue, US Highway 93 West, or East 2nd Street which crosses the railroad tracks at grade and connects to East Edgewood Drive. North of the railroad tracks, evacuation is possible through at least three routes – Wisconsin Avenue crossing the grade-separated viaduct (bridge) and leaving to the south, by traveling east out of the city along East Edgewood Drive, or by leaving at the north side of Whitefish Lake using Lower and Upper Whitefish Roads (unpaved forest roads). Wisconsin Avenue / East Lakeshore Drive is the only continuous road north of the viaduct which provides direct egress out of the city at the northernmost city limits (although there are some shorter alternate roads parallelling Wisconsin Avenue for some distance, but they begin and end at Wisconsin Avenue.) In the event of evacuation events not related to trains, emergency responders can communicate with BNSF to ensure trains do not impede at grade-accesses. There are ongoing communications with BNSF regarding the possibility of another grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street. Any route in the city can be directed to be one-way as necessary.

There is a neighborhood (Birch Point) along the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake with only one vehicular access in and out. Crossing of the railroad tracks is required, and this access is occasionally blocked by trains. In the event a train is disabled and blocking this access, there is no other vehicular access, but there is a pedestrian method of egress via the Skye Park Bridge across Whitefish River to Edgewood Place (as well the possibility of escape by boat). There have been discussions regarding the possibility of alternative accesses to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish.

Big Mountain Fire District has reported Big Mountain Road is the only feasible access in or out of the resort and the Big Mountain community. Although Haskill Creek Road does provide secondary egress from Whitefish Mountain Resort to East Edgewood Drive, it is Big Mountain Fire District's opinion this is not a reliable secondary route for emergency evacuation. Big Mountain Fire District has worked extensively with the resort and its communities on an emergency plan which includes evacuating to parking lots at the resort as safe zones. The District has mentioned notifications and communications are a shortcoming in their evacuation plans, due primarily to intermittent and inadequate cellular service on the mountain.

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) passed by Congress in 2003 gives communities who have prepared a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) the ability to influence where and how federal agencies implement forest management practices to reduce wildfire hazards. Communities with CWPPs are given priority for funding wildfire mitigation projects that are undertaken as outlined in the CWPP. A Community Wildfire Protection Plan typically addresses wildfire response, community preparedness, firefighting capability, and identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel treatments.

The City of Whitefish last adopted a community wildfire protection plan in 2009 and therefore it is currently out of date. This Plan identifies areas of high priority for fire fuel mitigation based on a 1993 risk assessment conducted by the Department of Natural Resources (DNRC). It also identifies measures homeowners can do to reduce the risk of losing homes to wildfire. The CWPP mentions many subdivisions and neighborhoods had been built since the 1993 risk assessment and recommends a new assessment. There has not been an updated assessment as of the time of adoption of this community plan.

Flathead County has a CWPP which was adopted in 2021. This CWPP divides the county into six different fire areas. In each area it gives very general information, mitigation strategies and discusses some of the more at-risk elements. It does not assess risk nor have specific study areas regarding Whitefish. The DNRC presently performs fire mitigation as is outlined by this CWPP. DNRC has reported there are discussions to create a map indicating areas which have been mitigated or are planned for mitigation.

Fire Adapted and Firewise® Communities

Fire Adapted Community is a term for a general framework for community wildfire preparedness and resilience. This framework typically involves individuals, neighborhoods, jurisdictions and organizations collaboratively educating, sharing information, and working together to reduce and mitigate fire hazards and impacts. Fire Adapted Communities rely on an assortment of tools, programs and strategies. One local organization cooperating to create fire adapted communities is *Firesafe Flathead.* The Whitefish Fire Department is a regular participant in Firesafe Flathead.

A common strategy of fire adapted community frameworks is encouraging and assisting with the organization of Firewise® Communities. “Firewise” is a trademarked designation given by the National Fire Protection Association for individual neighborhoods or communities of at least eight dwelling units and up to 2,500 dwelling units meeting minimum guidelines or best practices for wildfire preparation. Being designated as a Firewise® Community is voluntary but includes benefits such as access to grants and funding, the possibility of fire insurance rate reductions, and greatly reduced risk for homes or neighborhoods being lost to wildfire.

The Big Mountain Fire District has coordinated extensively with Whitefish Mountain Resort, Homeowners Associations, and individual property owners to become a Fire Adapted Community and to obtain a Firewise® Community designation. The community engages in information sharing, HOA and citizen training, education, and evacuation drills. Many of its individual homeowner's associations work together and have adopted Firewise® standards into their covenants. Another example of a Firewise® community is the Elkhorn community, which is located approximately 3 miles west of Whitefish (not within the planning boundary). Elkhorn adopted their own CWPP in 2004. Strategies of this CWPP include cooperating with the forest service and DNRC for fuel mitigation projects, upgraded signage, creation of fuel breaks, designation of firefighter "safe zones" and continuing homeowner education.

The city should provide focused efforts around public safety, risk prevention and early intervention for wildfires, including messaging for homeowners and associations and enforcement as the state allows. Working with the community, the city should strive to prepare all segments of the community for such disruptions by encouraging community and individual preparedness through risk awareness. The city should prepare for, respond to and manage wildfire hazards by implementing additional wildland-urban interface regulations and developing, updating and implementing multi-hazard mitigation programs and plans.

FLOODPLAINS

A floodplain is an area of land adjacent to a lake, river or stream that periodically experiences flooding. These areas provide significant environmental benefits by providing soil for agriculture, offering habitat for various wildlife species, and acting as natural buffers by absorbing excess water, filtering pollutants and reducing the impact of floods downstream. Floodplains, while vital to ecosystems, also come with inherent downsides. These include potentially significant property damage, high insurance costs for properties in proximity to them, loss of crops, and displacement of communities (see the floodplain schematic).

Human activities such as development further exacerbate the risks of flooding and environmental degradation. Constructing buildings, roads and other impervious surfaces in floodplains prevents water from being absorbed into the ground and increases runoff. Development and loss of floodplains reduces the natural buffering that absorbs excess water, making adjacent areas more susceptible to flooding. Development in or near floodplains often destroys critical habitat and increases the potential for sediment or contaminants being introduced into water bodies.

As climate change leads to more frequent and intense weather events[51], the hazards associated with floodplains are likely to increase, making it crucial to implement effective flood management and mitigation strategies. Proper planning and sustainable development practices are essential to minimize the adverse impacts of living and working in floodplain areas.

Whitefish Flood Prone Areas

Several areas in the Whitefish planning area lay within areas prone to flooding, including from Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, Cow Creek, Lazy Creek, Swift Creek, and Haskill Creek. Typically, the most severe flooding occurs in the spring or early summer months because of snowmelt and/or rainfall runoff. On rare occasions, ice jams cause overbank flooding in winter months. All the above listed watersheds have been mapped to locate flood prone areas. According to the 2024-2029 Flathead Annex to the Western Montana Hazard Mitigation Plan, 315 residences are located within the 100-year floodplain. Much of the flood-prone residences within the city of Whitefish are in areas vulnerable to pluvial flooding, which occur when intense rainfall overwhelms the capacity of drainage systems, such as storm sewers, and causes water to inundate land or property, independent of overflowing water bodies like rivers or streams.

The National Flood Insurance Program

The City of Whitefish participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), enacted by the Federal Government in 1968. Participation in the NFIP is based on an agreement between local communities and the federal government. If a community adopts and enforces a local floodplain management ordinance to reduce future flood risks to new construction in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), the federal government makes flood insurance available within the community as financial protection against flood losses. With assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Flood Insurance Studies (FIS) were completed which mapped out base flood elevations for flood prone areas in 1978, later updated in 2007 and 2015. Scientists and engineers use statistical analysis of streamflow data and topographic maps to determine the likelihood and extent of flood areas based on elevations.

The 100-Year Flood

A 100-year flood, which is considered a base flood, theoretically has a 1% chance of flooding in any given year. Areas within that 100-year base flood elevation have special

[51] According to Tamsin Edwards in *"What happens at 1.5, 2 and 4°C of global warming?"* from Greta Thunberg's 2024 *The Climate Book*, the changes our planet will experience will increase with each half a degree of heating. Heavy rain events will be 50% more likely if we reach 1.5°C/ 2.7°F warmer than pre-industrial levels, 70% more likely at 2°C/ 3.6°F, and 3 times more likely at 4°C/ 7.2°F.

restrictions on development found in Title 14, Flood Control, of the city code of ordinances. Floodplains are split into two categories:

1. The floodway, which is the flood area most effective in carrying flow and where water depths and velocities are greatest.

2. The flood fringe, which is the portion of the floodplain outside of the floodway.

Development is not permitted in the floodway but can be allowed in the flood fringe with a floodplain permit and an engineer's "no-rise" certificate. The no-rise certificate must demonstrate that any fill or structures added will not cause the floodplain to unduly affect adjacent properties by raising the base flood elevation. Typically, any residential structure in the flood fringe must have its lowest floor elevated at least two feet above the 100-year flood elevation, and the building must be designed to withstand hydrostatic pressure from floods.

The Whitefish River originates at the south end of Whitefish Lake and flows 24 miles before joining the Stillwater River near Kalispell. The annual precipitation of the watershed is 37 inches per year. The largest flood on record was June of 1974, when it had a flow of 1580 cubic feet/second with a 3.33 percent flood event. Floods on the Whitefish River, which is slow moving, often last for several weeks as it rises and recedes gradually due to the effects of Whitefish Lake. Other recorded floods on the Whitefish River occurred in 1932, 1948, 1950, and 1964.

Whitefish Lake, which is fed from Swift Creek at the north end, has a surface area of approximately five square miles and a shoreline length of approximately 15 miles. The normal Whitefish Lake water level elevation (pool level) is considered 2,996.4 feet, with a base flood elevation of 3004 feet[52]. The historic peak elevation occurred in 1974, when the pool was at 3003.4 feet.

Whitefish's floodplain regulations were last updated in 2015. The State of Montana DNRC established new model regulations in 2022. Whitefish's floodplain regulations are not consistent with the most recent State of Montana Model Floodplain Regulations and will require a revision of the whole chapter with a review by DRNC prior to adoption by the City Council.

Several past city infrastructure projects such as the West 6th Street reconstruction and the East 2nd Street reconstruction have altered floodplains due to changes in drainage, stormwater conveyances, or resizing of culverts for creeks. While the floodplain in those

[52]Base Flood Elevation (BFE) is a term used in floodplain management and refers to the computed elevation to which floodwater is anticipated to rise during a base flood. A base flood is often described as having a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year, also known as the "100-year flood."

areas likely changed, no changes were made to the maps, which affected neighboring properties within a 100-year floodplain designation that might have been removed by a revision to the mapping. That put the burden on the property owners to pay for map amendments. For future public infrastructure projects in or near floodplains, it is recommended that the floodplain mapping revisions be rolled into the contract with the engineering firm selected.

Several recent private projects added fill or docks in the Whitefish River with approval from the Flathead Conservation District without approval or necessary floodplain and/or water quality permits from the City of Whitefish. While the FCD was contacted and verbal agreements made to better communicate, it should be an objective going forward to have better coordination and information sharing between the two agencies.

The Community Rating System

The Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages community floodplain management practices that go above and beyond the minimum requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program. In participating CRS communities, flood insurance premium rates are discounted to reflect the reduced flood risk from the community's efforts to reducing and avoiding flood damage to insurable property, strengthening and supporting the insurance aspects of the program, and fostering better floodplain management. It is a tiered program based on credit points and calculations for things like extra public outreach, mapping and regulations, flood damage reduction, and warning and response. Whitefish does not presently participate in the CRS system, but if it did, flood insurance rates for residents could be reduced. It is recommended that the City participate in FEMA's Community Rating System. It is further recommended that the City collaborate with Flathead County, Kalispell, Columbia Falls and non-governmental partners to expand public outreach and flood awareness, mapping, flood damage reduction, and warning and response.

HIGH GROUNDWATER

Most areas in and around Whitefish are characterized by high seasonal groundwater. This groundwater can interfere with construction of infrastructure, homes and other structures. High groundwater, also known as shallow depth to groundwater, is more of a development constraint than a hazard, although it can cause flood damage in high water years.

In 2008, the City Council adopted the Water Quality Protection regulations in part to address issues with high groundwater. With the adoption of these regulations, standards for monitoring high groundwater were established along with a map indicating areas with the potential for high groundwater.

Currently the City's Engineering Standards require all properties proposed for development located in areas of potential shallow groundwater to monitor groundwater during the seasonal high groundwater conditions – typically March 15th through June 30th. This timeframe coincides with the Spring snow melt and seasonally higher precipitation coupled with the low transmissivity of the lacustrine soils. This information is then used to develop plans for infrastructure installation. Concurrent with this standard, both the engineering standards and the subdivision regulations require a note on the face of the plat indicating when groundwater is at depths of six-feet or less and recommending no crawl spaces or basements be installed.

SEISMIC ACTIVITY

Montana is in earthquake country, especially areas around Yellowstone National Park. The Flathead Valley is located in a north-northwest trending earthquake zone known as the Intermountain Seismic Belt. Within Flathead Valley there are several fault lines. In addition to many small earthquakes, there have been two significant earthquakes in the Valley, one in 1945 (a 5.5 quake west of Flathead Lake) and in 1952 (a 5.7 quake in the Swan Range). The largest quake in Montana history was magnitude 7.3 near West Yellowstone in 1959. The Whitefish area is in a seismic zone and the International Building Codes provide for specific measures to be taken for building structures in each designated zone including, but not limited to seismic strapping, foundation anchorage and foundation steel reinforcement.

STEEP SLOPES

Whitefish is characterized by areas of steep mountainous terrain. This geography is highly desirable for building homes due to the scenic views, forested areas, privacy, surrounding wildlife, cooler summertime temperatures, and accessibility to outdoor recreation. As already mentioned, some of the most desirable locations to live in Whitefish are also some of the most susceptible locations to hazards. Although wildfire is one significant risk in these environments, building on steep slopes also comes with a myriad of other risks and issues. Steep slopes are prone to erosion, landslides and avalanches. Construction on steep slopes often requires expensive and complex foundation designs and can require additional engineering for drainage. Buildings on steep slopes can increase access difficulty for emergency responses and driveway maintenance. These constraints tend to increase exponentially after slopes are greater than 30 percent. Accordingly, many local building and zoning regulations restrict construction beyond this threshold. The City of Whitefish requires additional geotechnical reports for any properties within a subdivision with slopes greater than ten percent. The City of Whitefish's Subdivision Design Standards discourage building residential homes on greater than 30 percent unless the hazard is eliminated or overcome by approved design or construction methods. The City

of Whitefish's Subdivision WUI standards prohibit building on greater than 30 percent slopes.

PUBLIC FACILITIES BACKGROUND

CITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The City of Whitefish offers a variety of public services and facilities that are provided by a number of departments, agencies and organizations.

CITY ADMINISTRATION

City of Whitefish administration occurs at Whitefish City Hall. City Hall is an approximately 26,000 square feet, two story building with a half floor basement constructed in 2017, replacing the original city hall constructed in 1917 in the same location. Whitefish City Hall is the administrative center of the city, responsible for managing day-to-day operations and serving as a place for the public to interact and communicate with city staff and elected officials. Twenty-seven full time employees presently work in city administration, not including public works employes (see below). Departments within Whitefish City Hall include the City Manager, City Clerk, Finance, Human Resources, City Attorney, Parks and Recreation, Utility Billing, Planning and Building, and Public Works. Whitefish City Hall is also the location for meetings of the City Council and numerous boards and committees.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

Attached to Whitefish City Hall is an approximately 84,000 square feet, three story parking structure with approximately 200 parking spaces, both for public use and for lease. The City Hall building was constructed with the ability to add an 8,000 square foot third floor for additional future workspace. Funding for these improvements has not yet been identified.

PUBLIC WORKS

Public Works encompasses a wide range of projects and services aimed at improving the infrastructure and facilities within the community. From the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, and public transportation systems to snow removal and ensuring access to clean water and efficient waste treatment, public works services are directly related to public health and safety.

Public Works Divisions

Public Works is comprised of four primary divisions.

The administrative and engineering division is located in the City Hall Building at 418 E Second Street. This division provides customer service, administration and preparation of public works budgets, engineering and management for city projects, and engineering plan review of private development projects. There are eight full time employees in this division.

The public works utility operations division has 13 full time employees and uses seven buildings on the 40-acre former landfill site at 545 W. 18th Street. This division provides road construction and road maintenance for approximately 59 miles of public streets and seven miles of alleys. Duties include asphalt paving and patching, pavement marking, snow plowing and street sweeping, maintenance of traffic lights and signs, fleet maintenance, as well as construction and maintenance of water distribution, sewerage collection and stormwater utilities. An outdoor shooting range for the Whitefish Police Department also exists on the site. When the snow storage lot at the northeast corner of Railway Street and Columbia Avenue was deeded to the Whitefish Housing Authority in 2022, snow storage was transferred to the public works site. The Montana Department of Transportation maintains and plows U.S. Highways 93 and Wisconsin Avenue through the city as well as the associated signal lighting and signage. Flathead County plows and maintains other public roads adjacent to the city.

The other two public works divisions are related to water treatment and wastewater treatment, located in two different locations. Please refer to the water and wastewater treatment sections for more details.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

- Public Works Utility Operations Property: Present resources on the site may be insufficient to accommodate the projected future population. Currently, one mechanic services the entire city fleet of vehicles out of a three bay, 3,200 square feet building. As the city population expands, additional fleet vehicles, a larger garage and more mechanics will be needed. Improved workspaces are also desired as daily utility operations are being managed out of inadequate and antiquated buildings. Snow storage has been moved to this location which takes up additional space, and more land will be required to accommodate a water tower needed to increase water pressure at the south end of the city. Although vacant areas exist on the property, the site is located on top of a landfill of which the extent is unknown, and additional engineering and remediation efforts may be required. To determine the most efficient future usage of this city property and to accommodate needed improvements and facilities, an analysis and facilities plan for the site needs to be developed.

- Stormwater – Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES): When Whitefish's fulltime population reaches 10,000, the city becomes subject to a MPDES state stormwater permit which is required by the Environmental Protection Agency through the Montana Department of Environment Quality. These permits are required for communities with stormwater systems separate from the sanitary sewer system (called municipal separate storm sewer systems or "MS4"). The permit contains limits on what can be discharged, as well as monitoring and reporting requirements. Implementation of this permit will involve lengthy coordination, need additional staff, and require a new stormwater utility be established financed by utility fees. With the population nearing this threshold, the city should begin preparing by ensuring mapping of outfalls, stormwater treatment facilities, and green infrastructure, both public and private, is accurate and MS4 compliant.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

The Whitefish freshwater treatment facility provides clean, safe and dependable and waterborne disease free drinking water for daily needs like cooking, bathing, and sanitation, and serves industries and agriculture which rely on dependable water supplies for production and growth. The freshwater system also plays a critical role in city needs such as fire protection, emergency preparedness, and maintaining parks. Effective management of this system helps reduce the risk of shortages during droughts and ensures long-term access to a critical natural resource.

Existing Conditions

The city operates a surface water system serving residential, commercial, and industrial customers. The freshwater system consists of approximately 73 miles of pipes and three booster pumps that deliver water to homes, businesses and fire hydrants. Municipal water is primarily sourced from 2nd Creek and 3rd Creek of Haskill Creek[53] which is then conveyed by gravity to a reservoir at the Whitefish Water Treatment Plant. Water is also pumped from Whitefish Lake, primarily during the summer months, due to higher demand and to maintain downstream flows in Haskill Creek. There are three ground storage reservoirs providing approximately 1.85 million gallons of storage (see Public Water Facilities Map). Haskill Creek yields approximately 2.32 million gallons per day (MGD). Haskill Creek is generally preferred over Whitefish Lake as a source of drinking water. This is due to the cost of obtaining and treating water from the lake, with the primary expense being the need to pump lake water to the treatment plant, whereas Haskill Creek runs downhill to the plant. Haskill Creek is also higher water quality than that of Whitefish

[53] The City has a right to take water from 1st Creek but has not since the 1980s due to natural contamination.

Lake, so additional treatment of lake water is required. Water quality data for all sources of drinking water is reported to DEQ on a monthly basis.

Big Mountain Water Company (BMWC) supplies water to the Big Mountain Resort Base Area as well as the Sunrise Ridge subdivision. BMWC operates six groundwater wells which are all more than 400 ft deep and produce between 105 gallons per minute (GMP) and 300 GPM. At this time, no connection exists between the city's water system and the Big Mountain Water Company's system. The Big Mountain area is within the city's planning boundary and is slated for future annexation.

The city's water treatment plant was initially constructed in 2001 and designed to treat up to four million gallons per day (MGD). The facility was upgraded in 2021 to provide an additional two MGD of treated water to handle the city's growing demand. The city uses approximately 1.3 MGD, with average per person daily water use being 156 gallons, a decrease from 203 gallons per day in 2017. Total city water usage peaks between June to August to approximately 2.7 MGD. This peak includes full-time and seasonal residents as well as visitors. There is a myriad of reasons why per capita water usage is declining as compared to population growth, but a large contributor is likely the city's dedication to reducing water loss. This work includes aggressively targeting old leaking cast iron pipes, replacing old water meters, and better accounting for unmetered water such as hydrant flushing. Per capita water use has been on the decline since. Estimates have indicated reductions in water loss from approximately 40 percent to 20 percent.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

Whitefish's Water System Master Plan was last updated in 2006, just prior to the adoption of the 2007 growth policy. As part of Vision Whitefish 2045, the city hired Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services (AE2S) for an update. The updated plan uses the projected 1.5% growth rate as discussed in the demographics chapter as the baseline for determining future capacities.

The city's existing water supply sources and treatment plant can meet the future population projection demand of approximately 4.4 MGD through the 20-year planning horizon. However, the city may need to adjust water sources to account for limited water in Haskill Creek from drought or water contamination associated with wildfires. Whitefish Lake as a source could also be impacted for the same reasons as Haskill Creek, with an additional risk being invasive species impacting infrastructure. Also, the water reservoir at the water treatment plant is open to the air and thus vulnerable to evaporation. Evaporation could be mitigated by placing floating covers over the water surface. Such covers have the potential to not only mitigate evaporation losses, but to assist in the

prevention of algae growth and reduce bird activity at the reservoir. Due to the vulnerability of surface water sources, the city should consider establishing groundwater sources for additional supply. Groundwater sources also require less treatment.

The amount of water storage available in the main reservoir and three above-ground tanks is less than sufficient to meet future needs, but a fourth water storage facility is planned to begin construction in 2026 at the city public works yard would add an additional one million gallons of water storage. This project, along with several other improvements to boost water pressure, will enable the utility to meet the requirements of the International Fire Code (IFC). Specifically, as stated in the IFC, the minimum fire flow required for one- and two-family dwellings that do not exceed 3,600 square feet and do not have an automatic sprinkler system is 1,500 gpm. For one- and two-family dwellings exceeding 3,600 square feet, and for all buildings other than one- and two-family dwellings, the minimum fire flow ranges from 1,500 gpm to 8,000 gpm, over durations from two to four hours.. These improvements would help the city continue to provide adequate water supply and sufficient water pressure into the foreseeable future.

In 2021, the Parks and Recreation Department adopted an irrigation and landscape plan which indicated improvements that can be made to city irrigation systems and landscaping for more efficient water use. The department has started implementing recommendations of this plan, such as retrofitting existing irrigation with new controller monitoring systems. Additionally, the city plans to abandon the antiquated irrigation systems along US Highway 93 South and allow adjacent property owners to install new irrigation systems in front of their properties. The Parks Department has also drilled two wells in Armory Park to remove irrigation systems from city water and transition to well water. The city continues to look into the feasibility of using water rights from Whitefish Lake and the Whitefish River to pull irrigation for river parks and other irrigated areas.

WASTEWATER AND STORMWATER

A city's wastewater treatment system is a vital component of urban infrastructure, ensuring public health and environmental protection. It manages the complex process of collecting, treating, and safely discharging or repurposing wastewater from homes, businesses, and industries. Through multiple treatment stages- including filtration, biological processing, and disinfection—contaminants are removed, safeguarding waterways from pollution.

A city's stormwater facilities play a crucial role in managing runoff from rain and snowmelt, preventing flooding, erosion, and water pollution. These systems typically include a network of storm drains, retention ponds, permeable surfaces, and underground storage tanks. These facilities facilitate proper drainage throughout the city and

contaminants like oil, heavy metals, and debris do not flow unchecked into rivers and lakes.

Wastewater treatment systems are beginning to proactively address issues with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), microplastics, and pharmaceuticals, as these emerging contaminants evade conventional treatment methods and are not necessarily adequately regulated by state and federal regulations. The main challenges involve the persistence of these substances, their ability to accumulate in the environment, and the inadequacy of existing technology to fully remove them. The City should consider developing proactive policies to begin to address these issues as financially feasible.

Existing conditions

Wastewater System

The City of Whitefish's wastewater system consists of approximately 70 miles of gravity mains (for downhill flow of sewage), approximately 15.54 miles of force mains (transport sewage under pressure from lower to higher elevation), 16 lift stations (used to pump sewage when gravity flow is not possible) and a recently upgraded wastewater treatment plant.

In 2021, the city completed the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant. The previous wastewater treatment facility was constructed in 1975 for an average daily flow of 1.25 million gallons but needed to be upgraded due to rising levels of ammonia and recent more stringent requirements than when the plant was initially constructed. The city estimates approximately 102 gallons of sewage is produced per person, per day. Current average totals of the system are approximately two million gallons per day and the plant is designed for a maximum capacity of six million gallons per day.

The Big Mountain Sewer District (BMSD) serves an area on the slopes of Big Mountain, in the vicinity of Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort. The city maintains an agreement with Big Mountain Development to receive and treat wastewater from their privately owned sewer system. Wastewater enters the city's system at East Lakeshore Drive and Big Mountain Road. The agreement allows for up to 2,000 equivalent dwelling units (EDUs) to be connected. As of 2024, approximately 878 EDU[54]s are estimated to be connected with up to 1,522 EDUs total either existing or approved. Big Mountain contributes approximately 5.65% of the total wastewater flow.

[54] An EDU, or "Equivalent Dwelling Unit," is defined as one single-family residential household.

The Big Mountain area is within the city's planning boundary, and under a 2002 agreement between the city and the Big Mountain Sewer District, Winter Sports Incorporated and the Big Mountain Development Corporation waived their right to protest annexation after 20 years in 2022. and when the city's boundary becomes contiguous with BMSD service areas. The feasibility of future annexation is being investigated because the conditions of the agreement have been met.

Stormwater System

Stormwater from impervious surfaces and non-point sources is managed through various stormwater systems owned by the City, State, or private entities. These facilities are vital for controlling runoff from rain and snowmelt, helping to prevent flooding, erosion, and water pollution. Adequate infrastructure, such as collection and treatment systems, is essential for sustainable urban development and environmental protection.

Whitefish's existing stormwater infrastructure consists of approximately 36.6 miles of storm gravity mains, 1,434 stormwater inlets (outlets), and 69 culverts, ditches, or open drains. Stormwater treatment devices, such as separators and infiltration structures, help remove pollutants before discharge into lakes and streams. Additionally, key structures like settling and retention ponds, overflow structures, pump stations, discharge points, and storage basins play a crucial role in managing excess stormwater and preventing flooding in the city.

To ensure effective stormwater management, the City of Whitefish prioritizes routine inspections and maintenance of its stormwater infrastructure. Maintenance frequency varies by system component—some require weekly, quarterly, or annual inspections. Regular upkeep helps prevent blockages, prolongs the lifespan of infrastructure, and ensures compliance with environmental regulations, ultimately protecting local waterways and ecosystems.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

Whitefish's wastewater and stormwater master plan had last been updated in 2006, just prior to the adoption of the 2007 growth policy. As part of Vision Whitefish 2045, the city hired Robert Peccia Consulting (RPA) for an update (incorporated into this community plan by reference). The plan uses the projected 1.5% growth rate as discussed in the demographics chapter as the baseline for determining future capacities and makes the following recommendations as indicated below.

Wastewater System

The current wastewater facility has sufficient capacity to handle the projected flows and loads for the project population to 2045, including with future Big Mountain flows. However, by the mid-2030s, certain parameters, such as ammonia and nitrogen levels, are expected to approach design thresholds. These considerations are included in the sewer master plan. To proactively manage growth, there are prioritized recommended improvements and operational adjustments to the facility such as pump improvements in the short term and an additional basin by 2035.

Upsizing segments of sewer mains in three general areas is identified to increase capacity and flow - along Iowa Avenue between Skyles Place and Edgewood Lane, along East Lakeshore Drive from Reservoir Road to the Viking Creek lift station, and along the Whitefish River from East Edgewood Place to Riverside Park. The Iowa Avenue segment is the first recommended section for upsizing, with the Whitefish River portion from East Second to Riverside Park being the last. Due to the age of clay pipes, additional lining of sewer mains in the City Beach Area and Downtown is recommended. These improvements are recommended in three phases, beginning in 2035 and completion in 2039 (refer to the Recommended Wastewater System Improvements Map).

There are five lift stations recommended for improvement under existing conditions within the city limits. The River Lakes Lift Station is in the most need of improvement as it is presently at 93% capacity, and upgrades must occur before any significant development or annexation occurs within this station's drainage basin. The other stations needing improvements to serve the projected population over the next 20 years include the lift stations at City Beach, Houston Point, Lacy Lane and the Baker Lift Station, listed in order of recommended priority.

Stormwater Improvement Needs

The current stormwater system has sufficient capacity to handle projected flows to 2045 if several improvements are made, however, the city shall strive to incorporate new technology when available and cost efficient. A street treatment device needs to be replaced at 7th Street, and there is a blocked stormwater outfall on Greenwood Drive and Shore View Court.

When Whitefish's fulltime population reaches 10,000, the city becomes subject to a MS4 permit which is required by the Environmental Protection Agency through the Montana Department of Environment Quality. Implementation of this permit will involve lengthy coordination and require additional staff.

Areas of Potential Future Sewer Infrastructure

The 2025 Wastewater and Stormwater Master Plan considers and analyzes nine areas, most of which are presently outside the city limits, that due to proximity to collection infrastructure, could reasonably include future connection to the City's existing collection and treatment system infrastructure. The plan identifies future improvements that are required before these areas can be connected. (Please refer to the Potential Future Areas of Required Improvements to Connect to City Infrastructure Map.) These areas include the following:

- Big Mountain
- Reservoir Road
- East Texas Avenue
- Voerman to Armory
- Monegan to Voerman
- Kallner
- Highway 40
- Karrow
- Lion Mountain

WHITEFISH EMERGENCY SERVICES

Whitefish Emergency Services is located at 275 Flathead Avenue. This approximately 34,000 square foot three story facility opened in 2010 as a shared location of the Whitefish Fire Department[55], Police Department, and the Whitefish City Court. The Whitefish Fire Department (WFD) is allocated five double-stacked apparatus bays, sleeping quarters for eight, a kitchen and a dayroom. The Whitefish Police Department (WPD) has four holding cells with nine beds. There is also a three-bay sallyport, offices and conference room space. The City Court also has an office and courtroom in this building. Prior to 2010, emergency services were in and behind the original City Hall and the City Court was also in the original City Hall Building at 418 East Second Street and shared the Council Chambers for court proceedings.

The WFD also has a second fire station, Station 22, located at 1345 Hodgson Road, out of the city limits but within their service area boundary. This approximately 4,000 square foot building was constructed in 1995 and contains a meeting room, storage areas and four apparatus bays. This unstaffed station is used for the staging of the reserve ambulance, one fire engine, a 1968 parade engine and winter storage for a fire boat. On the same property and behind the station is a three story training tower, which includes a 200 square foot burn room.

[55] The EMS Building is also known as Whitefish Fire Department Station 21

WFD has a small, one-bay building located at City Beach which houses a hovercraft for Whitefish Lake winter incident response.

All emergency services calls go to a consolidated call center for the entire county located in Kalispell. This dispatch service is separate from the wildland fire dispatch for Montana Department of Natural Resources and the US Forest Service.

WHITEFISH FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Whitefish Fire Department is a career fire department with a paid firefighting force of 20 paid staff and two on-call firefighter volunteers[56] initially established in 1906. Services of the WFD include structural and wildland firefighting, ambulance services, rescue services such as vehicle extraction, water/ice rescue, and hazardous materials response. The department includes a city-wide ambulance service designed to provide swift and effective responses in emergencies. Two full-service hospitals support emergency services in the area - Logan Health Whitefish within the city limits, and Logan Health Kalispell.

Service Area (refer to Fire Districts and Travel Distances Map)

The WFD primarily served only 11.7 square miles within the city limits until 1989, at which time the Whitefish Fire Service Area (WFSA) was created by Flathead County. The WFSA is an intergovernmental agreement between WFD and Flathead County which is funded by fire protection fees levied on properties within the District. With the creation of the WFSA, the service area expanded to approximately 86 square miles.

Outside the WFSA boundary, WFD coordinates with the Flathead County Fire Service Area through mutual aid agreements with other fire districts for primary fire service based on availability and fire location. In total, the WFD provides fire protection and an all-hazard emergency response to an area larger than 140 square miles and a population of approximately 14,000 people, which rises to more than 30,000 in summer months. Approximately 60% of the Department's service demand occurs within the city limits, with the remaining 40% occurring in the WFSA and remote areas[57]. Most incident calls come from downtown, with the highest volume of calls in July, and the lowest volume in April.

Fire Response Travel Distances

A five-mile driving distance is a guideline used when locating fire stations and ensuring communities have adequate fire protection and emergency response capabilities. Depending on road types and traffic, a five mile driving distance can typically be traveled by an emergency vehicle in five to ten minutes. This distance is used by insurance companies to assess fire insurance costs as well as other factors. Beyond this distance,

[56] As of January 2025
[57] Data taken from the Whitefish 2021 Long Range Fire Department Master Plan

home insurance costs increase significantly. At least 18 percent of Whitefish residents beyond the five mile radius report being refused insurance altogether[58]. As can be seen by the Fire Districts and Travel Distances Map, the limits of the five-mile driving distance radius is approximately where East Lakeshore Drive turns west, about ½ mile east of the Big Mountain Road / East Lakeshore Drive intersection. The five mile distance previously extended further north prior to the relocation of emergency services to their present location.

Big Mountain Fire District

The Big Mountain Fire District (BMFD) serves Whitefish Mountain Resort, all associated commercial and lodging uses, and its surrounding residential communities (approximately 650 dwelling units) to the northernmost Whitefish city limits. The District is located at 3790 Big Mountain Road, toward the center of the resort complex. The Big Mountain Fire District Station is approximately 7,000 square feet and two stories, contains seven bedrooms, a kitchen and four equipment bays. There are presently seven full-time staff firefighters / paramedics. Services of the BMFD include structural and wildland firefighting, ambulance services, rescue services such as vehicle extraction and some limited hazardous materials responses. Equipment includes three fire trucks, an ambulance and a utility terrain vehicle. In early 2025, Big Mountain Resort Area voters approved a 3% resort tax, with a portion of this tax funding the fire district. If future annexation of Big Mountain occurs, this fire station would likely be absorbed into the City of Whitefish Fire Department.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

In 2020, Carnegie Mellon University worked with the City of Whitefish to complete a study to determine future fire station needs. The study considered GIS distance analysis, existing residences, insurance premium costs, and location and construction costs. Based on this analysis, it was determined the most efficient location for a new facility would be in the vicinity of East Lake Shore Drive and Big Mountain Road. A new staffed facility in this location would benefit at least 400 residences, including Iron Horse, the Northwoods Subdivision to the east, and many of the properties along the east shore of Whitefish Lake. If access between the north and south sides of the city were compromised by a wildfire or train-related incident, this facility would ensure level of services on the north side of the city were still maintained. Having a second fully staffed station in this area would also prove beneficial in the event of multiple emergencies. Funding for this new facility is accounted for in the 2023 City of Whitefish Service Area Report and Impact Fee Study 10 year plan although land has yet to be acquired.

[58] Source: “Analytically Driven Network Design Planning For Fire Fighting Resources” study prepared for the City of Whitefish by Carnegie Mellon University in 2020

WFD has noted it could serve the projected population with its present capabilities, but a ladder truck with 100 foot high capability is needed to access taller buildings in the city. There is also a need for additional emergency access connections for evacuation and improvement of response times. The communities at the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake in the vicinity of Whitefish Lake State Park, West Lakeshore Drive and Birch Point Drive have only one vehicle access in and out, and this access is occasionally blocked by trains. Another access should be sought to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish. An emergency access connection from the extreme northwestern portion of the lake at Delrey Road to Highway 93 North should also be examined.

Adopted Plans

Since 2006, the WFD has adopted the following plans to guide the department:

- 2006 Emergency Services Plan. This plan studies existing service demands and their implication for the city's ability to meet future services demands.
- 2009 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Identifies areas of high priority for fire fuel mitigation and measures homeowners can do to reduce the risk of losing homes to wildfire. The city has made updating this plan a high priority and is in the early stages of an updated plan as of 2025.
- 2021 Whitefish Fire Department Long Range Master Plan. Updates the 2006 Emergency Services Plan. Analyzes current levels and future needs of staff, training, equipment and facilities, and how the department fits into the larger Flathead County emergency services system.
- 2021 Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Divides the county into six different fire areas. In each area it gives very general information, mitigation strategies and discusses some of the more at-risk elements. It does not assess risk nor have specific study areas regarding Whitefish.
- 2023 Emergency Operations Plan: Provides guidance and sets forth the initial management structure, key responsibilities, and general procedures to follow during a response to an emergency or disaster.

WHITEFISH POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Whitefish Police Department (WPD) has served the citizenry of Whitefish since 1903, before Whitefish was an incorporated community. The Police Department provides primary services within the city limits and agency-assists with the Flathead County Sheriff's Department for areas outside the city limits. Currently, the WPD has 19 sworn officers and three civilians providing administrative support and parking enforcement. The Police Department maintains approximately one officer per 800 full-time residents. In addition, the WPD also has three school resource officers that transfer to patrol during

the busy summer months. Service calls are nearly 15,000 per year with the busiest time being June, July and August. The majority of incidences are vehicle-related, with the highest number of accidents at the Highway 40 West / Highway 93 South intersection. The majority of disorderly conduct incidents occur downtown.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

With an increase in population, there will be a need for additional officers and associated equipment to support those officers. The current ratio of officers has worked well and would continue to serve the town in the future. If Big Mountain is annexed, an additional staffed office would also be needed.

Currently, officers utilize an outdoor firing range at the City Shop for training purposes. An indoor firing range and training facility is needed within the next five (5) years and is planned in a two-story separate structure on the Emergency Service Center campus at the southeast portion of the property. While the Whitefish Police Department does not enforce rules pertaining to activities on the lake, they do provide agency-assist to Fish, Wildlife and Parks and other agencies. As part of this assistance, they anticipate needing a suitable emergency craft to provide this assistance.

Additional east-west street connections city-wide as well as connecting dead-end streets will help with emergency response times including Police services.

WHITEFISH MUNICIPAL COURT

The Whitefish Municipal Court shares space in the Emergency Services Center (ESC) with Police and Fire. Since 1986, Whitefish has had an elected Municipal Court Judge. Prior to that date, the city had a Police Judge (1951-1985) and a Police Magistrate (1906-1951). Currently, the court has an elected judge, two full time, and one part time staff. Space in the ESC includes offices and a courtroom.

The Whitefish Municipal Court reviews misdemeanors and civil jurisdictional matters within the city limits. 50% of matters before the Court are parking tickets. The busiest times for the Court, mirroring the Police Department, are June, July, August, and into the early fall and holidays. The Court, on average, reviews 4,000 cases per year.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

With an increase in population and expanding city limits through annexation, in order to serve the projected population, there will be a need for additional staff; approximately one to one and a half full time employees.

PARKS & RECREATION

Parks and recreation play a vital role in fostering a healthy and vibrant community. They provide residents with accessible green spaces for recreation, a place to engage in activities, increase social interaction, and promote physical and mental well-being. Parks also enhance the beauty of neighborhoods, offer a safe habitat for local wildlife, and contribute to environmental sustainability. Additionally, special events and recreation programs serve participants of all ages, promoting active and healthy lifestyles. Connecting people with nature, parks, and associated recreation helps create a sense of belonging and shared responsibility within the community.

Parks and recreational amenities are highly valued by the Whitefish community. During visioning sessions, outdoor access and recreation ranked first in what participants valued the most about Whitefish, and parks and open space ranked as the second most important element of the Whitefish Community (after “small town feel”). As new development occurs the City should continue to promote the protection of open spaces.

It is important to consider accessibility for all segments of the population using city facilities. Accessibility is essential for fostering inclusive, equitable communities where all individuals - regardless of physical ability or disabilities - can have equal opportunity to enjoy public spaces and fully participate in public life. As new facilities are developed or upgraded, or master plans are developed, accessible design helps everyone participate in civic and recreational activities, access restrooms, navigate trails, and use city equipment without barriers.

Whitefish Parks & Recreation Department

The Whitefish Parks and Recreation Department maintains parks, trails, shared use paths, boulevard trees, and city-owned properties. It also operates key community facilities, such as the City Beach public boat launch, including Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) inspections and decontamination services. The department offers a wide range of recreational opportunities tailored to meet the community’s diverse needs. Signature programs include the Stumptown Summer Day Camp, After School Program, and youth sports programs, which provide children and teens with opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and community engagement.

The department consists of 11 full-time staff members and approximately 245 annual volunteers. These include 70 regular volunteers and 175 Whitefish Trail contributors whose invaluable efforts support events, trail maintenance, and a variety of recreation programs. Since 2013, the department has significantly expanded its staffing, increasing from eight to eleven full-time positions to meet the community's growing needs and expectations[59].

The Parks and Recreation Department is administered out of Whitefish City Hall. There is a parks maintenance shop located at 202 Monegan Road which serves as the home base for maintenance staff and is an essential equipment storage location. Smith Fields and Roy Duff Memorial Armory function as the heart of youth and community programming. City parks, along with city-owned facilities managed by partner organizations, such as The Wave, Ice Den, Smith Fields, and the Golf Course, host thousands of participants annually, providing vital spaces for recreation, learning, and community engagement. Both the parks shop and Armory are currently operating at maximum capacity, underscoring the need for future infrastructure, including a second maintenance shop on the north side of the city, another recreation center and two satellite facilities, to accommodate growth and increased demand. (The Armory, Wave, Ice Den and Golf Course are described in detail in the "Other Public and Civic Facilities" section of this plan element.)

Approved Plans

Since the adoption of the 2007 Growth Policy, the department has actively pursued several initiatives to expand and refine its parkland management strategy. These efforts are designed to improve accessibility, sustainability, and aesthetic appeal while addressing the evolving needs of the community. Key plans currently guiding the Park's Department's work include:

- 2013 Parks Master Plan: Established a comprehensive framework for park expansion, facility upgrades, and program development.
- 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan: Deals with the non-motorized network and how to provide better pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.
- 2020 Armory Park Master Plan: Focused on upgrades and enhancements specific to this key recreational site.
- 2020 Irrigation Master Plan: Addresses the sustainable management of irrigation systems across city parks.
- 2020 Landscape Master Plan: Guides landscaping efforts to ensure ecological sustainability and visual appeal.

[59] Parks Master Plan (2013)

- 2021 Park Sign Master Plan: Aims to standardize and improve park signage for better accessibility and navigability.
- 2023 River Trail Improvement Project: Enhances trail connectivity and outdoor recreation opportunities along the Whitefish River.
- 2025 Bike Path Maintenance Plan: Provides an outline for how paths are maintained and a timeline for accomplishing deferred maintenance.

Together, these plans illustrate the department's commitment to proactive management and thoughtful planning. Recent achievements include the implementation of the *Park Sign Master Plan* and measurable progress on the *River Trail Improvement Project*, which has improved accessibility to Whitefish River's scenic trail network.

The city last updated its Parks Master Plan in 2013. Whitefish has experienced considerable growth since this time. As certain portions of the city grow, the community needs to assess whether expanded or additional parks are needed in these areas. Recreation trends change, the community interest in recreation facilities change, demographics change, and the city limits have changed since 2013. As a Parks Master Plan should be updated at least every ten years, the city should adopt an updated comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Parks Inventory

The department oversees 32 park and recreation facilities, encompassing 90.1 acres of developed and 56.1 acres of undeveloped parkland. Notable locations include City Beach, Riverside Park, and Armory Park, alongside a trail network offering opportunities for outdoor recreation and alternative transportation. During visioning sessions, participants indicated Armory Park (which includes Hugh Rogers WAG Park) was their favorite city facility.

City of Whitefish Parks and Recreation Facilities					
Neighborhood Parks		Community Parks & Paths		Community Partnership Recreation Facilities	
*Canoe Park**	*0.8 acres*	*Armory Park*	*30 acres*	*Ice Den*	
*Cloud 9 Park**	*0.5 acres*	*Baker Park*	*2 acres*	*Memorial Stadium*	
*Cottonwood Park**	*0.33 acres*	*City Beach*	*2 acres*	*Smith Fields*	*20.8 acres*
*Creekwood Park**	*4.43 acres*	*Depot Park*	*2 acres*	*The Wave*	
*Crestwood Park**	*2.49 acres*	*Grouse Mountian Park*	*7.8 acres*	*Whitefish Golf Club*	
*O'Brien Bluffs**	*4 acres*	*James R. Bakke Nature*	*4 acre*	*The Whitefish Trail*	*47 miles*
*River Lakes**	*26.66 acres*	*Kay Beller Park*	*1 acre*	*Spencer Trails*	*6.68 miles*
*River Park**	*1.9 acres*	*Memorial Park*	*9.5 acres*		
*River Edge Park**	*3.67 acres*	*Mountian Trails Park*	*4.5 acres*		
*Rivertrail Park**	*0.77 acres*	*Riverside Park*	*5 acres*		
*Riverwood Park**	*4.5 acres*	*Roundhouse Landing*	*0.5 acres*		
*Skye Park**	*0.5 acres*	*Shared-Use Paths &*	*23 miles*		
Soropotimist Park	*1 acre*	*Trailview Park**	*1.3 acres*		
*Ted Kusumoto Park**	*0.874 acre*				
*Warton Landing**	*0.88 acres*				

Whitefish Trail

The City of Whitefish is also a dedicated partner with Whitefish Legacy Partners, the non-profit organization that created and maintains the Whitefish Trail system. This extensive network of non-motorized, multi-use trails includes over 15 trailheads and serves not only the residents of Whitefish but also the greater surrounding area. Recognizing the trail system's vital role in providing public recreation access, the City remains committed to supporting the Whitefish Trail through continued collaboration with Whitefish Legacy Partners.

Spencer Trails

The Spencer Freeride Trail system comprises approximately 6.68 miles of downhill and technical mountain bike trails. It was established through a 2013 agreement between the City of Whitefish, the Montana DNRC, and Flathead Fat Tires (now known as Flathead Area Mountain Bikers, or FAMB). Under that agreement, FAMB, a local nonprofit, constructs, inspects, and improves the freeride trails and technical trail features, providing labor, materials, and financial support, and ensuring the trails meet design and safety guidelines. FAMB works closely with Whitefish Legacy Partners and participates in Whitefish Trail operations, although the Spencer Freeride Trails are managed independently from the Whitefish Trail system. This collaborative stewardship makes the

Spencer Trails a unique offering, providing a high-quality addition to the broader Whitefish Trail network.

As the majority of the trails and shared-use paths in Whitefish are considered an integral component of the transportation system and not merely a recreational amenity, the trails network is discussed in detail in the Transportation Element.

Parkland Acquisition and Funding Mechanisms

Parkland acquisition policies have played a key role in expanding access to green spaces. Dedications are managed based on size thresholds. The size thresholds have not only streamlined the dedication process for the City but have also provided opportunities to diversify open spaces and park offerings across Whitefish. When parkland dedications amount to less than 10,000 square feet, the city requests fees-in-lieu of land. When parkland dedications are 10,000 square feet to one acre, the city requires a Homeowners Association owned and maintained park. When parkland dedications amount to more than one acre of land, the city typically accepts the land as a city park. Montana State Statute allows parkland dedication fees to be used for acquisition, development or maintenance (with certain provisions) of parkland, but no more than 50 percent of the dedicated money may be used for maintenance.

While efforts are significant, the department recognizes the challenge of maintaining aging facilities as many approach the end of their useful lifespan. Fee-in-lieu funds[60] are restricted to acquiring or developing new parkland and cannot be used for maintenance of existing infrastructure. However, the department has identified alternative funding sources to address these needs, including resort taxes, sponsorships, and the parks fund. These resources ensure facilities remain functional, appealing, and aligned with the community's expectations for sustainability and quality.

Preserving open space lands in a rural and open state in perpetuity will take more than regulatory action pursuant to a Growth Policy. The development potential must be removed from these properties through mechanisms such as the transfer of development rights or the outright purchase of development rights through open space bonds or other means in order to establish a conservation easement. The 2007 growth policy discusses consideration of an Open Space Designation as well as an Acquisition Strategic Plan which would identify, prioritize, and set forth realistic recommendations for open spaces of all types. A plan which explores various options may still be prudent.

[60] A "fee in lieu" refers to a payment that can be made, in this case, to acquisition of new parkland rather than actually providing the land or improvement.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

As Whitefish continues to experience sustained growth, there will be an increasing demand for parks and recreation services. To support expanded programming and facility usage, the department anticipates the need to add five to six full-time staff members. This increase in staffing will enable the department to meet growing community needs while maintaining the high standard of service expected by residents and visitors.

Addressing current space limitations is a priority. Plans include the development of a new recreation center and two satellite facilities to enhance capacity for community programs, ensuring all residents have access to affordable high-quality recreation opportunities. Additionally, there is potential to build seasonal, workforce housing and a campground adjacent to the parks maintenance shop, providing both additional services and a sustainable revenue source to support departmental initiatives.

Revitalizing existing parks and green spaces remains a critical focus, with planned improvements centered on usability, accessibility, and environmental sustainability. Upgrades to irrigation systems and the adoption of eco-friendly landscaping practices, as outlined in the Irrigation and Landscape Master Plans, will further the department's commitment to conservation goals.

During visioning sessions, there were numerous comments regarding parks. These comments included removing the fence at Soroptimist Park because it is being used as a dog park, better access and boat launches at the Baker Bridge, river access at the "old" hospital property, better river access near JP Road and additional stand up paddleboard (SUP) storage at City Beach. (Please see the Transportation section regarding visioning comments regarding trails.)

The city does not favor the removal of the fence at Soroptimist Park because the fence contains activities such as soccer games as well as small child playground at the park, but the city is looking at locations for a possible dog park on the north side of town. Improvements next to the Baker Bridge are currently occurring, and these include stone steps down to the river and native planting to stabilize stream banks. This will make it easier to access the river for a kayak or stand up paddleboard user. There have been conversations regarding personal watercraft access at the old hospital property although no formal plan has been established yet. Improvements are currently occurring at JP Road to improve access to the river, and the parks department is looking at additional non-motorized boat storage at City Beach. There are also plans to develop a City Beach Redevelopment Plan.

OTHER PUBLIC AND CIVIC FACILITIES

The quality of Whitefish's arts, cultural, and performance facilities is a source of community pride. Civic and cultural buildings provide spaces where community members can gather, engage in activities, and promote education, creativity and cultural preservation. Whitefish has historically been very supportive of the arts, recreation, and education and has an unusually high number of public and quasi-public facilities for a city of its size. Many of these facilities have been funded by the community at a grassroots level. Below is a brief discussion of these facilities.

- Whitefish Community Library: The Whitefish Community Library is located at 9 Spokane Avenue, directly north of the Whitefish Middle School. The library was initially located in a small building behind the original city hall beginning in the early 1920s until it moved into a 3,000 square foot area in city hall in the early 1950s. In 1961, the nonprofit Whitefish Library Association was incorporated to help fundraise for a new facility, meanwhile, in 1976, the library merged into the Flathead County Library System (FCLS) due to financial constraints. The city coordinated with BNSF and the Whitefish School District in a land swap for a new facility, and with a small amount of funding from the city and mostly local donations, the current library was opened in 1998. This new library remained in the FCLS until increasing differences and political pressure led to the city establishing an independent library board and transitioning the library out of the FCLS in 2011.

  The Whitefish Community Library is 9,600 square feet, contains 30,000 books and accommodates approximately 60,000 yearly visitors. In addition to books, the library provides co-working services, a genealogical database, a community room for up to 35 people, and Wi-Fi, all at no cost. To accommodate anticipated growth over the next 20 years, the library anticipates the need for additional community rooms and co-working space. There is approximately 9,000 square feet of city owned vacant land at the east side of the library for expansion. The library is in the early process of creating a strategic plan.

- Stumptown Ice Den: The Stumptown Ice Den is an approximately 35,000 square foot ice rink located at 715 Wisconsin Avenue, within Mountain Trails Park. Discussions regarding the construction of a permanent ice rink at City Council meetings date back as far as the early 1970s. Memorial Park was identified as the initial location and the City Council committed to furnishing land. In 1984, 4.5 acres of land previously used by the Whitefish Saddle Club for equestrian activities was donated to the city. This land was subsequently developed as Mountain Trails Park and chosen as the location for a new ice rink facility.

Through local fundraising efforts, grants from the State of Montana, and financing by the city, an outdoor seasonal rink was finished in the late 1980s. The popularity of the rink, demand for longer seasonal use, and concerns expressed by surrounding neighborhoods regarding noise, lighting, and late night activities led to discussions regarding fully enclosing the facility. In the early 2000s, the non-profit Whitefish Sports Facilities Foundation (WSFF) was established to assist with fundraising and construction of the building, and a fully enclosed pavilion was finished in 2003. The city established the Mountain Trails Ice Rink Advisory Committee to provide input, advice, and recommendations to the City Council on matters related to the Mountain Trails Ice Rink, including community feedback. In 2015, management and maintenance of the Stumptown Ice Den was transferred to the WSFF. The Ice Den is designed to meet National Hockey League specifications, includes a 17,000 square foot ice sheet, six locker rooms, one conference center, a lobby and a concession area. It is estimated there are over 60,000 annual visitors, with 15,000 paid admissions. The Stumptown Ice Den is the only ice rink facility in Montana open year round. The need for a new pavilion roof has been identified. Funding mechanisms such as public bonds or loan programs offered through the State are being explored.

- Ski Heritage Center Museum of Skiing. Directly west of and on the same property as the Stumptown Ice Den in Mountain Trails Park is the Ski Heritage Center Museum of Skiing. In 2013, the Flathead Valley Ski Education Foundation approached the Whitefish City Council with the desire to discuss leasing what was known as the “warming hut”, for the purpose of creating a home for a local skiing hall of fame and museum. The City Council ultimately approved this lease agreement with the understanding the Ski Foundation would update and maintain the building. The Ski Museum features exhibits on the 10th Mountain Division, a photographic history of skiing in the Flathead Valley, a Hall of Fame for local ski legends, and rare ski footage in and around Montana.

- The Wave Aquatic Center: The Wave Aquatic Center is located at 1250 Baker Avenue and is a city-owned fitness, recreation and aquatic center. The facility is the result of a collaborative process between the city and a nonprofit organization formed in 2001 called the Whitefish Community Aquatic & Health Center. In 2003, the city acquired a former gravel pit site of approximately three acres from Flathead County with a private entity donating an additional two acres of land. The city provided funding for the land and infrastructure improvements through a tax increment bond. The majority of financing was provided by the non-profit through fundraising and philanthropy. After the building was constructed by the nonprofit in 2005, it was deeded to the city, who then leases the building back to the non-profit. The building is managed and

maintained by a separate management company under the direction of the nonprofit's board of directors, one of which is a city representative.

The two-story, 54,000 square foot facility contains three pools, a yoga studio, cardio machines, gymnasium, sports courts, hot tub, sauna as well as provides fitness classes and a daycare facility. There is a separate physical therapy business which leases approximately 3,500 square feet within the building. An agreement between the nonprofit and the city allows the Parks and Recreation Department free use of the facility for athletic programs and provides reduced membership rates for city employees. Although future expansions have not been designed at present, the Wave is currently in the process of developing a Capital Improvements Plan.

- Whitefish Lake Golf Club: The Whitefish Golf Course is located at 1200 Highway 93 W. It is a 36-hole course bisected by Highway 93 W; there are 18 holes on the north course and 18 holes on the south course. The north course was donated to the City of Whitefish on January 15, 1934, and has been leased to local golf associations since the 1940s. In 2011, the Whitefish City Council entered into a new 30-year lease agreement with the Whitefish Lake Golf Club (WLGC) expiring in 2040. The south course is owned by the WLGC and is not subject to the lease agreement. This north course lease agreement includes, among other items, rental payment, a lower golf pass rate for full-time Whitefish residents, maintenance of the cemetery and Grouse Mountain Park, and cooperation for off-season uses benefiting the city as a whole, including Nordic skiing. In 2017, the city and the WLGC entered into the Whitefish Lake Golf Club Urban Forestry Management Agreement, as the trees on the north course are city trees. The agreement acknowledges the urban forest plus the need to manage trees for the golf course. In 2040, when this lease agreement is up for renegotiation, the city and WLGC should be prepared for the re-negotiated lease to reflect the needs of the WLGC and the city at that time.

- Cemetery: The Whitefish Cemetery is located at 830 Highway 93 W adjacent to the Whitefish Golf Course. The cemetery has been at this location since 1917. There are 3,079 gravesites and 184 crematory gravesites. In recent years, the city added two columbaria, each with 40 niches. As described previously, under the current WLGC lease agreement, the WLGC provides maintenance including mowing, trimming, and irrigation from April to October.

  As of the writing of this plan, there are a few niches available in one columbarium but the remainder of the cemetery is full. As early as 2010, the City Council has an ongoing goal to identify a new location for a cemetery. In 2011, the Council appointed an Ad hoc Cemetery Committee to evaluate possible locations and development for a new public city cemetery. However, the Committee was unable to identify a suitable

location due to the presence of high groundwater and proximity to waterbodies. Finding a cemetery location continues to be a priority.

- Roy Duff Memorial Armory Building: The Roy Duff Memorial Armory Building is located at 315 Armory Road and is now part of the 30-acre Armory Park. The Armory Building was used by the Montana National Guard since the mid-1950s. The building is adjacent to land where softball fields, previously owned by Flathead County, were deeded to the city in the early 1990s. The National Guard had a cooperative agreement with the county, and later the city, which allowed usage of the adjacent property for training exercises, including mortar training. As more residences began developing in the area, neighbor complaints regarding the training activities increased. This led to concerns from the City Council during negotiations about renewing the training use agreement, and in the mid-1990s the National Guard abandoned the facility. The State offered the building for sale, and in 2003 the city purchased the 5-acre property. The terms of the purchase agreement restricted the property to public use.

  The city began repairing and remodeling the facility in 2004. The 3,000 square foot building presently contains a gymnasium, conference room, recreation dayroom, washrooms, kitchen and locker rooms. The Armory Building is used for city recreation programs, after school activities, summer day camp, and can be rented as an event center. Roy Duff, the namesake of the facility, was a longtime Whitefish resident who had been a World War II combat veteran, Whitefish business owner, volunteer firefighter, council member, former mayor, and highway commissioner involved in various community endeavors for more than 50 years.

- North Valley Music School: North Valley Music School is located at 1998 River Lakes Drive and is a community-based music school formed as a nonprofit organization in 1997. The City Council initially approved the school to operate out of an existing residence at 432 Spokane Ave in 2001. Due to the success of the music school and increases in enrollment, the school began looking for a new location as far back as 2009.

  In the 1990's, a nonprofit called Project Whitefish Kids (PWK) acquired 51 acres known as Smith Fields during the development of the Lakes subdivision on the far south side of the city. At the request of PWK, the city accepted the land in 2004 with deed restrictions that the property be used primarily for recreational purposes. Simultaneously with the land transfer, the city executed a lease with PWK to manage and operate Smith Fields as a sports complex, which is still in effect today. Beginning in 2021, the NVMS, PWK and the city began discussions regarding leasing approximately two acres of land at Smith Fields to the music school with the Council

and Park Board ultimately approving the lease. Through private fundraising, NVMS was able to raise the financing to construct the new facility. The 8,100 square foot school broke ground in 2024 and was completed in 2025. Once constructed, the building was deeded to the city as a public building with the school financing the operations and maintenance.

The North Valley Music School includes 14 music studios, a recital space with 100 seats, a reception area, classroom, conference room, two practice rooms and an outdoor performance area for community events. The lease agreement allows the city parks and recreation department non-cost usage based on available scheduling. The NVMS is the only non-profit music school in Montana and reports at least 700 students annually.

- O'Shaughnessy Center: The O'Shaughnessy Center is an approximately 15,000 square foot cultural arts center. It is located on land leased from the City of Whitefish at 1 Central Avenue, adjacent to Depot Park. It was funded entirely from philanthropy and community fundraising, was first constructed in 1998 and expanded in 2016. The facility is owned and operated by the Whitefish Theater Company; a local theatre troupe established in 1978 that performed in various venues around the Flathead Valley without a permanent location. The 320-seat theater (which can be expanded to just over 400 seats for music events) hosts year round musical, theater, movie and comedy performances, and can also be rented as an event center. As many as 15,000 a year attend events at the center. The O'Shaughnessy Center is constructed to full capacity and no further significant expansions are expected.

- Whitefish Performing Arts Center (PAC): The Whitefish Performing Arts Center (PAC) is located within the Whitefish Middle School in downtown Whitefish. Owned by the Whitefish School District and used as the school auditorium, the 10,000 square foot center was retrofitted from a previous 75-year old auditorium into a 496 seat state-of-the art facility in 2007. The PAC has a separate box office, entrance and exits from the remainder of the school to allow it to be a stand-alone facility. Money for this facility was raised locally, with more than 1,000 community supporters involved in the venture. The PAC is the primary location for performances by the local Alpine Theater Project (another local theater troupe) as well as hosts performances of local and nationally known arts and cultural events. As the center is within an existing school, no future expansions are planned for the PAC.

SOLID WASTE

Introduction

City regulations[61] require residents, businesses, and anyone within the city limits to use the city's solid waste hauling services, which are provided by Republic Services[62]. There are no regulations that require residents of unincorporated areas of Flathead County to collect and dispose of household garbage properly. However, the County does regulate "community decay" on or adjacent to all public roadways and requires loads to be covered or controlled in route to the landfill. Republic Services reported that in 2023 they accepted 164,535 tons of trash, an increase of about 3% from 2022.

All garbage and refuse collected in the city is disposed of at the Flathead County Landfill located south of the city between Whitefish and Kalispell. While Flathead County provides a collection site at the landfill for disposal of household chemicals (and holds a monthly Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day) there is no such facility in Whitefish. Flathead County Solid Waste (FCSW) reports having 1.57 million + 18.1 million cubic yards of licensed airspace for refuse at the County Landfill with no current deficiencies or Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) violations.

Recycling

According to the Waste Not Project, recycling is limited in Montana because of the distance from recycling markets. The city no longer offers centralized collection sites (the temporary site at the corner of Columbia Avenue and Railway Streets was permanently closed in 2022 due to contamination, overuse and being economically inefficient and is being redeveloped for affordable housing). However, recycling services remain available to those interested through private vendors and county-operated drop off sites located throughout the valley. One vendor, Republic Services, reported the amount of recycling collected in Flathead County in 2023 was 689 tons, a decrease of about 5% from 2022.[63] The City could consider contracting one of the private vendors to integrate recycling bins (ex. for glass and aluminum cans) throughout the downtown area to encourage recycling when reducing and reusing are not feasible. Today, the U.S. recycling rate for plastics sits at about 5 or 6 percent; it has never risen above 10 percent[64].

In alignment with the 2007 Growth Policy, Climate Action Plan, and Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, the City Council is continuing to re-evaluate recycling in the city. If a

[61] Municipal Code 4-2
[62] Previously owned by North Valley Refuse
[63] Source: Solid Waste Board- January 2025 Board Packet
[64] Source: https://grist.org/article/petrochemical-companies-have-known-for-40-years-that-plastics-recycling-wouldnt-work/

new central collection were to be opened, it would need to be staffed and well designed (i.e. paved and fenced).

Organic Waste Diversion Programs (Composting)

Composting food scraps is the most energy-efficient form of recycling and provides local jobs and soil remediation products. Dirt Rich Compost, a company in Columbia Falls, offers commercial and residential service and yard waste drop off in the Flathead Valley. Many local businesses and restaurants in Whitefish recycle with Dirt Rich, including the City of Whitefish, Explore Whitefish, and the North Valley Food Bank. During 2023, Whitefish City Hall diverted 180 gallons (about 684 lbs.) of organic material from the landfill by using Dirt Rich's food scrap pickup. This amount potentially prevented 466 net pounds of CO2 emissions, or the equivalent of driving 532 miles in a standard vehicle[65]. According to the Whitefish Climate Action Plan, the three schools in Whitefish monthly compost more than 1,000 pounds of materials, in coordination with Dirt Rich.

The City of Whitefish currently dries biosolids generated during the wastewater treatment process on site for several years before hauling the dried material to the landfill. The Whitefish Climate Action Plan and Sustainable Tourism Management Plan notes materials such as woody matter, leaves, and yard waste could be mixed with the biosolids at this location. Food scraps would not be accepted. Options for final usage of the compost are not specified. The City should consider turning biosolids into energy, through innovative technologies such as the Varcor system[66].

Climate Action Plan Relationship

The 2018 Climate Action Plan (CAP) calls for maximizing waste diversion opportunities throughout the community to meet its long-term sustainability goals. The CAP strategies and actions go beyond recycling and composting to include waste reduction in city and school district operations (ex. deconstruction material salvage, paper reduction policy, and phasing out Styrofoam).

Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Relationship

The City of Whitefish 2024 Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) was developed to incorporate sustainability principles into destination marketing and tourism management efforts. The Plan supports citywide curbside recycling, expanding composting services, and recycling construction materials.

[65] Source: Dirt Rich 2023 Annual Report
[66] https://sedron.com/our-technology/#:~:text=The%20VarcorTM%20technology%20is,where%20it%20undergoes%20mechanical%20recompression.

Projected Needs

The landfill capacity is sufficient to meet the needs of Whitefish and Flathead County for the next 70 to 90 years. If needed, Republic Services could add trucks and drivers to meet increased demand in the city. FCSW has submitted an expansion document to DEQ to expand the landfill's capacity on their property.

WHITEFISH SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Whitefish School District #44, established on September 21, 1903, is located at the north end of Flathead Valley. The District is 307 square miles and serves students in grades Kindergarten to 12th grade in three separate schools.

According to the October 7, 2024, Flathead County Superintendent of Schools Statistical Report, Whitefish School District #44 had 1,965 students; 1,336 in the elementary schools (K-8) and 629 in the high school. This is a 13% increase in the elementary schools (K-8) and 29% increase in the high school over the past 10-years. The District has 250 staff to support the schools.

There are three schools in Whitefish School District #44. Muldown Elementary, the grade school, serves children in grades K-4. Muldown is a new building constructed in 2020 to the west of the former grade school, was designed to serve up to 836 students and is at 77% capacity. Whitefish Middle School (WMS), serves children in grades 5-8. The WMS was significantly remodeled in 2006, has a design capacity of 850 students and is also at 77% capacity. Whitefish High School (WHS), serves students in grades 9-12. The WHS was renovated and expanded in 2014, has a design capacity of 600 students and is presently reported to be at 100% capacity[67].

A portion of the former Muldown Elementary was retained when the new elementary school was constructed, as there was contemplation at the time of multiple functions. Currently the School District uses the space for high school classes due to lack of space in the existing high school building.

City and School District Coordination

Coordination with the District includes working with District staff and a developer when a larger residential development project is proposed to determine whether existing or future schools have the capacity to serve the project, and the most appropriate locations for the schools.. The city notifies the school district, and other advisory agencies, of development proposals but early school district involvement could enable better planning for the future.

[67] Enrollment and capacities provided Whitefish School District in 2025.

Another aspect of city coordination is related to traffic and transportation-related matters on the public streets surrounding the schools. In 2025, the city used Resort Tax Funds to redevelop East 6th Street to facilitate better circulation around Muldown Elementary. The project involves the installation of a sidewalk on one side with street lighting, one-way travel from Columbia Avenue east to Pine Avenue and an improved intersection crossing at East 6th Street and Pine Avenue.

Also in 2025, the City Council approved a Safe Streets for All Plan which includes improvements to Memorial Park north of WHS for additional parking, a drop-off area for students and improved sidewalk connections. Upon completion of these improvements, parents would have the option to avoid traffic around the school by dropping off their children at the Memorial Field area allowing students to safely walk to school.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

The School District has a 2021 Long-Range Facility Plan, approved by the School District Board, which identifies needs for future school facilities based on a historic 2% growth in student population.

In 2024, the public approved a bond measure to expand WHS for up to 20 years of student growth and a separate measure was approved to update the athletic fields and have all the athletic facilities on school district property. Work is anticipated to commence soon with estimated completion in 2-3 years.

If the student population continues to increase, the District would anticipate a need for another elementary school. They would be looking for adequate property to house a school, parking and associated play fields in an area with plans for development to ensure the school is walkable and bikeable and served by water and sewer.

BROADBAND

Broadband is a term applied to high-speed internet that is not dial-up service. Broadband can be provided over different platforms including Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), Cable, Fiber, Wireless and Satellite. Broadband services for residential consumers typically provide faster downstream speeds than upstream speeds. Quality high speed internet is important for expanding education and economic opportunities in a community. High speed internet has enabled the expansion of ‘work from home’ that got traction during the 2020 Covid Pandemic. According to Federal Communications Commission mapping, nearly 100% of the planning jurisdiction has some form of high-speed internet whether it is Satellite, DSL, Cable or Fiber. The state of Montana also developed a broadband map

showing addresses served by high-speed internet, under-served or unserved. Similar to the FCC map, most of Whitefish is served by some form of broadband.

Development of a city-wide Broadband Master Plan could evaluate the existing services, areas in need of high-speed internet options, needed improvements for existing and future population and review of the role the city would play in the deployment of broadband infrastructure.

EXTENSION OF SERVICES PLAN

The city's Extension of Services Plan (EOS) is used as a guide for the provision of city services to those areas of the city not served currently, and for territories anticipated to be annexed into the city. The purpose of the plan is to meet statutory requirements for annexation, provide a logical framework guiding future growth of the community and to establish policies identifying methods of finance and the party/parties responsible. The most recent Extension of Services Plan was adopted by the City Council in 2021 as required by state law. The 2021 Plan amended a 2018 Plan and expanded the boundaries of the Urban Growth area to the south along Highway 93.

Within the Plan, the city identified the urban growth areas in which municipal services may be extended in the next 5-10 years. The plan details future areas for development, constraints in these areas and all the public services and facilities the city provides including who is responsible for expansion of such facilities. The plan identifies impediments to growth in and around Whitefish including the lack of infrastructure, the high cost of extending infrastructure, the presence of important lands of agricultural significance, the volume of land under public or corporate ownership, private developments that limit access to adjacent lands, the presence of soils unsuitable for development, seasonally high groundwater, and steep slopes. The plan assesses the potential for future development for all parts of the city, broken down by seven specific areas. The EOS contains infrastructure policies to be followed when developing within the city or when proposing an annexation to develop.

FINANCING AND IMPROVEMENT MECHANISMS

- Capital improvements: Capital improvements are made to the city's utility, street system, park improvements and other facilities every fiscal year. Most capital improvements are for system maintenance or an overall system improvement. Examples are the recent improvements and upgrades to the city's water and wastewater treatment plants.

- Latecomer agreements: Any developer that extends public infrastructure to serve a proposed development can enter into a "latecomer agreement" with the city. This is a

mechanism through which the city can collect fees from subsequent developers who make use of the new public infrastructure and reimburse the developer who installed it. This ensures the cost of providing infrastructure are distributed equitably among those who benefit from it.

- Over-sizing: When infrastructure is extended into a new area the city may opt to pay for "over-sizing" of water and/or sewer lines. This is a common practice when lines, extended by a developer, will eventually serve a much larger area than the developer's specific project. For example, a developer may need to extend an 8-inch sewer main to serve a proposed subdivision. However, if that main will subsequently be extended to serve an even larger area in the future the city may pay the cost difference between engineering and installing a 12-inch pipe over the 8-inch pipe necessitated by the development.

- Impact Fees: This tool allows communities to charge developers a fee for the incremental system costs solely attributable to the new development. Impact fees may be spent for public improvements identified in the service area report including, but not limited to, planning, land acquisition, right of way acquisition, site improvements, necessary off-site improvements, construction, engineering, architectural services, permitting, administrative expenses, applicable impact fees or mitigation costs, and any other expenses that can be capitalized with a useful life of 10 years or more. Impact fees may also be used to recoup public improvement costs previously incurred by the city to the extent that new growth and development will be served by the previously constructed improvements or incurred costs (MCA 7-6-1603). Existing deficiencies or any maintenance of infrastructure cannot be financed with impact fee revenues.

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF): TIF is an important community and economic development tool available to Montana cities and towns. It works by borrowing against the assumed increase in property tax revenue (the "tax increment") resulting from rising property values due to redevelopment or new investments. Instead of this additional tax revenue going into the general fund, it is used to finance infrastructure improvements, public amenities, or other projects that support economic growth within the TIF district. Whitefish projects financed through a now expired TIF include the reconstruction of City Beach, construction of City Hall, development of the Wave and numerous road reconstruction improvements. The city's TIF sunsetted several years ago, and while there has been a feasibility study completed to determine the possibility of creating new districts, the minimal beneficial impacts have not made implementation efforts a priority.

- Resort Tax: Montana law allows communities substantially dependant on visitation for their economic base to enact local luxury tax on the sale of certain goods and services. In 1996, the voters of Whitefish approved a 2% resort tax which applies to lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail. To pay the debt service for the purchase of the Haskill Basin Conservation Easement to protect the city's water supply, voters approved an additional 1% in 2015 for a total resort tax rate of 3%. In November 2023, voters approved a 20-year extension and a reallocation of the tax as follows: property tax rebates to landowners (25%), community housing projects (10%), roads and infrastructure maintenance and improvements (48%), maintenance and improvement of city pathways and parks (10%), Whitefish Trail maintenance (2%), and merchant's costs of administration (5%). In 2024, approximately 6.6 million dollars were collected by the city. In the November 2023 election, voters approved a 20-year extension to collecting the resort tax and a redistribution of resort tax which still allows for property tax relief and costs of administration. The 2023 ballot measure also adds the inclusion of equipment to improvements and maintenance of bicycle and pedestrian path; adds maintenance to improvement or reconstruction of streets and storm sewers; increases the amount of resort tax dollars for housing initiatives and adds dollars for maintenance and replacement of existing improvements of the Whitefish Trail system.

- Revenue Bonds: In accordance with state law, the city utilizes bonds through Montana's State Revolving Fund (SRF) Loan Program for high-cost improvements. The bonds are secured by revenues of the specific utility, such as water and wastewater fees. Fees for service are reviewed each year to ensure the minimum coverage requirements of the outstanding bonds are met.

- Grants: Grants are financial awards provided by a level of government to support public programs, infrastructure or services. Grants do not need to be repaid, but they often come with a lengthy application process and specific requirements on how the money must be used. Recent examples include grants from the federal government for the Whitefish Safe Streets for All Plan, and an Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant for reconstruction of East 2nd Street.

- Concurrency: Concurrency is not a funding mechanism, but a policy through which facilities and services are required to be in place at the time, or a financing plan in place for the construction, the actual impacts of development occur. Under a concurrency policy, a developer has the option of delaying a proposed development until all applicable facilities are in place or providing for those facilities (often with reimbursement from future developers and/or the city).Under a concurrency policy, a developer has the option of delaying a proposed development until all applicable

facilities are in place or providing for those facilities (often with reimbursement from future developers in the form of a latecomers agreement).

SUMMARY

Whitefish is committed to providing high-quality public facilities and services that meet the evolving needs of its residents. This commitment includes responsible investment in infrastructure, financial accountability, investing in well-maintained parks, libraries, recreation centers, and other essential infrastructure that promote public health, safety, and well-being. By prioritizing sustainability, technology, accessibility, and modern design standards, the city aims to ensure that all residents - regardless of age, ability, or background - have equitable access to safe and functional public facilities.

VISION WHITEFISH 2045 WORK PROGRAM

	PLANNING COMMISSION	CITY COUNCIL
Jan 7, 2026	HOUSING	
Jan 14, 2026	OPEN HOUSE W/ LAND USE CONSULTANTS	
Jan 15, 2026	LAND USE CONSULTANTS WORKSESSION	
Jan 20, 2026		WORK SESSION ON VISION WF 2045 (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENRH, PUBLIC FACILITIES)
Jan 21, 2026	TBD	
Feb 2, 2026		WORK SESSION ON VISION WF 2045 (TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING)
Feb 4, 2026	LAND USE	
Feb 11, 2026	LAND USE	
Feb 17, 2026		WORK SESSION ON VISION WF 2045 (LAND USE)/ZONING AND SUBDIVISION INPUT
Feb 19, 2026	**PUBLIC HEARING ON COMPLETED DRAFT**	
Feb 25, 2026	**PUBLIC HEARING ON COMPLETED DRAFT – IF PUBLIC HEARING IS CONTINUED**	
Mar 2, 2026		**VISION WF 2045 PUBLIC HEARING**
Mar 4, 2026	Zoning/Subdivision Work Session – 1st	
Mar 16, 2026		**VISION WF 2045 PUBLIC HEARING – IF PUBLIC HEARING IS CONTINUED**
Mar 18, 2026	Zoning/Subdivision Work Session – 2nd	
April 6 or April 20, 2026		ZONING/SUBDIVISION WORK SESSION
April 16, 2026	**PUBLIC HEARING ZONING / SUBDIVISION**	
May 4, 2026		**ZONING / SUBDIVISION FINAL ADOPTION – 1ST READING**
May 18, 2026		**ZONING / SUBDIVISION FINAL ADOPTION – 2ND READING**
June 17, 2026		ZONING IN EFFECT

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Friday, August 29, 2025 12:21 PM
To: David Taylor; Wendy Compton-Ring; Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: FW: Community Dev. board letter

From: Kate Berry <KBerry@whitefishhousing.org>
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2025 5:09 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Community Dev. board letter

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Members of the Whitefish Community Development Board,

I am writing to you today as a concerned resident about the previously adopted edits to the Economic Development chapter of our Growth Policy. While I appreciate the work you are doing, I've reviewed the changes and feel that some of them could negatively impact the future of our community. I am particularly concerned that these changes don't fully serve the needs of Whitefish residents and seem to favor a narrow set of interests.

I believe we should hold onto the original vision of providing a full range of goods, services, and jobs right here in Whitefish. Removing this goal is a step backward and forces many of us to drive to Kalispell or Columbia Falls for basic necessities. This not only adds to traffic and pollution but also puts an extra financial burden on every household.

I also strongly disagree with the language that frames a resident's choice to commute as simply that—a "choice." The

reality is, many people are forced to seek higher-paying jobs outside of Whitefish because they simply cannot afford to live here. It’s important that our Growth Policy be based on the facts of our housing crisis, not a misunderstanding of it.
To build a more resilient community, I think it's vital that we add language to the policy about diversifying our economy. A strong, year-round economy that isn't solely dependent on tourism would help our local businesses thrive and provide stable jobs, especially during the shoulder seasons.
Furthermore, I was surprised to see key factual data removed from the document, such as the statistic that 76% of workers in Whitefish do not live here. This is crucial context for our housing challenges. The addition of misleading rental figures also concerns me, as it appears to downplay the severity of our affordability problem. The document should be grounded in accurate data and honest assessments.

Finally, I worry that some of the new edits are trying to shut the door on future opportunities by attempting to write restrictive zoning policy into a guiding document. Things like "pop-up shops," neighborhood bodegas, and food trucks are part of a vibrant, modern economy. We should give future city councils the flexibility to adapt and innovate, rather than locking in the preferences of a few.
If we want Whitefish to continue to grow with integrity, creativity, and citizen involvement, we cannot allow people to get away with invalidating public process like this. It is absolutely unconscionable!

I understand that I write this from a place of privilege, being able to live and work in Whitefish, and commute by foot or bike to my office most of the year. And why can I do this?

Because of affordable housing! I want others to enjoy this same convenience, and to be able to live, work, shop, and play in the same community.

Thank you for your time and for considering my concerns. I urge you to take a holistic, long-term view of our community and restore the language (drafted by city planning staff) that prioritizes residents and a more flexible, prosperous future for all of Whitefish.

Sincerely,
Kate Berry
[redacted], Whitefish

Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Lindsey Gardner <lindseyjanephotography@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2025 4:03 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Community Development Board

You don't often get email from lindseyjanephotography@gmail.com. Learn why this is important

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Dear Members of the Whitefish Community Development Board,

I am writing to you today as a concerned resident about the previously adopted edits to the Economic Development chapter of our Growth Policy. While I appreciate the work you are doing, I've reviewed the changes and feel that some of them could negatively impact the future of our community. I am particularly concerned that these changes don't fully serve the needs of Whitefish residents and seem to favor a narrow set of interests.

I believe we should hold onto the original vision of providing a full range of goods, services, and jobs right here in Whitefish. Removing this goal is a step backward and forces many of us to drive to Kalispell or Columbia Falls for basic necessities. This not only adds to traffic and pollution but also puts an extra financial burden on every household.

I also strongly disagree with the language that frames a resident's choice to commute as simply that—a "choice." The reality is, many people are forced to seek higher-paying jobs outside of Whitefish because they simply cannot afford to live here. It's important that our Growth Policy be based on the facts of our housing crisis, not a misunderstanding of it.

To build a more resilient community, I think it's vital that we add language to the policy about diversifying our economy. A strong, year-round economy that isn't solely dependent on tourism would help our local businesses thrive and provide stable jobs, especially during the shoulder seasons.

Furthermore, I was surprised to see key factual data removed from the document, such as the statistic that **76% of workers in Whitefish do not live here**. This is crucial context for our housing challenges. The addition of misleading rental figures also concerns me, as it appears to downplay the severity of our affordability problem. The document should be grounded in accurate data and honest assessments.

Finally, I worry that some of the new edits are trying to shut the door on future opportunities by attempting to write restrictive zoning policy into a guiding document. Things like "pop-up shops," neighborhood bodegas, and food trucks are part of a vibrant, modern economy. We should give future city councils the flexibility to adapt and innovate, rather than locking in the preferences of a few.

My family has not been priced out of the housing market but MANY of my friends families have been. It hurts my heart to see them struggle. ALL of these friends are providers for the community. One example is my friend that is a makeup artist. She is about to be kicked out of her house (she has a husband and two kids) because the owner is selling, and she's having a difficult time finding

something local. They really want to keep their kids in the WF school district. I have many more examples of this heartbreak.

Thank you for your time and for considering my concerns. I urge you to take a holistic, long-term view of our community and restore the language (drafted by city planning staff) that prioritizes residents and a more flexible, prosperous future for all of Whitefish.

Sincerely,
Lindsey Gardner
[redacted]
Whitefish, MT.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Brad Bulkley <bbulkley@bulkleycapital.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2025 1:16 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Richard Hildner
Subject: Statement Draft

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Alan:

Firstly, thank you for all you do. You have made such great progress on what has been a challenging initiative. Would you be good enough to share our group's sentiments with the committee tonight? Richard and I are both traveling and unable to attend the meeting.

Thank you!

Community Development Board:

Thank you to the committee for all your hard work. Comments to the Growth Policy submitted by Heart of Whitefish with input from FFRG is being challenged by a few who claim the views come from a few special interest groups. We do not believe this to be accurate. From the groundwork both by Heart of Whitefish and FFRG, we believe these comments largely represent the sentiments of our greater community. We strongly encourage the committee to adopt the language from the last meeting and move forward.

Thank you.

With best regards,

G. Bradford Bulkley

Co-Founder and President • O 214.692.5476 M 214.675.9964

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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Marijke Stob
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2025 10:28 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Economic development chapter

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Hey Alan,
Thanks for all your work on the whitefish growth policy!
I am writing to submit comment for the whitefish community development board and I ask them to vote for the original, public guided edits to the economic development chapter of the growth policy. The whole point of sb 382 is to engage the public in the growth policy process and the community board members who allowed heart of whitefish to insert their comments after the fact, were wrong and are doing a world of hurt to their community.

Thanks for taking the time to consider my comment.
All the best,
Marijke Stob

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jeanne Langan
Sent: Tuesday, August 19, 2025 4:11 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: For Aug 20 Community Development Board Meeting

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Hi Mr Tiefenbach and committee,

I am writing in lieu of oral testimony, and to note that if not for a very typical story of a Whitefish worker, I would attend more meetings like the one Wednesday evening, but can't due to work. Well, partially work, partially that after being priced out of Whitefish last year after living walking distance from downtown for 10 years, I moved to Columbia Falls. So my once walk-to-work commute now has become an extra hour to the time my dog is left home alone during my workday. I think this is exemplary of many situations and reasons more voices are not being heard at your meetings. I had a lot of faith in this project from the start, for the future of a really special town with really special locals. I've been able to attend a few meetings, participated in many surveys and feedback requests, and I've submitted comments (again, when I've been working during meeting times and can't negotiate the extra commute time). I even submitted a logo design when you did a call for options. I've hoped that the obviously detailed and carefully handled work being done to learn about the community from a broad perspective would temper the voices that have effectively driven myself and so many others out of living in this town. All this is to say:

I am concerned with the previously adopted edits to the Economic Development Chapter of the Growth Policy. These edits remove much of the community input that was gathered over multiple visioning sessions last year. I urge the Community Development Board to reconsider many of these adopted edits and to revert back to the original draft created by city planning staff in most, if not all, cases.

I hope you all are enjoying your summer, I'd love to see folks in the Clay Studio at Stumptown sometime!

Best,
Jeanne Langan
she/her

Subject: Line-by-line review of previously adopted economic development chapter edits

Dear Members of the Whitefish Community Development Board,

Thank you for taking the time to review the Economic Development chapter that you adopted previously, and to review all of the adopted edits line-by-line, thereby allowing the public to view all of these edits and to comment on them. As an organization focused on improving housing affordability, we find many of the adopted edits to be troubling, and would urge you to reconsider reverting back to the original language created by city staff in many instances. We will summarize these below.

- We encourage you to add back the line that reads, “we will endeavor to provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs to serve our local population.” (page 2, “Vision”)
    - Removing this sentence (and goal) does not make sense, as this is an aspiration that the city should have. Requiring residents to travel to Kalispell or Columbia Falls for basic necessities increases the cost of living in Whitefish, and is a disservice to and an effective tax on residents.
- We encourage you to adopt the staff-provided language on page 3, paragraph 3, rather than the edits provided by the Heart of Whitefish.
    - Residents who commute out of the city to work have not necessarily “chosen” to do this. It is a fact that there are many more jobs (and many more high-paying jobs, required to afford housing in Whitefish) located in Kalispell than there are in Whitefish. As Kalispell is a larger city, some of this is to be expected. However, framing this as a choice is not factual. The other deletions in this paragraph aim to replace facts with the opinion of a small minority of downtown special interests and should be reverted to the original staff-provided draft for this reason.
- We encourage you to add an additional sentence that reads, “Developing a more diverse, year-round economy outside of tourism could help sustain businesses and create stable jobs throughout these shoulder seasons.” to the end of paragraph 3 on page 5.
- We encourage you to remove the sentence that reads, “Thus, visitors have contributed significantly to the livability of the community for residents.” as this is strictly opinion based on one’s subjective view of “livability.” We imagine that many people could and would argue that high levels of tourism in Whitefish have reduced livability by increasing the cost of living significantly and making it much more difficult to get around town during peak seasons. This is also based on data above it that states that ~60% of resort tax collections are attributable to visitors, meaning that locals also pay into this fund substantially.

- We encourage you to add back the sentence that reads, “According to a report from GSBS consulting, 76% of workers employed in Whitefish do not live in Whitefish.” on page 6, last paragraph.
    - This is important context for the current housing affordability problem in Whitefish, and removing this does a disservice not only to those workers who can not afford to live here, but to those who will update this Growth Policy in the future.
- We encourage you to remove the misleading sentence at the bottom of page 6 that continues on page 7 that reads, “According to the Executive Director of Housing Whitefish, the average monthly rent per person for rental assistance applicants was $800, offering a more accurate picture of the cost of living for working residents.”
    - This figure appears to be based on these residents having one or more roommates, and the rental assistance program does not cover 100% of working residents. Many (most?) working residents continue to pay substantially more for rent each month, and this misleading statement is an attempt to dismiss how significant the housing affordability problem is in Whitefish.
- The survey data about tourism sentiment cited on page 7, paragraph 5 should include response rates for each survey. We suspect that the 2023 survey included more responses than the 2025 survey, and that the 2025 survey may have been skewed with responses towards those who benefit from the tourism industry. If true, the citation of these surveys is problematic.
- We encourage you to revert to the original language drafted by staff on page 11, paragraph 2. This was edited to change a factual statement by staff that “many” public comments (during visioning sessions)…expressed the desire for more locally available goods and services to read instead “a few” public comments.
    - This represents a narrow special interest attempting to rewrite history and silence contrary opinions. This is unacceptable.
- We encourage you to add back staff’s language on page 11, paragraph 2 that reads, “In addition to zoning review, strategies discussed in the study included encouraging more ‘temporary’ businesses such as ‘pop up shops’ or food trucks.”
    - The list provided here is clearly not all-inclusive, and the deletion of this sentence is unnecessary and appears to be motivated by one or two persons’ disdain for things like food trucks. It should be remembered that this document is not zoning policy, and attempting to close the door on future opportunities by removing them from this document is unacceptable, controlling behavior by unelected special interests.
- Beginning on page 13 and continuing onto page 14, multiple inappropriate deletions were made. This section summarizes a consultant’s report, and as such, the deletions of items in the list on page 14 is inappropriate. These deletions are simply attempting to remove assessments from a report that the special interest who provided these edits does not personally agree with. Again, this is inappropriate.

- We encourage you to add back the objective on page 15 that reads, “Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local serving goods and services near local population centers.”
    - Zoning, both residential and commercial, by its very nature, is and should be fluid. Attempting to shut the door on this by removing this objective is short-sighted, and does not adequately prepare Whitefish for the future. This deletion appears to be driven by a narrow downtown business special interest in avoiding any and all competition. This deletion is attempting to write zoning policy, which is inappropriate for this unelected Board to do.
- On page 16, we encourage that you revert back to staff language for items d and e.
    - By adopting language that states “prohibit,” rather than the language provided by staff, the Board is again attempting to write zoning policy rather than a guiding comprehensive planning document.
- Additionally on page 16, we encourage you to add back the deletions of items h and j.
    - These deletions again represent the Board attempting to write zoning policy while silencing the voices of residents who participated in the visioning sessions.
- On page 17, we encourage you to add back objectives d and e, for similar reasons provided on the items immediately above.
- References should be cited for all factual information changed, including:
    - Changing $400 million to $200 million on page 3, paragraph 2.
    - Changing $314 million to $1 billion on page 4, last paragraph, as well as the changed figures in the continuation of that paragraph on the next page.
    - Changing figures for Glacier National Park visitation on page 5, paragraph 3.
    - Provide the citation as a footnote for the VisaVue data cited on page 6, paragraph 2.

Thank you for your consideration of these points. We ask that you take a holistic view of the entire community, both in the present and especially in the future, which we will not be able to predict. We ask that you err on the side of flexibility and expanding the options available to future city councils as they contemplate changes as Whitefish evolves, rather than erring on the side of entrenched special interest groups with an apparent goal to further erode the Whitefish local community by ensuring that no one who is not extremely wealthy can live here.

Sincerely,

Nathan Dugan, President

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Julie Mullins
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 11:56 AM
To: Michelle Howke; Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Fw: Economic Development - Resident Comment

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Dear Growth Committee, Planning Board and City Council Members,

I want to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the City of Whitefish, Alan and his team, and the Planning Board for taking on the difficult and often underappreciated task of updating the City's Growth Policy. As a former tourism stakeholder with Explore Whitefish and 30+ years working in one form of strategic planning or another, I understand strategic planning is a complex and highly nuanced process. It's been interesting to go through the strategic planning process here in Whitefish, where it's clear residents and business owners care deeply about the character and future of our community. I find this work is essential, and I commend you for your time, dedication, and willingness to engage with a range of perspectives.

That said, after reviewing the most recent draft Growth Policy and community comments, I feel compelled to share a few reflections. I understand writing growth policy is not just a technical document, it's a roadmap. It sets the tone for the kind of future a community wants to shape and prioritize values. It became clear reading through comments that too often, the Board and resident conversations got bogged down debating semantics rather than focusing on real change that will help our shape Whitefish's future. Semantics, like debating the meaning of "moderate or rapid growth" do little to change the real forces that will shape a town. The free market, community values, and economic conditions will continue to evolve, regardless of how carefully we edit a paragraph. What matters is the strategic thinking behind the words.

There was a continual theme of nostalgia or preserving what once was… I do appreciate and understand the appeal. However, that version of Whitefish no longer reflects our economic or demographic reality. Many resident comments began with how long someone has lived here, as though longevity should equal greater influence. That's not how inclusive and communities thrive. Whitefish is made up of more than one "type" of resident. Long-time locals, newcomers, seasonal workers, business owners, and second homeowners; ALL have a stake in our future; ALL our voices matter equally.

We must stop pitting groups against each other and start planning with unity, diversity, and shared purpose in mind. As I read through this draft I couldn't quite figure out what we are trying to decide…Do we want to be a wealthy residential suburb of Kalispell, known for our outdoor assets and few touristy restaurants and shops **- OR -** do we want to be a self-sustaining, vibrant, full-spectrum community with a year-round population, a working economy, and a strong sense of place?

In order to achieve the Vision Statement as outlined, this draft seems to be missing the mark on some of the biggest issues facing Whitefish's future as well as recent changes made may not reflect community sentiment as I understood from the vision sessions. It is my understanding this Growth Policy document will be used to set policy to make Whitefish livable, accessible, and economically sustainable for generations to come. However, the plan largely avoids transformational forces that will be shaping our future economy and way of life.

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI) - AI is not some distant technology. It's here now, and it is already altering how we live and work. Currently our community survives in a service-based economy, AI will profoundly impact our service industry and influence how people choose to and where to travel and shop. All over the world, we are already seeing customer service and front-line employee jobs affected by AI technology. AI is changing how consumers book travel, shop, and engage with destinations. Customized, AI-generated itineraries reduce the role of local knowledge and personal interaction. This will challenge how we manage visitor services, educate our visitors and connect our small businesses with guests, yet the Growth Policy does not include any focus on tourism management or very serious funding concerns already affecting the City's and the CVB's ability to control of the tourism economy. As someone who has invested over 3 decades in supporting communities through PROPER and BENEFICIAL tourism management, this plan leaves HUGE risks to our community as it has turned a blind eye to funding issues associated in the tourism space. Whether this town likes it or not, tourism is the #1 economic driver and ignoring it will only open Whitefish to outside influences and more disruptions.

2. Climate Change - Climate change is already impacting our region in ways that can't be denied - the below are real, tangible threats to our infrastructure, economy, and way of life. The Growth Policy should provide a proactive framework for adapting to these risks, especially considering how dependent we are on natural resources and outdoor recreation.

    a. Shortened winters and declining snowpack affect our ski season and winter economy.

    b. Intensifying wildfire seasons threaten summer tourism and public safety.

    c. Earlier runoff and lower late-season streamflow stress water supplies and summer recreation.

3. Tourism and Economic Identity - Tourism is and continues to be Whitefish's #1 economic driver. Yet the current draft, barely addresses its future or offers strategic guidance on how we

    sustain and evolve this vital sector. To omit sustainable tourism funding as a responsibility of the City of Whitefish is, quite frankly, irresponsible. If the City does not articulate a plan for managing and funding tourism in a sustainable way, Whitefish will be vulnerable to economic downturns, resident backlash, and lost opportunity. Additionally, due to the reliance on tourism and significant headwinds coming our way, innovative and alternative funding resources are going to be needed. I was surprised to see a complete disregard for any type of appetite for researching alternative funding models to sustain our city and essential services. For example, the idea presented around the possibility of paid seasonal parking was completely shut down. This reminded me of what we now know as the short-sightedness decision by our community in voting against the construction of a bypass which would have helped remove traffic congestion caused by commercial vehicles from our downtown corridor. I sincerely do not understand the risk of

investing in research…looking in the rear-view mirror for path forward is completely counter intuitive and restricts growth.

Thank you again for your service and dedication to our community. I deeply respect the complexity of this work, and I hope my perspectives can contribute in some sort of a meaningfully way ahead.

Sincerely,
Julie Mullins

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 11:18 AM
To: Dwayne Alcove
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Community Development Board

Hi Dwayne,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Dwayne Alcove **Sent:** Saturday, May 31, 2025 5:38 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Community Development Board

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1. Why is a special interest group writing the growth policy for the entire city of Whitefish? Rhonda and Chris are clearly motivated by financial gain and want to throttle any new competition that comes in to threaten their business interests. We need to do what the community desires, which was said at the visioning sessions. At this point the council may need to consider removing some of the members due to incompetence and flagrant disregard for public input.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 11:24 AM
To: Marti Brandt
Cc: Michelle Howke
Subject: RE: Question on Final Draft Version
Attachments: CDB Approved Econ Dev Element.pdf

Hi Marti,

The draft that went out to all the engagewhitefish subscribers was the initial draft written by staff.

As you already know, when we brought that same draft to the Community Development Board on May 21, 2025, it was replaced by a draft submitted by Heart of Whitefish. That was the draft the Board approved.

That draft has not been posted on the website yet, because it was not the draft initially sent out for public review, and we anticipate a great deal of discussion about it at the Council work session tonight. I am scheduled to give a general update regarding the growth policy tonight, and we have received so many comments regarding the May 21 work session, that it is one of the topics that I will discuss tonight. Depending on what happens at the Council tonight, I will be sending out a newsletter alert tomorrow about what happens. The Council is the ultimate decision maker, so they may give direction to staff or the Board (or both) tonight.

I have attached the draft that was approved by the Board (not submitted by staff).

Thank you for the kind words and all the correspondence.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Marti Brandt <mynameismarilyn@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 11:10 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Question on Final Draft Version

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Hi Alan,

This is Marti, same person who's been submitting all kinds of comments on the economic portion of the growth policy.

I have a quick question and I'm hoping you might be able to help. I checked the City Council packet for tonight and I'm still a bit confused on the economic element draft that was approved.

I know that this is the version in the CDB's agenda. I'm just confused because when I looked at the Engage Whitefish links that were emailed 5/2 I didn't see that draft. To clarify, my friend and I looked at the links I think over the course of 5/19-5/20. We clicked the first link (Completed Economic Development Element) and read through the original draft (I think on 5/19) and then on 5/20 we looked at the Heart of WF revisions. I believe that we started to access those through the "comments on this element to date and staff's responses" link (#2 in the email) and then noticed that the Heart of Whitefish version was included in the first link so viewed it there. But I don't think we saw this final version (what I'm calling version #3) at this time.

I guess I'm just wondering if you have a timeline on when that final approved draft (version 3) was added and to which link it was added.

Also, I hope my follow-up email to council clarified that I really don't think any of this confusion with document drafts is your team's fault. I hope that all of us can better support you and for future sections I would like to prevent these extensive revisions from being sent because they just (by nature) complicate the process. And I appreciate all the work you've done adding this information (and there's so much of it!) to try and make this process as transparent as possible.

Thank you again for all of your hard work on this and for taking time for this very specific question.

Best,
Marti

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 11:09 AM
To: Susan Schnee
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Economic Development Chapter letter to city council

Hi Susan,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Susan Schnee
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 10:51 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: FW: Economic Development Chapter letter to city council

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From: Susan Schnee <schnee@aboutmontana.net>
Sent: Friday, May 9, 2025 1:46 PM
To: 'atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov' <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Economic Development Chapter

To Whitefish City Council Members:

As a business owner downtown for over 25 years I have very real concerns about the following issues.

The following goals and objectives in the draft chapter are of special concern to downtown businesses.

Issue:
Goal 1 Objective d.
Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving
goods and services near local population centers.

Requested Action:
Request the removal of this objective. Given that only the planning administrator will have discretion to permit uses in a specific zone, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both of which would be harmful to our downtown business district. For example, this objective would pave the way to allow uses similar to those that are currently allowed only in our downtown business district to be allowed in the WB-2 Hwy 93 S. zone, and potentially in residential neighborhoods.

For years we have kept the downtown district healthy by not allowing strip development or sprawl. I cannot understand why permitting sprawl is even under consideration. Who's to gain here, developers? Why not pay more attention to updating zoning to prevent any more CBD stores in areas that are not permitted for marijuana, as an example.

Issue: Goal 2 Objective j.

Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood serving light
commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas.

Requested Action:

Request removal of this objective. Neighbors have always fought commercial uses in their neighborhoods.
Without Conditional Use Permits (CUPs), which we understand will no longer be a planning tool and to date have given residents the opportunity to oppose such proposals, these uses would be by
right. Residential Neighborhood streets that could be re-zoned to allow commercial are Columbia Ave, East and West Seventh Street, Pine Ave, Armory Rd, portions of Karrow Ave, Denver Ave. and Texas Ave.

I really oppose allowing commercial in residential areas. Again, what's the point? Why is this even being considered? Who benefits other than developers.

Issue:

Goal 3 Objective e.
Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over
and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new
public parking lots, and/or public transit.

Requested Action:

Request removal of this objective to pursue paid parking in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking will
dissuade shoppers from shopping in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking would also encourage

shoppers to take more vehicle trips to other communities and other commercial areas in Whitefish, where there is no paid parking. The
economic playing field is not level if only downtown Whitefish requires shoppers to pay for parking. Recently enacted ordinances and the Employee Parking Permit Program are already addressing parking turn-over in our downtown.

Being downtown for over 25 years I fully support the current timed parking with leases available for employees/owners. I don't see logic behind this. It will not increase turnover or availability. It will just burden the business owners, employees and the locals who shop downtown and support our small businesses. Try creating revenue by taxing short term rentals instead of shoppers supporting our local businesses. Add an extra tax on short term rentals for parking infrastructure revenue as they just exacerbate our parking situation downtown.

Thanks for letting me comment and I would have probably done a better job if I hadn't just noticed that this needed to be in by 1pm today!
I was unable to attend the planning sessions or I would have voiced these concerns at that time. I did send a letter to Alan for the meeting in May.

Thanks for your time and service to our community.

Susan Schnee
[redacted] **Central Ave**
Whitefish, MT 59937
[redacted]

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Zak Anderson <zak@explorewhitefish.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2025 12:50 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Daniel Sidder
Subject: Re: Economic Development Input from the Convention and Visitors Bureau

Alan - I need to clear up a mistake that I made regarding a rent statistic that I quoted from Daniel Sidder. In the second paragraph of the Tourism Related Impact section I oversimplified the math from the article below and I should have checked with Daniel before I included. I have recently spoken with Daniel; cleared things up and apologized. I would like to clear up that language in the draft of the econ development if possible .

Incorrect sentence: *According to Daniel Sidder, Executive Director of Housing Whitefish, the average monthly rent per person for rental assistance applicants was $800, offering a more accurate picture of the cost of living for working residents.*

Correct information: *As of October 2024, the program was providing an average monthly rental assistance payment of $316 for those enrolled. Those people were paying an average of $1,657 a month for rent on an average household income of $46,523.*

Source: https://flatheadbeacon.com/2024/10/29/single-parent-households-make-up-almost-half-of-whitefish-workforce-rental-assistance-program-approvals/

Also, I wanted to thank you for your hard work on the plan and let you know that my aim was to provide some updated tourism information that would help inform the master plan.

If you have any questions, comments, etc please reach out.

Thanks again.

-Zak

--

Zak Anderson
Executive Director
Explore Whitefish
Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau
Email zak@explorewhitefish.com
Phone 406-862-3390
Visit Us At Explorewhitefish.com

On Mon, May 12, 2025 at 8:17 AM Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:

Thank you Zak.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner

City of Whitefish

418 E. 2nd Street

P.O. Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Zak Anderson <zak@explorewhitefish.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 8, 2025 10:07 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Economic Development Input from the Convention and Visitors Bureau

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Alan - Attached is an updated draft of the two sections on tourism within the Economic Development Plan. I've revised the content to reflect the most current data on market trends, public sentiment, and the economic impact of the visitor economy in Whitefish. In addition, I've added context to better illustrate the connection between tourism and broader economic development efforts.

In short, I believe it's important that the Growth Policy recognizes tourism as a vital component of our community's economic health—and as an asset that can be strategically leveraged to support economic diversification. Rather than framing economic growth and tourism as competing forces, I suggest viewing them through the lens of mutual benefit.

Please let me know if you have any feedback or suggested changes and thank you for all the hard work on the Growth Policy.

-Zak

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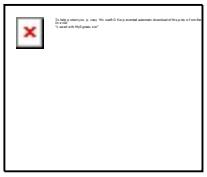

Zak Anderson
Executive Director
Explore Whitefish
Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau
Email zak@explorewhitefish.com
Phone 406-862-3390
Visit Us At Explorewhitefish.com

6/1/2025

To whom it may concern,

My name is Sandi Crow, and I am an on again/off again longtime Whitefish resident & local. I have watched this town grow, expand and unfortunately- cater to those who have way more money and clout than the average working local over the last dozen years, and it is absolutely frustrating to see those with all the money and privilege constantly win out over those of us who are the moving heartbeat of the community.

I attended a portion of the late May work session regarding the economic growth policy, and I felt that the conversation was dominated by voices of those that are scared of meaningful and impactful change in the community. The town is growing, it is likely going to keep growing whether ANY of us like it or not, and would not it be better to truly work together, and let everyone have a voice at the table as opposed to just a select few who think they need to yell a little louder?

I love our downtown, but the sad fact is- Aside from Flathead Industries (one of my favorites), I can hardly afford to spend anything because of my tight finances. Prior to Covid, we had a couple consignment stores that were actually affordable. We had the Stumptown Marketplace with a nice spot for folks to really meet and mingle. All of that, gone. Priced out. Nowadays, even making decent money at my job, and living within my means as best I can, my budget runs more in line with the Dollar Tree near my apartment. Even Markus Foods is barely affordable for many of us now. And on yet another side of this, I have friends who live locally in the Valley who will not come into Whitefish because they feel it is so outrageously priced and caters more to the tourists with money than the locals. (Especially to ski, play in the mountain on the summer, eat out or do things like the Stumptown Art Studio for example. They'd rather go elsewhere).

It would be wonderful if there could be some mall space converted to say, something like the former Shopko Hometown, to help folks who live in town avoid having to drive to Kalispell for necessities not sold at the grocery stores or Dollar Tree (which, I am told- might close if their sales do not pick up). Not another boutique, not another high end clothing store, not another tourist attraction. Not necessarily a free standing box store, but something with a variety to actually help out the community members. Especially the ones who do not have reliable access to transportation.

Myself, and so many others choose to live here because we truly love the community. We're invested. And because of those things, for the most part- we're willing to put in what effort we can to help tackle these challenges that arise. I am absolutely not in favor of "Aspen-ing" Whitefish, but I am VERY in support of making it more diverse for the diverse cast of people living, working and surviving/thriving here.

I understand that there is no easy, or one size fits all answer for this very large question, and a broken crystal ball to boot, but I truly think that the more the working class community members feel they have a voice in the matter, the more we can come up with solutions that will keep everyone happy.

Thank you,
Sandi Crow

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 8:23 AM
To: Jeanne Langan
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Comment for WF Community Development Board decision

Hi Jeanne,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cityofwhitefish.gov%2F&data=05%7C02%7Catiefenbach%40cityofwhitefish.gov%7Ce6ddae9133fa4f8bf23f08dda1e0eefb%7C3c4380ae5af243c9b8edd34b6ce09d2b%7C0%7C0%7C638844709637004559%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=vJyzhjd1RRCv9QTouaEjrBFf6go5kXis2Ih2%2B47%2BcQA%3D&reserved=0. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

-----Original Message-----
From: Jeanne Langan
Sent: Saturday, May 31, 2025 7:59 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Comment for WF Community Development Board decision

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Hello,

I am writing to comment on the recent decision by the Whitefish Community Development Board to adopt policies proposed by a special interest group in direct opposition to public input. As someone who has contributed to many of the public opinion surveys in this process, it's incredible that this was allowed to happen. The care and effort to include as much of the community as possible in this process are/were genuinely admirable, and the Board's capitulation to a small group of unnamed businesses owners is disheartening and gross. Many people's ability to stay living in this area depends on both the decisions of this Board AND working a job that doesn't allow them to attend in person meetings. The most actionable request I have would be that the Board reconsider any decision to rewrite/adopt policy contradicting broad public opinion, and make it explicitly clear that they continue to value **all** input in the future of our community. Including the hundreds of us working jobs that people, especially tourists, spend their evenings and weekends patronizing.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 8:26 AM
To: Cassie Roberts
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Community Development Board Concerns

Hi Cassie,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Cassie Roberts <> **Sent:** Friday, May 30, 2025 5:40 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Community Development Board Concerns

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Greetings Whitefish City Council,

I am writing as a concerned citizen and renter in Whitefish about the recent developments within the community development board. As I'm sure you know, this board spent time crafting a 20-year growth plan. As part of this, they surveyed the community, myself included, and each community member took time to give honest responses and feedback. However, it has come to my attention that a special interest group called Heart of Whitefish has been able to make edits to the growth plan that have been approved by the community development board. Despite these comments being in direct contrast with the community's interest. This interest group made edits lowering the median rent 860 a number that any renter in Whitefish will tell you is wildly inaccurate. They also erased many of the requests that were added specifically off of surveyed community interest.

There are very real consequences to prioritizing the interests and motives of this group over the citizens of Whitefish. On the surface this board is breaking the communities trust by erasing their opinions, but on a deeper level this shows who is really in charge of the future of Whitefish. I've only lived here two years but even I know that it's not shady special interest groups that make up the true "Heart of Whitefish" it's the people (many of them renters) who show up every day working hard to make Whitefish a friendly place to live. Please make sure that their opinions and needs are heard.

Thank you,

Cassie Roberts

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Friday, May 30, 2025 10:22 AM
To: Marijke Stob
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: Regarding the economic development chapter

Hi Marijke,

Thank you for your comment. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great weekend!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Marijke Stob <marijke.jane7@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, May 30, 2025 9:34 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Regarding the economic development chapter

You don't often get email from marijke.jane7@gmail.com. Learn why this is important

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Dear City Council and Whitefish Community Development Board,

I watched the most recent Community Development Board meeting and was disappointed to find that the committee blatantly disregarded the staff recommendations and public perspective for the economic development chapter. I have never heard of Heart of Whitefish and while I understand they do a lot of vague things to improve and raise the quality of Whitefish, I believe their edits to this draft are extremely narrow and lack imagination.

I am a small business owner in Whitefish. I provide sewing services to folks from all over the valley and to quite a few tourists as well. Because I offer a niche service, folks from bigfork, lakeside, eureka, libby etc, make plans to travel to whitefish to drop their stuff off and maybe grab some lunch or hit some shops

they may never aim to go to if they didn't have to stop in Whitefish. I mean, why would they come to whitefish when it only caters to tourists?

Why would we limit ourselves to only a tourism focused economy?! If we allow for a wider range of commercial zoning, we could not only help residents from our own town access specialized goods and services but all of our businesses could be making more money from people next door.

I should also mention that many of my Whitefish customers express that they are thrilled they do not have to drive anywhere for the service I provide. Let's be honest, we all know that highway 93 to kalispell is absolutely abhorrent to drive and becoming increasingly dangerous. Should I go on?

Most importantly, I have been trying to participate in all of the community discussions for the Growth Policy and this most recent decision by the community development board makes me wonder why I even try. Their disregard of public input is why people do not participate in city government and I believe we need to address it.

Thank you for taking the time to read my email,
Marijke Stob

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Friday, May 30, 2025 9:23 AM
To: Richard Gomez
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: Community development board

Hi Rick,

Thank you for your comment. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great weekend!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Richard Gomez <richard.gomez.77912@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2025 9:02 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Community development board

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Good Morning,

I am incredibly disappointed by the actions of the community development board...i do not know why they are allowed to not adhere to what the public said and instead write financial favors to a local special interest group...maybe it's time for council to intervene and shake up who is on the board...

Best Regards

Rick Gomez

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Rhonda Fitzgerald <rhonda@gardenwallinn.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 5:50 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; Daniel Sidder; Whitney Beckham
Subject: Econ Dev chapter

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Hi Alan,
Since the last meeting of the Community Development Board I have had some additional conversation with Daniel Sidder, the Director of Housing Whitefish. He had originally given me an estimate of the average monthly rent per person in Whitefish, as $800 per month. In our subsequent conversations he would prefer that the sentence: "the average monthly rent per person for rental assistance applicants was $800" be replaced with "based on data collected from the Workforce Rental Assistance Program applications, applicants are paying on average $1,200 for a studio , $1,267 for a one-bedroom, $1,707 for a two-bedroom, $2,038 for a three-bedroom and $2,728 for a four-bedroom in the spring of 2025.
I think most people can do the math and conclude that two people in a one-bedroom are paying $600 per month each, two people in a two-bedroom are paying $850 each, three people in a three-bedroom are paying $680 each, etc."
Per Daniel, in the Housing World, they look at household size and income to determine what is affordable rent, not what rent would be per person in the household.He would prefer to stick to the contract rent and number of bedrooms as most accurate, rather than trying to figure out "rent per person".
Apparently you have received a number of comments regarding this subject. I think it would be best to change the language to Daniel's preferred sentence.
Thank you,
Rhonda Fitzgerald

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Giuseppe Caltabiano
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 3:12 PM
To: Michelle Howke
Cc: John Muhlfeld; Angela Jacobs; Dana Smith; Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor
Subject: Urgent Request to Reaffirm the Legal and Collaborative Framework for Whitefish's Growth Policy

(Michelle, could you kindly forward to each member of the WCDB, cc-ing me since I cannot seem to find good email addresses?)
———-

Dear Mayor Muhlfeld, City Staff, and Members of the Community Development Board,

I write as both a City Councilor and a concerned citizen to express my deep unease regarding the current trajectory of our growth policy development process.

Recent actions by some members of the Community Development Board, specifically the submission of independently drafted chapters to replace staff-prepared material, and the board's 4-2 vote to proceed with those drafts, represent a troubling departure from both the legal intent and collaborative spirit outlined in Montana law.

As detailed in MCA 76-1-601 and clarified in the Montana Planning Board Member Handbook, it is the responsibility of qualified staff or consultants to research, write, and draft the growth policy based on data, community engagement, and technical expertise. The role of the Community Development Board is to serve as a deliberative, advisory body: reviewing these drafts, participating in public hearings, and ultimately making recommendations to the City Council.

By asserting a primary authorship role, the board risks undermining the credibility of the process, the objectivity of the data, and the morale of the very staff entrusted with this critical work. This is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of legal structure, good governance, and public trust.

I respectfully urge:

- **That the Mayor and City Manager reaffirm the respective roles of staff and the Community Development Board in this process;**
- **That the Board reconsider its approach to ensure collaborative, evidence-based development of the growth policy;**
- **And that we restore procedural integrity so this policy reflects both professional standards and the community's best interests.**

Our growth policy will shape Whitefish for decades to come. It must be built on a foundation of expertise, factual data, transparency, and respect for process.

Sincerely,

Giuseppe Caltabiano

———-

Giuseppe GMan Caltabiano - City Councilor 2022-2025

gcaltabiano@cityofwhitefish.org

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Daniel Sidder <daniel@housingwhitefish.org>
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 2:02 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Growth Policy - Economic Development Section

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Alan,

In reviewing the recently adopted section of the Economic Development Section by the Whitefish Community Development Board, Housing Whitefish is referenced.

The section states:

> It is also difficult to attract workers willing to commute from nearby communities for relatively low wages. As a result, businesses are hesitant to locate in areas with limited access to employees. Recent efforts by Housing Whitefish—a local nonprofit that provides workforce housing assistance—have aimed to reduce rents for qualified applicants. According to Daniel Sidder, Executive Director of Housing Whitefish, the average monthly rent per person for rental assistance applicants was $800, offering a more accurate picture of the cost of living for working residents.

I appreciate that my name has been taken out of this section, and I would like to clarify the $800/month figure is not correct and is not something that Housing Whitefish has published. In talking with the author of the section, it appears it was an honest mistake and said they would follow-up with you for a correction. If the board feels like this is an important figure to include, I'd appreciate it if our data was accurately represented.

It is wordier, but I think the best way to present this is to say, "based on data collected from the Whitefish Workforce Rental Assistance Program applications, applicants are paying on average $1,200 for a studio, $1,267 for a one-bedroom, $1,707 or two-bedroom, $2,038 for a three bedroom, and $2,728 for a four bedroom in the Winter of 2025."

Here is the data through February. I haven't cleaned the data in a few months but can get you updated numbers if you'd like.

Average Price Studio	Average Price 1bd	Average Price 2b	Average Price 3bd	Average Price 4bd
$1,200 (n=1)	$1,267 (n=22)	$1,707 (n=38)	$2,038 (n=19)	$2,728 (n=4)

Best,
Daniel

HOUSING WHITEFISH

Daniel Sidder
Executive Director, Housing Whitefish
Phone 406-318-6890
Web www.housingwhitefish.org
Email daniel@housingwhitefish.org
PO Box 4421, Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 8:50 AM
To: Natalie Wright
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Whitefish Community Development Plan

Good morning,

Thank you. Your letter will be on the agenda for Monday, June 2nd under Communications from Mayor, and City Council. You can speak towards your letter at the beginning of the meeting under Communications from the Public. Once the packet has been published, I will email the agenda to you.

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Natalie Wright **Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 9:28 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Whitefish Community Development Plan

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Whitefish City Council,

My name is Natalie Wright, I live within Whitefish city limits, and I am representing only myself as a private citizen with this comment.

I am writing to express concerns about what took place at the last Community Development Board meeting, specifically the board's adoption of edits from the Heart of Whitefish in the economic development plan.

A diversified economy that relies less on the tourism industry and an increased development of housing to support our workforce would strengthen our local economy and ultimately make it more sustainable for the long-run. If there is a dip in regional tourism, our local economy would suffer and it doesn't seem responsible to pigeon-hole ourselves into one industry. There is undeniably a housing shortage problem in Whitefish that drives up prices and deters people from residing here or accepting work here in the first place. This leaves fewer people contributing to local businesses that are not geared towards tourists, and fewer businesses orienting themselves towards the people who live here because of that.

As a citizen of Whitefish, I would appreciate more local goods and services, and not gift shops. I would support higher density housing so that people can both work and live in Whitefish. There are many benefits to Whitefish's tourism, but relying on it entirely has its downfalls and stifles this town in other ways. Whatever the Heart of Whitefish's special interests are, they are out of touch with what the people who live in Whitefish actually want and have communicated to the Community Development Board. I respectfully ask that you put greater stock in what matters to Whitefish's residents, reconsider that vote, and prioritize what is best for our *community*, not just the visitors.

All the best,
Natalie

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Marti Brandt <
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 7:15 AM
To: Michelle Howke
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: Re: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting

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Hi Michelle,

I know that this comment won't make it to the public packet and that's OK. Could you please tell council that more information has been added to the Engage Whitefish link so my citations with page numbers are off? Yesterday it was a 135 page document and now it's 151.

Thanks!

Best,
Marti

On Tue, May 27, 2025 at 2:36 PM Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:

> Thanks Marti. I will include this with your comments.
>
> Michelle
>
> ---
>
> **From:** Marti Brandt
> **Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 3:32 PM
> **To:** Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
> **Cc:** Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>; David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Dana Smith <dsmith@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Angela Jacobs <ajacobs@cityofwhitefish.gov>
> **Subject:** Re: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting
>
> Hi Michelle,
>
> Sorry just one more note to include if possible, knowing that Alan will be present. I just want to say that I think Alan has done a really amazing job collecting information, organizing massive amounts of detailed edits, and handling feedback.

From: Marti Brandt **Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 1:08 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting

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Hi Michelle,

Would

you mind passing along the following letter to our council?

Thank

you!

Best,

Marti

Brandt

Dear

Whitefish City Council,

I

attended our Community Development Board's work session on May 21. I have a few questions and concerns about that meeting. There was no council member present so I didn't feel there was someone to whom I could direct these questions. In addition, our city

has a knowledgeable staff to provide answers.

I

wrote this letter over the weekend and must finalize before I work Tuesday–the deadline for commenting. The YouTube link to the May 21 meeting hasn't been uploaded as of this writing. I would like to reference the meeting video, exact language and times but

unfortunately I can't. I have tried to include as much additional verified information as possible.

For

background, the Economic Element of the growth policy was written by city staff. One nonprofit—that was one of 17 stakeholders in the original data collection—then rewrote the element.

In

the meeting, it was not clear beforehand that the board would vote on one draft versus another—choose version A or version B—instead of reviewing these edits section by section, including staff's feedback. There is an ethical issue with entirely approving

one stakeholder's draft, to the point that board members refer to it as this stakeholder's version. This language was used when approving and is also used by member Jon Heberling in his emailed public comment–page 59 in the Engage Whitefish public link.

I

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stakeholders who were contacted to review the economic element, 2 approved, 13 didn't reply. One made these extensive revisions and Explore Whitefish submitted revisions later. The 1/2 who approved went unmentioned until I asked this question. The Montana

Department of Commerce also approved–with small changes–of the original plan (84). Because they didn't offer extensive edits, these perspectives weren't the focus of the meeting but their approval should be considered.

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there were so many edits made to this document, I believe the board received its most up-to-date version as a paper copy distributed right before the meeting started. They were reassured that this draft contained minor changes but ultimately there wasn't time

for the board to read this draft. Personally, I reviewed the links with drafts the afternoon before the meeting, and didn't see a document with the Housing Whitefish Director's name, which was referenced during the meeting. Reviewing the document link now,

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When

one group rewrites policy and staff must respond or revise with new drafts or comments, this process becomes disorganized and consequently less transparent. By setting the precedent that stakeholders and community groups can rewrite the growth policy, more

contentious sections might take months to finalize. Imagine how many groups might want to rewrite the land use policy.

I

request the following:

-Due

to transparency issues from the May 21 meeting and the board's decision to approve—in its entirety—one group's version of our economic growth policy, our council should revisit the decisions made in this meeting and personally re-conduct this work session.

Sections should be discussed before approval. This might result in the same outcome, but it would offer transparency.

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from the phrase “tourist traffic” (68)? A general explanation is insufficient. This would protect the groups writing edits, as well, preventing speculation about motivations.

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order to prevent an incredible volume of drafts and revisions, like-minded groups should collaborate to make their changes. Editing groups could be focused by interest and perspective: tourism, finance, affordability, etc. This would also provide transparency

by demonstrating that similar groups don’t represent a diverse coalition. A group’s approval of the policy, as is, should be recorded and considered by the board and public.

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offer these as ideas. I am certain that we need guidelines and perhaps Alan and council can brainstorm what those might be.

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also ask that our city staff clarify one point because I believe it is critical to our understanding of the growth policy process.

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the May 21 meeting there was discussion on whether—per the Montana Land Use Planning Act—our growth policy document will commit our city to pursuing the projects mentioned therein. Is the growth policy a vision document or a binding agreement? How much flexibility

will our citizens and city council have when a suggestion is made in the growth policy? For example will residents still be able to oppose developments if these ideas are suggested in the policy? I think this is a critical issue for our Community Development

Board to consider. I would like for our council or staff to clarify because it seems that board members have a difference in understanding. Guidance—and perhaps some suggestions on sections for reference—would be helpful.

Thank

you for reading this very long letter and for your attention.

Best,

Marti

Brandt

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 4:07 PM
To: Colton Little
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Request for Urgent Council Action: Restore Public Integrity in Growth Policy Process

Hi Colton,

Thank you. Your letter will be on the agenda for Monday, June 2nd under Communications from Mayor, and City Council. You can speak towards your letter at the beginning of the meeting under Communications from the Public. Once the packet has been published, I will email the agenda to you.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Colton Little
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 3:57 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Request for Urgent Council Action: Restore Public Integrity in Growth Policy Process

You don't often get email from Learn why this is important

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Members of the Whitefish City Council,

My name is Colton Little. I am a local student and community member, currently serving on FVCC Student Government and representing my peers through civic advocacy. I also serve on the Flathead County Transportation Advisory Committee, and I'm deeply engaged in work promoting affordable housing, equitable development, and meaningful democracy in our area.

I am writing to express my deep concern over troubling information about the recent approval of edits to the Economic Development chapter of Whitefish's 20-year Growth Policy. Specifically, I urge the City Council to immediately review and address the Community Development Board's decision to adopt wholesale the recommendations of Heart of Whitefish, which is a private special interest group with no transparency or public accountability.

As it stands, this board's decision disregards a wealth of authentic, community-driven feedback and undermines the inclusive planning process that this document is supposed to reflect. To mention some of the line item issues, the edits or information promoted by Heart of Whitefish:

1. Falsely state that the median rent in Whitefish is $860/month, in addition to being false, this is a number that does not reflect the reality faced by most residents. This is a harmful misrepresentation, especially when applied to students, low-income families, and working-class individuals;

2. Remove accurate and necessary references to the low-wage nature of tourism jobs, thereby sanitizing the harsh economic conditions that many locals must navigate. This includes the increasing number of those who must commute from neighboring cities to work;

3. Eliminate widely supported goals from the public input process, including:

• Creation of more non-tourism-based jobs;

• Improved access to essential goods and services within Whitefish, reducing dependency on Kalispell;

• Permission for neighborhood-serving small businesses, like coffee shops and bakeries, in residential zones, which promote walkability and community resilience.

To allow a single special interest group to erase these priorities is not only inequitable, but more so, it is structurally unjust and deeply damaging to civic trust. As a member of the rising generation in Flathead County, I have spoken with many students, renters, and first-time workers who feel their futures here are increasingly precarious. That sense of instability is only worsened when participatory processes are overridden by private influence.

What is particularly alarming is that Heart of Whitefish has no website, no accessible records, no disclosed leadership, and no mission statement available to the public. This lack of transparency stands in stark contrast to the community members who showed up, participated in good faith, and shared their lived experiences during public engagement sessions.

The appearance of undue influence and conflict of interest in this process demands swift, corrective action. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Council:

1. Place this issue on the agenda for the next public City Council meeting;

2. Direct the Community Development Board to re-engage in a transparent, public review of the Economic Development chapter, that includes representation from across the community, not just a private business consortium;

3. Formally require disclosure from Heart of Whitefish regarding its leadership, funding, and stated mission so the public may evaluate its role in policymaking.

Public Office is a Public Trust. As a student advocate, transportation committee member, and pro-democracy organizer, I urge you to defend the integrity of this process and reaffirm your commitment to the public you serve. This is not only about one chapter. It's a question of ethics about whether our city's long-term vision reflects all of us, or just a privileged few.

Thank you for your time, your public service, and your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Colton K. Little

Flathead County

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 3:36 PM
To: Marti Brandt
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting

Thanks Marti. I will include this with your comments.

Michelle

From: Marti Brandt <mynameismarilyn@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 3:32 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>; David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Dana Smith <dsmith@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Angela Jacobs <ajacobs@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Re: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting

Hi Michelle,

Sorry just one more note to include if possible, knowing that Alan will be present. I just want to say that I think Alan has done a really amazing job collecting information, organizing massive amounts of detailed edits, and handling feedback.

I hope that my comment isn't taken as criticism of what he's accomplished. I hope we can better support him. He deserves our thanks and probably a raise but I know that's not part of this discussion.

Best,
Marti

On Tue, May 27, 2025 at 1:29 PM Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:

> Hi Marti,
>
> Thank you for your comments. Alan will be updating the City Council on the growth policy during the work session on June 2nd. Your letter will be included in the packet.
>
> Michelle Howke
>
> Administrative Services Director/City Clerk

PO Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

(406)863-2402

mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Marti Brandt **Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 1:08 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting

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Hi Michelle,

Would

you mind passing along the following letter to our council?

Thank

you!

Best,

Marti

Brandt

Dear

Whitefish City Council,

I

attended our Community Development Board's work session on May 21. I have a few questions and concerns about that meeting. There was no council member present so I didn't feel there was someone to whom I could direct these questions. In addition, our city

has a knowledgeable staff to provide answers.

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wrote this letter over the weekend and must finalize before I work Tuesday–the deadline for commenting. The YouTube link to the May 21 meeting hasn't been uploaded as of this writing. I would like to reference the meeting video, exact language and times but

unfortunately I can't. I have tried to include as much additional verified information as possible.

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background, the Economic Element of the growth policy was written by city staff. One nonprofit—that was one of 17 stakeholders in the original data collection—then rewrote the element.

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Thank

you for reading this very long letter and for your attention.

Best,

Marti

Brandt

[redacted]

Armory Road

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 2:07 PM
To: Lena Camero
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Public Comment Regarding the Community Development Board's Recent Draft Adoption

Hi Lena,

Thank you for your comments. Alan will be updating the City Council on the growth policy during the work session on June 2nd. Your letter will be included in the packet.

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Lena Camero <
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 1:40 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Public Comment Regarding the Community Development Board's Recent Draft Adoption

You don't often get email from

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hello,

My name is Lena Camero, and I am submitting this comment to express deep concern over the Community Development Board's decision to adopt edits from Heart of Whitefish, a special interest group with a financial incentive to shape local policy in its favor. Their revisions contradict input from over 250 residents gathered during prior visioning sessions and create a clear conflict of interest by allowing existing businesses to rewrite the economic development chapter to serve themselves. Heart of Whitefish operates with little transparency, lacking a public website, board member information, or a clear mission statement. This is not how an open and inclusive process should function.

Many of the group's edits misrepresent reality, such as falsely claiming the median per-capita rent is $860, inflating visitor spending figures, and suggesting unaffordable housing "may be reversing" despite no supporting evidence. They also removed language acknowledging that tourism jobs tend to be low-paying, dismissed concerns about rising land costs, and deleted staff-backed statements about the lack of available goods and services in town, instead blaming consumers. Additionally, they censored references to the negative effects of a tourism-based economy, despite it being a well-documented issue.

It is clear that these changes, which again did not come from the community at large, are economically imbalanced, relying too heavily on tourism while pushing workers to live elsewhere due to unlivable wages and skyrocketing housing costs. This is not sustainable. We do not need more high-priced lodging—we need commercial spaces that support well-paying jobs beyond tourism.

I urge the council to ANNUL the vote, do their jobs and ensure that voices beyond those of wealthy business owners are heard. The board members who approved these edits have failed to critically assess their impact, and stronger oversight is necessary to prevent a process dominated by financial self-interest.

Lena Camero

Ua Mau ke Ea o ka ʻĀina i ka Pono

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 1:29 PM
To: Jill Davis
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Whitefish Community Development

Hi Jill,

Thank you for your comments. Alan Tiefenbach will be updating the City Council on the growth policy during the work session on June 2nd. Your letter will be included in the packet.

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Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
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From: Jill Davis **Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 1:04 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Whitefish Community Development

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hello.

My name is Jill Davis. I work in Whitefish year round, but live in Kalispell because the cost of housing is too high in Whitefish.

I am frustrated and disheartened by what happened at the last Community Development Board meeting. I couldn't believe the board voted to adopt edits from the Heart of Whitefish, a local special interest group with a financial incentive to promote anti-competitive local policies. Many of us in the community spent our time and effort to give input to the growth plan. I feel that the Heart of Whitefish's edits are not respecting and utilizing the input from the community. I feel the voices of the wealthy and powerful are being given more weight than the average, hard working community member who lives and/or works in Whitefish.

To borrow the words of a friend who is also concerned about these edits:

'The economic development chapter should concern existing and future businesses, and allowing a special interest group consisting of existing businesses to rewrite the draft of that chapter presents a clear conflict of interest. Many of the edits that Heart of Whitefish provided run counter to what the community said in visioning sessions. Examples of this from the last meeting include:

- Removing language that points out that tourism jobs are lower paying, which is empirically true and was mentioned at visioning sessions from the public;
- Cites "overwhelming sentiment" of community members despite actively going against what locals stated they wanted for our town at visioning sessions and providing no data to back their claim up;
- Removing language that correctly points out the negative effects of a low-wage, tourism-based economy, which is a clear conflict of interest and borderline unethical, especially for a tax-exempt 501(c)3;
- Censoring the language that points out that rising land costs are an obstacle for local businesses;
- Removing language about the lack of available goods and services within town, which staff recommended against and cited frequent public comment about in visioning sessions and blaming consumers for this;
- Not allowing commercial uses in residential neighborhoods without a conditional use permit, which staff recommended against and cited high public input about allowing certain businesses in residential neighborhoods;
- Citing the median rent as $860, which is empirically false;
- Saying that the trend of unaffordable housing "may be reversing" with no evidence to back that claim up;
- Citing the downtown business district master plan as the reason for downtown being vibrant, while failing to demonstrate causality on their claim;'

Contrary to Heart of Whitefish's claims, the town of Whitefish has become more limited when it comes to our local economy. Over 75% of workers do not live within our city limits, including myself. We are NOT a town where people live and work. We are a town where people work low-wage tourism jobs and get kicked to Kalispell. **It is very shortsighted to base our town's economy on the activity that most Americans cut from their budgets when the economy takes a downturn.** We **do not need** another overpriced bed and breakfast - we need more commercial real estate for higher paying work in fields that are not tourism-based.

I am asking the council to undo the vote that was done at the last meeting and allow for other groups to provide their input, as well as for comments from the visioning sessions and staff recommendations to be taken more seriously. **I do not believe that the members of the board who voted to approve these edits are acting in the best long-term interest of our community, and I question their impartiality.** I implore the council to **provide more direct oversight of this board to ensure ALL of our voices are being heard, and not solely wealthy local business owners who benefit from higher prices and lower wages.**

Thank you for considering my comment.

Sincerely,
Jill Davis

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 1:30 PM
To: Marti Brandt
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Letter For Council Regarding May 21 Meeting

Hi Marti,

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request the following:

-Due

to transparency issues from the May 21 meeting and the board's decision to approve—in its entirety—one group's version of our economic growth policy, our council should revisit the decisions made in this meeting and personally re-conduct this work session.

Sections should be discussed before approval. This might result in the same outcome, but it would offer transparency.

-Any

group or person, for this and future edits, should provide justification for every individual change made directly to the policy and sources for data changes. For example, why do we need to change "tourism economy" to "community"? Why remove the word "tourist"

from the phrase "tourist traffic" (68)? A general explanation is insufficient. This would protect the groups writing edits, as well, preventing speculation about motivations.

-There

should be a window of time in which edits can be requested or made. This would allow time for revised drafts to be uploaded to the website and be viewed by the community and board. Draft uploads should be timestamped and their authors stated clearly at the

top.

-In

order to prevent an incredible volume of drafts and revisions, like-minded groups should collaborate to make their changes. Editing groups could be focused by interest and perspective: tourism, finance, affordability, etc. This would also provide transparency

by demonstrating that similar groups don't represent a diverse coalition. A group's approval of the policy, as is, should be recorded and considered by the board and public.

I

offer these as ideas. I am certain that we need guidelines and perhaps Alan and council can brainstorm what those might be.

I

also ask that our city staff clarify one point because I believe it is critical to our understanding of the growth policy process.

In

the May 21 meeting there was discussion on whether—per the Montana Land Use Planning Act—our growth policy document will commit our city to pursuing the projects mentioned therein. Is the growth policy a vision document or a binding agreement? How much flexibility

will our citizens and city council have when a suggestion is made in the growth policy? For example will residents still be able to oppose developments if these ideas are suggested in the policy? I think this is a critical issue for our Community Development

Board to consider. I would like for our council or staff to clarify because it seems that board members have a difference in understanding. Guidance—and perhaps some suggestions on sections for reference—would be helpful.

Thank

you for reading this very long letter and for your attention.

Best,

Marti

Brandt

[redacted]

Armory Road

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 11:20 AM
To: Dakota Whitman
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Comment for 6/2/2025 city council meeting

Hi Dakota,

Thank you for your comments. Alan will be updating the City Council on the growth policy during the work session on June 2nd. Your letter will be included in the packet.

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Dakota Whitman **Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 11:12 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Comment for 6/2/2025 city council meeting

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Hello.

My name is Dakota Whitman - I am representing only myself as a private citizen with this comment.

I wish to express deep concerns about what took place at the last Community Development Board meeting, specifically in regards to the boards wholesale adoption of edits from the Heart of Whitefish, a local special interest group with a clear financial incentive to promote anti-competitive local policies.

I am concerned that those on the board who voted to approve Heart of Whitefish's edits are not respecting the public input received from over 250 residents at prior visioning sessions. Heart of Whitefish has no public facing website or anywhere the public can easily access information about who they are, who is on their board and what their mission statement is. This is not conducive to a transparent process. The economic development chapter should concern existing and future

businesses, and allowing a special interest group consisting of existing businesses to rewrite the draft of that chapter presents a clear conflict of interest. Many of the edits that Heart of Whitefish provided run counter to what the community said in visioning sessions or is objectively inaccurate. Examples of this from their edits include:

- Removing language that points out that tourism jobs are lower paying, which is empirically true and was mentioned at visioning sessions from the public;
- Cites "overwhelming sentiment" of community members despite actively deleting sections of the draft chapter where staff claimed there was broad community support from visioning sessions;
- Removing language that correctly points out the negative effects of a low-wage, tourism-based economy, which is a clear conflict of interest and unethical, especially for a tax-exempt 501(c)3 that has a financial interest;
- Censoring the language that points out that rising land costs are an obstacle for local businesses;
- Removing language about the lack of available goods and services within town, which staff recommended against and cited frequent public comment about in visioning sessions. Heart of Whitefish chooses to blame consumers for this;
- Not allowing commercial uses in residential neighborhoods without a conditional use permit, which staff recommended against and cited high public input about allowing certain low-impact businesses in residential neighborhoods;
- Citing the median per-capita rent as $860, which is empirically false and, frankly, laughable;
- Saying that the trend of unaffordable housing "may be reversing" with no evidence to back that claim up;
- Inflated the ITRR report of visitor dollars spent in Flathead County from $818 million to $1 billion, which is not accurate;
- Claims that paid parking driving away business is a "proven fact" with no evidence to back their claim up, and;
- Citing the downtown business district master plan as the reason for downtown being vibrant, while failing to demonstrate causality on their claim;

Contrary to Heart of Whitefish's claims, the town of Whitefish has become a one trick pony when it comes to our local economy. Over three-quarters of workers do not live within our city limits, and tourism based jobs largely do not pay a living wage. Despite romanticized public sentiment, we are empirically NOT a town where people live and work. We are a town where people work low-wage tourism jobs and get kicked to Kalispell. It is incredibly shortsighted to base our town's economy on a luxury that is usually the first expense that Americans cut from their budget when the economy takes a downturn. We do not need another overpriced bed and breakfast - we need more commercial real estate for higher paying work in fields that are not tourism-based.

I am imploring the council to undo the vote that was done at the last meeting and allow for other groups to provide their input, as well as for comments from the visioning sessions and staff recommendations to be taken more seriously. I do not believe that the members of the board who voted to approve these edits are acting in the best long-term interest of our community, and I question their impartiality as it does not appear that they critically assessed these edits. I implore the council to provide more direct oversight of this board to ensure ALL of our voices are being heard, and not solely wealthy local business owners who benefit from higher prices and lower wages.

Thank you for considering my comment.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2025 8:34 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor
Cc: Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: FW: Community Development Board Meeting

From: joe Bonty
Sent: Monday, May 26, 2025 10:02 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Community Development Board Meeting

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What took place at the last community development board meeting was unacceptable. We did not elect or appoint a special interest group (heart of whitefish) to entirely write the economic development chapter of our growth policy. They outright deleted sections that staff indicated had broad support from the community, and the board adopted these edits. The input that the city has received from the public has been trampled on by a group with a clear financial interest in preventing new businesses from opening and flourishing. I do not believe that those on the community development board are listening to the public and I would hope they be replaced after this.

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Thursday, May 22, 2025 3:05 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; Heart of Whitefish
Subject: Public comment

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment electronically. First, let us start by noting that we agree with the thoughtful input of Heart of Whitefish. We are a small family owned retail business on Central Avenue. We want to drive home the point that a vibrant downtown and survival through the peaks and troughs of a resort community is incumbent upon the dual support of tourists and locals. We often hear local members of our community comment that they do not shop downtown because of parking. That said, Whitefish is in dire need of additional downtown parking. Paid parking would further encourage our local population to stay away from our downtown merchants. And, as noted previously, we depend on our local support. Please give consideration to the Heart of Whitefish comments as well as our comments. Thank you.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Julie Mullins <julie@explorewhitefish.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2025 1:03 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element
Attachments: FY24_Annual-Report_3.26.25.pdf

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Alan – Thank you for sharing your report; it reads very well and is clearly thoughtful and well-informed.

One area I'd like to suggest might benefit from further attention is the vulnerability of tourism and destination management funding in Whitefish. Unlike many states and municipalities that invest meaningfully in their Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) or Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), Montana provides only a minimal allocation of public tax revenue to manage the influx of more than one million annual visitors to Whitefish. At the local level, the City currently provides no financial support (neither direct funding nor in-kind contributions).

While some Montana communities have been able to mitigate this funding gap through the adoption of Tourism Business Improvement Districts (TBIDs), Whitefish has faced longstanding challenges in even exploring that option. Much of this can be attributed to an outdated governance structure lacking term limits, which has limited the flexibility and evolution of leadership.

With more than 35 years in the hospitality and tourism industry, I can confidently say that Whitefish's current model for funding tourism management is not sustainable. Explore Whitefish is placed in the unenviable position of having to raise funds annually from local businesses - those already shouldering the burden of sustaining the largest sector of our economy and having to deal with local disruptions associated with "voluntary" 1% tax. I've made every effort to understand the rationale behind this model and, frankly, have not found a compelling business justification for it.

This structure creates real vulnerabilities; not just for Explore Whitefish, whose reach and impact are concentrated among four major funding partners, but for the City itself. Without adequate and predictable support, the organization tasked with building a year-round visitor economy, while also stewarding our natural environment and quality of life through education and outreach, is at risk.

Tourism is Whitefish's #1 economic driver and #1 employer. And yet, there is no coordinated investment from the City to ensure long-term stability, resources, or resilience for the very industry that supports so much of our community and city operations.

I hope this perspective is helpful - there is a tremendous need to evaluate how to secure a sustainable future for Whitefish's visitor economy. If nothing is done, managing tourism will end up falling to the City and/or to for-profit businesses.

Julie

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Friday, May 9, 2025 1:59 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Comments on Economic Development Element

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Alan Tiefenbach,

Thank you for emailing the materials for the Economic Development Element of the growth policy. Thank you also for hosting the neighborhood visioning sessions, in which I participated. They were collaborative and thoughtfully executed.

The original Economic Development Element includes my visioning group's priorities of walkability, economic diversity, and businesses with local appeal. In addition, the document incorporates other sources: local studies, feedback from stakeholders, and our High School students' presentations. It combines many community voices.

In contrast, the revisions were written by a third party with interests in tourism. I believe that the edits are biased, represent a single perspective, and shouldn't be incorporated into the final draft. If the Economic Development Element misrepresents our town, it should be rewritten by a neutral consultant, or by the original city staff authors. This draft could cite the edited data from the infographic page–if this data is more accurate–to update the analysis.

The revisions are too numerous to work through point by point, but I would like to offer my perspective on a few items.

I manage Bookworks in downtown Whitefish. Anecdotally, I'd confirm that tourism is Whitefish's primary industry, and there are increasingly fewer businesses that appeal to locals. Downtown businesses need stores that attract year-round customers. Many business owners regret the loss of Nelson's downtown, which brought to Central Ave customers who browsed other stores and restaurants. There were other factors affecting Nelson's move, but it's an example of how a practical business affects the surrounding economy, especially in an area that's pleasant to shop.

Tourism-based seasonal jobs don't usually pay well. My friends who work these jobs must work two or more jobs to survive and would welcome opportunities in new well-paying industries. Economic diversification seems smart. A well-rounded economy creates a vibrant and resilient town. When we rely heavily on tourism, fluctuations in that industry can devastate our economy.

The Economic Element does not mention or allude to rapid growth and I believe this term only creates fear and panic. I support the staff in saving growth references for more appropriate sections of the policy. In addition, I believe that growth is often beyond government control. Who could have predicted the Covid boom? We can plan for–and respond to–growth, but it's people who decide to move. My friends, family, and longtime customers say that Whitefish has failed to adapt to the influx of people. The policies we have in place aren't working and downtown is stagnating. My husband often shrugs and says, "I don't really have a reason to go downtown anymore."

My visioning session group from Armory Road–and those in other locations–attended our meetings and shared our thoughts. We believed that this feedback would shape our town's future. However, many participants have families and work full time. They lack the time and resources to defend their ideas in follow-up meetings and comments. I hope that those who read my comment will keep these community members–and the comments they provided–in mind. Our voices still count.

Thank you again for the opportunity to weigh in and for your hard work on this project.

Best,
Marti Brandt

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What was originally an economy based on the timber and railroad industries is now primarily a visitor economy with some healthcare, education, railroad, information, retail and entrepreneurial and service industries.

*BNSF is still a major employer in the city, employing approximately **280** people.*

*Approximately **43%** of all jobs in the City of Whitefish are related to tourism.*

$69,919
Whitefish Median Household Income

21% of working Whitefish residents work remotely.

$67,915
Montana Median Household Income

TOP WHITEFISH EMPLOYERS (2024)	
Logan Health	*483*
BNSF	*280*
Whitefish School District	*250*

< $35,000
Average salaries of service workers

*In 2023, non-resident spending in Flathead County was **1 BILLION**, with the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau reporting tourism bringing in approximately **$390 MILLION** for the City of Whitefish. Resort tax brought more than **SIX MILLION** dollars into the city in 2023.*

Areas of Expected Job Growth

- Professional Services
- Tourism

Areas of Job Decline
Transportation
Warehousing
Information Services

Businesses Most Lacking in Whitefish
Personal and business services
Construction
Clothing retailers (for locals)

76% of employees who work for Whitefish businesses do not live in Whitefish.

Goods and Services limited by zoning or availability in Whitefish results in Whitefish residents driving to other nearby communities for their needs.

"Availability of Attainable Housing, Traffic and Shift of Resource and Transportation Based Jobs into Tourism Economy"
Indicated as trends that will influence economic development opportunities

SUPPORTING A ROBUST RESILIENT ECONOMY

Vision: "We support local business retention and expansion and encourage a diverse year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities, though policies supporting moderate economic growth for our community. ~~We will endeavor to provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs to serve our local population."~~

Whitefish has weathered many economic ups and downs since its incorporation in 1905 after the Great Northern Railway made Whitefish a stop in 1904. In 1929, the Empire Builder rail service was completed from the east to west coast, bringing in visitors from far away, many of whom stayed for the outdoor beauty and jobs at local mills or the railroad. An early 1900s timber boom was tempered by the Great Depression that lasted from 1929 to 1939. In 1947, Big Mountain Ski area installed lifts and soon after skiers began finding their way here to recreate. Whitefish Lake also drew in visitors and summer resort cabin owners for its productive fishing. In the 1980s, many local timber mills shut down due to changing federal policies and timber jobs became scarce. At that time, there were homes and businesses that sported signs that stated: "Supported by Timber Dollars". Empty storefronts appeared downtown after businesses left to new malls constructed in Whitefish and Kalispell. The economy began to pick up in the late 1990s. The early 2000s saw a huge jump in real estate prices and new home starts as more people discovered Whitefish via the Internet and as a result of the housing bubble nationwide. In 2008, the Great Recession hit, causing many in the construction and real estate industries to lose their jobs ~~and local families to move away~~. Fortunately, in 2003, local businesses partners with the Ciyt to develop the Wghitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan. Implementation of the plan began in 2009 using a combination of resort tax funds and tax increment funds. This investment revitalized the town's commercial core resulting in the vibrant downtown we enjoy today.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and 2020 brought a huge influx of new people and businesses to Whitefish who were fleeing population centers for a more laid-back mountain lifestyle, many of whom were able to maintain their high-paying jobs by working remotely. A consequence of this was a steep increase in housing prices. This trend may reverse as remote workers are being called back to in-person work. Over the next twenty years, there will likely be other major economic shifts for reasons that are hard to predict.

It is vitally important for a community to not rely on one industry for its economy, as economies change and downturns or closures in that industry can have catastrophic effects on small towns. Economic diversity is critical in achieving a strong, stable, resilient community. A healthy economy adds to all aspects of the community, from jobs to infrastructure to community services. A diverse economic base with a trend toward higher paying jobs for residents provides the ideal framework on which a city prospers.

Logan Health is the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, and health care and associated services is considered an industry of potential growth in the area. ~~However,~~ Approximately half of the Whitefish economy is driven ~~tourism~~ by visitation and second home owners~~is by far the largest contributor to the Whitefish economy~~, providing the

majority of businesses and jobs and bringing nearly $200~~400~~ million into the city in ~~2023~~2024. The tourism

industry is highly seasonal; there are wide fluctuations in tourism-related employment and revenue throughout the year.

Many Whitefish residents are employed in high-paying professional-level jobs who work remotely or have chosen to commute out of the city into other nearby areas ~~due to lack of these jobs in Whitefish~~. Conversely, many workers in the lower-paying tourism-related service industry can no longer afford to live in Whitefish and must commute into the city by car since there is no local commuter transit. Rising land costs, employee shortages and housing affordability make it difficult for local businesses to retain and find workers. Due to factors such as ~~restrictive zoning,~~ high lease rates ~~downtown~~, low inventory, ~~sky-high~~high property prices and construction costs, it can be difficult for new businesses to afford or find locations to open~~, leading to a deficit of locally available essential goods and services that residents rely on~~.

The City of Whitefish enjoys numerous assets – it is in a highly desirable location, surrounded by lakes and mountains, with an abundance of natural resources and a wealth of available outdoor activities. It is vital to protect those assets, as they are a major economic driver. Whitefish has locational advantages as well, including being along an international highway corridor, having major rail access, being near an airport, and in proximity to Glacier National Park. The vibrant downtown strengthens Whitefish's unique identity, and the educated and talented citizenry and visitors generate beneficial social interaction to facilitate idea-exchange. Whitefish is uniquely poised to capitalize on its assets to broaden its economic base ~~beyond purely~~compatible with a visitor economy and enhance its economic sustainability and resilience.

ECONOMIC DRIVERS

The City of Whitefish was formerly an economy heavily reliant on the timber and railroad industries but by the early 2000's the largest industry had become tourism. At the time of the 2010 census, the three major industries in the City were accommodation and food service, retail trade, and health care and social assistance. In 2024, the same three major industries dominated the Whitefish economy. However, 69% of Whitefish residents are employed in the management, business and financial sectors. As only about 10% of jobs offered in Whitefish are in those same industries, a large number of Whitefish residents commute to other areas or work remotely.[1].

[1] The source of recent statistics comes from the 2023 Whitefish Economic Growth Policy Update prepared for the city by GSBS Consulting.

TABLE A: CITY OF WHITEFISH TOP INDUSTRIES (percentage of jobs)			
Year		Year	
2010		2020	
Accommodation and Food Service	20.5%	Accommodation and Food Service	21.1%
Retail Trade	16.6%	Health Care and Social Assistance	17.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	16.4%	Retail Trade	15.7%
Educational Services	8.8%	Professional, Scientific, Technical	8.4%
Finance and Insurance	6.1%	Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	6.8%
* Source: 2010 and 2020 Census			

TABLE B: CITY OF WHITEFISH TOP EMPLOYERS			
Year	Employees	Year	Employees
2007		2024	
Whitefish Mountain Resort	535	Whitefish Mountain Resort[2]	650 (peak season)
North Valley Hospital	249	Logan Health	483
Whitefish School District	240	Averill Hospitality	282 (peak season)
BNSF	230	BNSF	280
City of Whitefish	101	Whitefish School District	250
*Source: 2007 Growth Policy		*Source: Whitefish Chamber of Commerce	

The City of Whitefish median household income is **$69,919**; higher than $66,395 for Flathead County and $67,915 for the State of Montana, but lower than the $74,755 national average. Gallatin County has the highest median household income in the State at $83,064 [3]

Contribution of Tourism to the Whitefish Economy

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Whitefish's economy—43% of all jobs are at least partially reliant on visitor spending. According to the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR), nonresident visitors spent over $1 billion annually in Flathead County during 2022 and 2023, the highest of any county in Montana. Explore Whitefish, the city's official tourism organization, estimates that in 2024, 57% of every dollar spent in Whitefish was by a nonresident, contributing to an annual visitor economy of approximately $200 million.

Whitefish holds a unique position as a small town because of the intersection between the visitor economy and the local economy. Locally owned businesses earn most of their profits during the busy summer months and rely on local patronage throughout the rest of the year. Tourism brings substantial benefits to Whitefish—excellent restaurants and unique shops are possible because of visitor spending—but these businesses also depend on consistent local support.

Whitefish benefits from its proximity to Glacier National Park, which recorded 3,208,755 recreation visits in 2024, marking the second-highest visitation year on record. Meanwhile, annual visitation to Whitefish has remained relatively steady. The top three

visitor activities in Whitefish and the surrounding area (including Glacier National Park) continue to be scenic driving, hiking, and wildlife watching. However, the tourism industry remains highly seasonal, with significant fluctuations in employment and revenue. July and August consistently represent the peak season in Whitefish. To mitigate these fluctuations, Explore Whitefish works to manage visitation during the peak summer months through destination management messaging and promotes tourism during the shoulder seasons.

Outdoor recreation is a major driver of local tourism. The Whitefish Trail, which features 47 miles of non-motorized multi-use trail and 15 trailheads, attracts mountain bikers and hikers. A study by Headwaters Economics and Whitefish Legacy Partners indicated that the Whitefish Trail contributes $6.4 million in annual spending by visitors and locals, supporting 68 additional jobs and $1.9 million in labor income. Overall, outdoor recreation spending by visitors to Whitefish amounts to approximately $101 million annually, supporting 1,460 jobs and $41 million in labor income.

Montana does not impose a statewide sales tax. However, in 1996, Whitefish voters approved a 3% “resort tax” on lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail purchases to offset visitor impacts on tax-funded services. In 2024, resort tax collections exceeded $6 million. According to VisaVue data, 57% of spending in Whitefish is attributable to

visitors. Since VisaVue data does not include lodging expenditures—which contribute significantly to resort tax collections—it is reasonable to estimate that nonresidents contributed approximately $3.75 million to the resort tax in 2024.

As of 2025, the allocation of these funds is as follows:

- 48% for streets, sidewalks, and underground utilities
- 25% for property tax relief
- 10% for community housing
- 10% for paths and other park acquisitions and improvements
- 2% to the Whitefish Trail for maintenance
- 5% to merchants for tax administration

Thus, visitors have contributed significantly to the livability of the community for residents.

Tourism-Related Impacts

Despite its economic benefits, the success of the tourism industry in Whitefish has created certain challenges. Two of the most pressing issues are employee housing and the availability of workers. Service industry employees, who typically earn less than $35,000 per year, are finding it increasingly difficult to secure adequate housing in Whitefish, where the median home sales price exceeds $1 million and median monthly rents are $2,500—32% higher than the national average, according to aggregated data from rental listing websites.

It is also difficult to attract workers willing to commute from nearby communities for relatively low wages. As a result, businesses are hesitant to locate in areas with limited access to employees. Recent efforts by Housing Whitefish—a local nonprofit that provides workforce housing assistance—have aimed to reduce rents for qualified applicants. According to Daniel Sidder, Executive Director of Housing Whitefish, the average monthly rent per person for rental assistance applicants was $800, offering a more accurate picture of the cost of living for working residents.

Other commonly cited impacts of tourism include the rise in second and third home purchases and the proliferation of short-term rentals (STRs). STRs have a range of effects: they impact local hospitality businesses, alter residential neighborhoods, increase summer traffic, and reduce market share for hotels that contribute to the 3% resort tax. According to AirDNA, as of 2025, the 59937 ZIP code—which includes the city of Whitefish and surrounding unincorporated areas—had approximately 1,700 STR listings. Of these, about 400 were licensed within city limits, suggesting that roughly 1,300 STRs were located outside city boundaries but still within the same ZIP code.

To provide a strategic, long-term framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish community and reduce tourism's negative impacts, the City of Whitefish and the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau collaborated to develop the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP). A steering committee was formed in 2017, with the plan adopted in 2020 and updated again in 2024.

Public support for tourism declined following the surge in visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Whitefish Community Tourism Survey (developed by the STMP committee), tourism sentiment has evolved significantly since 2023. In that year, only 30% of respondents agreed with the statement, "The overall benefits of tourism in Whitefish outweigh the negative impacts," while 47% disagreed. By 2025, over 50% of respondents agreed with that statement, and more than 69% agreed that tourism benefits the community via resort tax collections: "Resort tax revenue generated supports vital city infrastructure and residential tax credits."

Overall, tourism has brought lasting benefits to the broader Whitefish community by helping to build and sustain the amenities that make the town attractive to residents, small businesses, and future employers. Whitefish is distinct from other
recreation-focused towns in the Rocky Mountains in that it is more than just a winter ski town or a summer gateway to Glacier National Park—it is a year-round community that strategically reinvests its visitor economy into local infrastructure, trails, parks, and public spaces.

With slightly more than half of all spending in Whitefish coming from nonresidents, visitor dollars help keep small businesses open during the shoulder seasons and slower periods. This stabilizing effect not only supports jobs and tax revenue, but also helps keep prices lower and services more viable for year-round locals. In this way, tourism has helped Whitefish preserve its small-town character while offering the amenities of a much larger community. Economic growth and development plans would be wise to build on the success of tourism in Whitefish. Accordingly, growth policies should be designed to leverage the visitor economy to grow business sectors beyond tourism.~~Tourism is the largest contributor to the Whitefish economy, comprising approximately 43% of all jobs. The 2007 growth policy noted the Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) reported non-resident visitors spent $314 million in Flathead County. In 2022, the ITRR reported non resident spending in Flathead County to be approximately one billion, with the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau showing tourism bringing in approximately $390 million for the City of Whitefish in 2023. Whitefish benefits from its proximity to Glacier National Park; in 2023 there were approximately 3 million visitors at the park[4]. The top three visitor activities in Whitefish and the surrounding area (including Glacier National Park) are identified as scenic driving, hiking and wildlife watching. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is highly seasonal and there are large fluctuations in tourism related employment and revenue. July and August have consistently been the~~

peak season in the City of Whitefish. The Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau targets messaging to highlight tourism during the shoulder seasons to

[2] Winter Sports maintains 100 year-round employees, with 650 during the winter ski season and 200 in the summer season.
[3] US Census https://data.census.gov/profile/Whitefish%20city,_Montana?g=160XX00US3079825
[4] The Montana Travel Industry – 2023 Summary (Melissa Weddell, ITRR)

boost the slower periods, and Glacier National Park's new vehicle reservation system is attempting to more evenly distribute visitation levels throughout the season[5].

Outdoor recreation is a huge driver for local tourism. The Whitefish Trail, which has 47 miles of non motorized multi use trail and 15 trailheads mostly on state owned land, is a big draw for mountain bikers and hikers. A Headwaters Economics and Whitefish Legacy Partners study showed the Whitefish Trail contributes $6.4 million in annual spending by visitors that come to enjoy the trail and by locals that purchase or rent outdoor gear at local stores. Whitefish Trail visitor spending translated to 68 additional jobs and $1.9 million in labor income. Outdoor recreation spending by people visiting Whitefish mainly for general outdoor recreation in the area amounts to about $101 million in spending, 1,460 jobs, and $41 million in labor income annually.

Montana has no state wide sales tax. In 1996, the voters of Whitefish approved a 3% "resort tax" that applies to lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail to offset visitor impacts to tax-funded services, so the full burden doesn't fall on local residents. In 2023, approximately six million dollars was collected. As of 2025, the funds will be split 48% for streets, sidewalks and underground utilities, 25% for property tax relief, 10% for community housing, 10% for paths and other park acquisitions and improvements, 2% to the Whitefish Trail for maintenance, and 5% goes to merchants for the administration of the tax.

Tourism Related Impacts

There have been issues related to the dominance of the tourism industry in Whitefish. Two of the top issues relate to employee housing and availability of employees. Service workers, who typically earn less than $35,000 per year, are having an increasingly difficult time finding adequate housing in Whitefish given the median home sales price of over a million dollars and median monthly rents of $2,000[6]. Also, it has proven difficult to attract employees who will commute from nearby communities for low wages, and businesses are reluctant to locate in areas where the employee pool is limited. According to a report from GSBS consulting, 76% of workers employed in Whitefish do not live in Whitefish.

Other impacts relating to tourism commonly cited include the increase of 2nd and 3rd home purchases and proliferation of short term rentals (which impact local hospitality businesses, residential areas and the housing market), additional summer traffic, the wide seasonal fluctuations in business and employment, and the difficulty protecting the natural resources and character which draw residents and visitors to the area. Local support for tourism declined following the significant uptick in visits during the 2020 pandemic. Results from a survey conducted by the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2018 showed 69% of residents agreed with the statement that tourism makes Whitefish a good

[5] Kelsey Evans, Tourism Outlooks: "Shoulder Seasons Grow, Snow Forecast Optimistic", The Whitefish Pilot, March 28, 2025, https://whitefishpilot.com/news/2024/oct/23/tourism-outlooks-shoulder-seasons-grow-snow-forecast-optimistic/

[6] Source: 2022 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment, Page 38

~~place to live. This dropped to only 22% of residents in 2023. Visitor spending has declined since 2021 and is now at pre-pandemic levels.~~

~~To provide a strategic, long term vision and framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish community and reduce tourism impacts on the community, the city and the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau joined together to develop a Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan. A steering committee was formed in 2017 and the final plan was adopted in 2020 and updated again in 2024.~~

Other Significant Industries in Whitefish

Healthcare and social assistance is the next largest industry in Whitefish, comprising approximately 18% of the jobs. The main contributor is the 25-bed Logan Health critical access hospital along with supporting medical clinics and services. The hospital, formerly known as the North Valley Hospital, formed in 1905 until it merged with the Kalispell regional healthcare system in 2016 before becoming part of Logan Health. They are the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, providing 650 year-round jobs. Healthcare employment offers career-oriented jobs (often called “primary jobs”) which pay significantly higher wages than tourism. Healthcare is one of the industries projected for future growth in Whitefish. Other industries projected for future growth in Whitefish include tourism, professional, scientific, and technical services and manufacturing.

Whitefish School District is a major employer in the city, providing approximately 250 jobs in 2023, about the same number of jobs reported in 2010.

Although no longer the main economic driver of the Whitefish economy, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corporation (BNSF) still maintains a significant presence in the city. The Whitefish location generates at least 280 local jobs, hosts the busiest Amtrak Station between Portland and Minneapolis, and is an integral component of the freighting network between the east and west coasts. In the past, there was a rail spur that served a local timber mill. That has been removed, but the railyard and adjacent industrial properties have the potential to help accommodate a rail-served industrial site or a site with the ability to load or unload goods from railcars, eliminating the need for intermediate transport of large goods by truck from Seattle and other international shipping ports.

There was a national trend of residents of urban areas moving to rural and mountain towns during the COVID-19 pandemic and working remotely. It is estimated that 21% of Whitefish workers are remote workers, many of which are employed with out-of-state jobs. This trend has brought households with higher incomes into the community, which raises prices and exacerbates the lack of affordability in the Whitefish housing market.

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Commercial Areas in Whitefish

There are generally four commercial areas in the City of Whitefish (see the Layout of the City Map on Page X). The first is the downtown core, which contains the majority of the tourism, entertainment, food, and civic uses in the city. The downtown area also provides the highest density of jobs (see the Job Density Map – Exhibit X). The second commercial area is neighborhood-oriented businesses, restaurants and professional offices located in pockets along Wisconsin Avenue north of the railroad tracks. The third commercial area contains ~~a gas station~~(the gas station is south of the river bridge/culverts) residences, professional offices, and two lodging establishments along the US 93 corridor north of the Whitefish River bridge on ~~US 93~~Spokane Avenue to the downtown core at East 4th Street. The fourth and largest commercial area is located along the US 93 South/Spokane Avenue corridor from the Whitefish River Bridge on US 93 south to the city limits near Highway 40 West. Virtually all automobile-oriented uses such as a mall, fast food restaurants, hotels, auto dealerships, service stations, supermarkets and most light industrial uses are located in this area.

The community values locally owned businesses as well as the unique commercial character of Whitefish. To protect those values, zoning has been implemented which prevents franchise or formula style chain businesses downtown and limits them in other commercial zones. While not currently regulated, formula services and formula hotels should also be limited downtown in order to further safeguard the unique business climate. The city's architectural review standards have strict limitations with regard to franchise business design and color schemes.

Outside of the downtown, most of the US 93 South corridor from East 6th Street to Highway 40 West is zoned WB-2, Secondary Business District. There have been concerns over the years regarding businesses along this corridor negatively impacting revenues of the downtown businesses, particularly the impact of "big box" style retailers. To better regulate those uses, the city instituted bulk and scale restrictions which require conditional use permits for buildings over 10,000 square feet so that impacts can be reviewed with more scrutiny. A new requirement for an economic impact study with any proposal for such businesses would better help decision makers weigh their effects on the local economy.

Economic Diversification

Diversifying the economy beyond a seasonal tourism base to attract "primary jobs" has been a recurrent strategy of the city. Both the 1996 Growth Policy and the 2007 Growth Policy (as well as previous economic studies) discuss the need for economic diversification. A common theme has been strengthening the economic base by seeking year round, high paying industries. The 1996 plan mentioned public opinion rates "small and non-polluting industries" as the most preferred type of economic growth in Whitefish. The 2007 Growth Policy stated it should be a policy of the City to promote beneficial job growth in the base economy, especially in areas that tend to diversify it beyond visitation-based business and industries. During visioning sessions for this plan update, virtually all comments about economic development expressed the need for providing a greater diversity of jobs for the residents of Whitefish.

Availability of Locally Needed Goods and Services

~~Unlike many commercial zones nationwide, T~~the WB-2, Secondary Business District has very prescriptive zoning with regard to allowed retail and service uses, listing a few very defined permitted uses. This was intentional, to provide locations for auto-oriented businesses that require large display space and large parking areas, and to create the opportunity for local businesses to expand into larger spaces. This zone also prevented direct competition with the downtown WB-3 General Business District, which allows all types of retail sales and services. This was initiated because several downtown businesses left Central Avenue to relocate in the Mountain Mall when it was built in 1985 during a time when the economy was struggling. While the mall is grandfathered for all retail and service uses, the downtown core was meant to be the center of financial, retail, governmental, professional, institutional, and cultural activities. Through such measures as the implementation of the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, the downtown has become a vibrant retail and entertainment hub and a significant resident and visitor draw. ~~This has led to retail offerings becoming mostly visitor serving due to the escalating cost of real estate.~~

Over time,

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the retail offerings have become more visitor-serving due to changing patterns of customer demand. Existing community-serving downtown businesses include a toy store, record store, independent book store, sporting goods stores, jewelry stores, kids clothing store, thrift stores, food markets/grocery stores, snowboard shop, third-generation shoe and clothing store, liquor store, bakery, kitchen store, florists, pet supply store, yarn store, bicycle shops, yoga studios, coffee shops, barber shops, and art education studio. Uses such as art galleries and boutique western wear stores have taken the place of the third-generation hardware store, which relocated to the WB-2 district for a larger space, and an electronics store and drug store, which were replaced by formula stores in the WB-2 district. Shifting consumer preferences for nearby big box general merchandise stores and online shopping have repeatedly caused general merchandise stores in the WB-2 district to cease doing business.

~~Uses such as art galleries, boutique western wear, and jewelry stores have replaced the hardware store, electronics store, drug store, and other retailers of necessary goods for residents that were historically prevalent on Central Avenue.~~

During visioning sessions and the most recent economic study, ~~many~~ a few public comments regarding economic and commercial development expressed the desire for more locally available goods and services. Some comments suggested more mixed use as well as opportunities for limited neighborhood-serving commercial in populated areas distant from downtown. There have also been discussions about how to reduce operating costs to keep locally serving businesses more affordable, particularly restaurants. ~~In addition to zoning review, strategies discussed in the study included encouraging more "temporary" businesses such as "pop up shops"[7] or food trucks.~~ While using Vision Whitefish 2045 as their senior project, several Whitefish High School students provided their arguments for more available and affordable goods and services in Whitefish.

Economies do not follow jurisdictional boundaries. When local residents drive to other communities, or shop online, ~~for~~ for everyday goods and services such as clothes, shoes, or school backpacks, or to shop online, this results in "leakage" of income, jobs and finances to areas outside the city. There are also residents who are too young or old to drive, or who cannot afford an automobile, for which traveling to other areas for essentials is difficult due to limits on public transportation. Such leakage also causes an increase in vehicle trips, which conflicts with sustainability, climate action, and emission reductions goals in this plan and plans such as the Whitefish 2018 Climate Action Plan and 2022 Transportation Plan.

While there is no simple solution to these issues, ~~further evaluating city commercial zoning districts and~~ supporting retention and expansion of current community-serving businesses is recommended to maintain local sustainability. Finding ways to reduce vehicle trips, including strongly pursuing valley-wide commuter public transportation partnerships and improving community walkability and bike ability while maintaining a strong centrally located commercial core, is important for the both the economy and environmental sustainability.

[7] A "pop up shop" is a temporary retail space that is set up for a short period of time, typically ranging from a few days to a few months.

Impact of Agriculture on the Whitefish Economy

Preserving and supporting local farms also has a positive impact on the economy. Local produce grown nearby can be sustainably transported to market without using the quantities of fossil fuels required to send products from somewhere else to local grocery stores. This “direct sale” puts more of the revenue in the grower’s pockets by eliminating intermediaries typically involved in brokering and distribution of produce. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)[8], local produce stands and farmers markets significantly reduce operating costs, and these savings can be passed on to consumers at the same time increasing profits for the farmers. As fuel prices continue to rise and as consumers become more sensitive to the issues of processed and genetically altered foods, organic local farming could become a growth industry. Whitefish School District’s Center for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship facility includes a greenhouse, production gardens, and orchards. Flathead Valley Community College offers courses in organic agriculture, including working on a certified organic farm. But all agriculture in Flathead County faces challenges due to development pressures and real estate prices rising at much higher value than the price of farm products.

Previous Economic Development Studies

There have been several previous economic studies completed for the City of Whitefish. In 2002, there was a study prepared by a Jobs for Whitefish Taskforce (*Baker Avenue City Property Development Program - Phase 2A Report*). This study was intended to determine highest and best uses to attract favorable high wage jobs along Baker Avenue in the vicinity of Flathead Avenue. Recommendations included creating incentives to attract or grow “desirable” businesses, fostering “incubator businesses” to help local startups grow and succeed, and considering the needs of present and future industries when determining location and types of infrastructure improvements. This report also states that the “do nothing” alternative would move Whitefish away from quality jobs and diversification as has happened to resort towns such as Jackson Hole, Ketchum or Aspen. Similar recommendations are repeated in a recent 2023 economic study (discussed below).

In 2015, the *Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan* was updated (first adopted in 2006). This plan presented strategies such as regulatory changes to address scale and massing of buildings to protect and enhance downtown character and synergy and the types and timing of public projects, such as pedestrian-friendly retail parking

projects to stimulate private investment. It called for expanding the retail core into an expanded shopping loop into the Railway District.

In 2018 and 2019, an economic performance analysis was completed as part of the *Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan* and the *Highway 93 South Corridor Plan*. Finally, an economic analysis and market study was completed by GSBS Consulting for the entire

[8] Community Supported Agriculture is a model where consumers directly buy shares of a farm’s harvest in advance in a “subscription” scenario. CSA members receive fresh products on a weekly basis throughout the growing season.

city as part of this community plan to inform this chapter and to meet statutory requirements (discussed below).

Economic Development Analysis for Statutory Requirements

The Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) has specific requirements regarding economic development. These include assessing existing and potential commercial enterprises, summarizing job composition and labor force, assessing local constraints to commercial enterprises, inventorying existing and potential commercial sites, and analyzing local facilities and financial feasibility of supporting existing and potential commercial enterprises for the projected population.

Due to the expertise needed for this analysis, staff retained a consultant to complete this study. (The complete report is included as Appendix X.) The consultant reached out to more than 30 business and industry stakeholders over a 6-month period, met with many stakeholders individually, held two group economic forums and coordinated extensively with staff. Seventeen stakeholders ended up participating.

TABLE C: STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN GSBS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY

AppCOM	Heart of Whitefish
Averill Hospitality	KCM Enterprises
BNSF	Montana West Economic Development
Chamber of Commerce	Mountain Mall
City of Whitefish	National Parks Realty
Explore Whitefish	Two Bear Capital
Garden Wall Inn	Whitefish Mountain Resort
Glacier Bank	The ZaneRay Group
Haskill Creek Farms	

Stakeholders were engaged in discussions of the following topics:

- Attainable Housing
- Economic Diversification
- Areas of Growth and/or Opportunity
- Tourism
- The Downtown Area and Commercial Expansion
- Public and/or Private Infrastructure
- Policy

The consultant's report was presented to the Community Development Board in June of 2024 and serves as a resource for this plan element. Key takeaways from this report include:

- The three industries of expected job growth are professional services, health care and tourism.
- Industries expected to decline are transportation, warehousing and information technology.

- Trends that may have an impact on Whitefish's economic future include an increase in remote workers, unavailability of employee housing, ongoing consolidation of economic activity into the tourism sector, and increases in commuting.
- Economic strengths include a strong tourism economy, proximity to Glacier National Park and airport, and the opportunity to capitalize on a significant rail network which is advantageous to industries that rely heavily on transporting large volumes of goods.
- Economic weaknesses and constraints include lack of economic diversity, ~~lack of affordable restaurant establishments for local residents, hyper specific zoning,~~ proliferation of short term rentals removing potential housing from the market, job opportunities, housing and basic needs and services being more available in other communities, and manufacturers and businesses leaving ~~due to cost of land~~, unobtainable housing and low employee pool.
- There is an increasing amount of development pressure for housing on properties presently zoned for industrial or commercial uses.
- ~~A recommendation to further study the pros and cons of a potential downtown electronic paid parking program to increase parking turn over in front of businesses and discourage employee parking in these areas.~~
- Benefits of forming a community group focused toward facilitating discussions between municipalities and other economic development organizations to ensure goals are in alignment and do not conflict with each other.
- ~~Considering regulatory changes to ensure the downtown is not dominated by one particular type of business (such as all art galleries or jewelry stores).~~
- A review of properties ideal for commercial development and recommended types of industry.

The State Legislature in 2023 enacted laws that require cities to allow multi-family and mixed use by right in all commercial zones while also limiting parking requirements for such uses. As such, there is increasing pressure on the remaining vacant commercial properties to be developed into housing rather than typical commercial uses. While housing is an important need, we also need to consider whether there is enough available commercial and industrial property to meet the economic needs of our growing community over the next twenty years and beyond.

SUMMARY

A healthy city economy is balanced, resilient, and inclusive, supporting both current and future generations. It should be diversified across multiple industries, reducing dependence on a single sector. The economic benefits should be shared broadly among the population. Goods and services should be readily available locally to all residents. The *vision* is to balance the availability of needed jobs, goods and services with the community's desire to support local businesses and retain its scale, identity and charm.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

1. Encourage a balanced year-round base economy that continues to provide essential jobs, goods and services, recognizing that the needs of local residents and neighborhoods should not be less important than the needs and interests of businesses

Objectives:

a) Pursue all feasible alternatives to provide affordable housing for those who work in the City of Whitefish.

~~)~~b) Evaluate where commercial and industrial areas may need to grow or revitalize to meet expected demand over the next twenty years and beyond.

~~)~~c) Preserve existing industrial and commercial zoning and only support rezoning for residential purposes if a significant public benefit can be demonstrated, such as workforce housing.

~~)~~d) Consider incentive programs for certain business sectors to entice relocation or establishment of high-wage businesses within the city.

~~) Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers.~~

~~)~~e) Investigate opportunities and partnerships to identify and recruit clean, community-compatible industry to Whitefish.

Goal

~~)~~f) Support local and valley wide commuter public transportation to and from downtown to accommodate residents, visitors, and local employees.

2. Support local business retention and expansion and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Objectives:

a. Consider incentive programs or low-interest loan programs to retain and expand existing businesses within the city.
b. Coordinate with BNSF and compatible industries to identify available land and opportunities to capitalize on existing rail access, including adding a new rail spur to accommodate rail-served industry and local loading or unloading of shipped goods.
c. Encourage the development of primary-job creating enterprises through such strategies as timing of infrastructure improvements and/or emphasis on building or redevelopment of building types that allow for small business growth (such as business incubators or co-working spaces).
d. ~~Continue to restrict and regulate big box retail and explore adding an economic impact analysis requirement for proposals for those uses.~~Prohibit big-box retail.
e. Continue to prohibit formula retail and restaurants downtown and modify code to ~~include regulation of~~prohibit formula hotels and formula services downtown. Continue to regulate formula businesses in other commercial areas to support the unique character and shopping experience of Whitefish and promote locally owned businesses.

f. Create a local group, network, or committee that has recurring conversations regarding trends and specific areas of growth with other municipalities, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations to share information to help develop and encourage sustainable business-attracting strategies.
g. Actively pursue partners and grants to fund and establish business incubators to provide technical and logistic support to new businesses.
h. ~~Support creative lower cost enterprises that cater to locals such as food trucks or temporary "pop up shops" using existing under utilized buildings, facilities or outdoor spaces~~.(only allow if operated year-round to serve local residents).
i. Encourage all new commercial development, subdivisions and infrastructure upgrades to include the installation of conduit for high-speed internet, and congruently explore grant or funding opportunities for this type of infrastructure to meet the needs of the current population and potential growth.
j. ~~Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood-serving light commercial or mixed use in appropriate areas~~.

Goal

3. Maintain the downtown core as the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of the community.

Objectives:

a. Continue implementation of the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan.
b. Maintain zoning consistent with the uses desired downtown and the recommendations of the Downtown Business District Master Plan.
c. Create an overlay district for the downtown area to protect and enhance downtown character, scale and massing.
d. ~~Consider a program for the downtown area that can evaluate and determine a limit of certain prolific business types. For example, create a maximum allowance on certain business types to be able to emphasize inclusion of other businesses – i.e. if there is a large number of art galleries or jewelry stores, consider a maximum number of those business types in the area to increase diversity of commercial offerings in the downtown core.~~
e. ~~Study the feasibility of a demand based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit.~~

Goal

4. Protect the natural resources and unique character and qualities of Whitefish for the continued health of the visitation economy and quality of life for residents.

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Objectives:

a. Work with Whitefish Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and local and state agencies to explore ways to promote sustainable resource-based tourism without endangering vital natural resources.
b. Support the goals and objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan.
c. Continue to work with the Montana DNRC, Whitefish Legacy Partners, Glacier Nordic Club and other public and private agencies to support, protect, and maintain outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities such as the Whitefish Trail, Glacier Nordic Ski Trails, Smith Lake Disc Golf Course, and other public recreation facilities.

Goal

5. Support organic and other localized farming as a means to broaden the community's economic base and to preserve and enhance rural character.

Objectives:

a. Map active local agricultural operations as part of the land use data base.
b. Explore incentives for the growth and retention of localized agriculture.
c. Determine appropriate zoning and locations in rural agricultural areas to allow limited farm-based produce stands, farmer's markets~~, and farm stops~~.
d. Continue to partner with the Whitefish Farmers Market.

DRAFT

Alan Tiefenbach

From: lynn smith <[redacted]gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 12:04 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: draft ofo the proposed Economic Development chapter

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

I ask that you take the following actions and give careful consideration to the detailed comments submitted by the Heart of Whitefish regarding changes needed to this chapter to keep Whitefish the town we love as it grows.

Goal 1 Objective e.: "Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers."

I request the removal of this goal. Given that only the planning administrator would have discretion to allow proposed uses, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both of which are harmful to our downtown business district, to be included in the plan.

Goal 2 Objective j.: "Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas."

I request removal of this goal. Neighbors have always fought commercial uses in their neighborhoods. Without CUPs, which we understand will no longer be a planning tool, these uses would likely be by right. Residential Neighborhoods that could be zoned to allow commercial use include along Columbia Avenue, E & W 7th St., Pine Ave, Armory Rd, portions of Karrow Ave, Denver and Texas.

Goal 3 Objective e.: "Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit."

I request removal of this goal to pursue paid parking in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking will dissuade shoppers from shopping in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking would also encourage shoppers to take more vehicle trips to other communities, and to drive out to the Highway 93 strip, where there is no paid parking. Discouraging support of our small, locally-owned businesses is counter to the intent expressed in the visioning sessions. The economic playing field is not level if only downtown Whitefish requires shoppers to pay for parking.

Lynn Smith (former resident of Whitefish)
[redacted]rolling ridge dr
kalispell

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Trek Stephens <[redacted]toggerymontana.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 11:43 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach

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ATTENTION: *External Email* - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hey Alan,
I'm unable to make the meeting tomorrow night. I would like to put my 2 cents in about the idea of paid parking.

I truly think it is a bad idea.

I think it creates an "obstacle" for our customers both local and tourists. It is not a welcoming feeling to have to pay to park in a small town.
I understand we experience high volume 3-4 months out of the year. But my concern is how the locals feel in the slower months as they want to frequent businesses downtown. There is parking off peak season and I see many locals visiting restaurants and shops. Including The Toggery.
We also have a multi-tenant building with coffee shop, hair salon, and chiropractor. All of which have customers during the day that utilize parking for their services. Imagine having to pay to park to grab a coffee in the morning?
All of these businesses contribute to the fabric of our downtown community. I would hate to see another inconvenience for them to locate in the city center.

I do really want to stress the "feeling" personally as a resident of Whitefish as well. I have always firmly believed creating inconveniences for people is a problem. We should be welcoming every person to be downtown. I feel I personally would not be inclined to park where I have to utilize a parking meter. Also, I think the meters would be an unattractive fixture in our downtown.

Maybe other ideas can be explored if revenue is the desire. Very few places I have visited had free parking in parking garages. That could be an option, but also the parking garage was built to add available parking without a fee. General public may not appreciate that either.

I implore you all to not pursue this idea. I think it would be a horrible mistake.

Sincerely,
--
Trek Stephens

www.toggerymontana.com
[redacted]
Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Mt Maestro <[redacted]gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 1:21 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: The draft of the proposed Economic Development Chapter

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ATTENTION: *External Email* - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

To: The Whitefish Community Development Board

I ask that you take the following actions and give careful consideration to the detailed comments submitted by the Heart of Whitefish regarding changes needed to this chapter to keep Whitefish the town we love as it grows.

Goal 1 Objective e.: "Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers."

I request amending this goal. Given that only the planning administrator would have discretion to allow proposed uses, this goal needs to be clearly written in a way that strip development and sprawl, both of which are harmful to our downtown business district, continues to be excluded in the plan.

Goal 2 Objective j.: "Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhoods serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas."

I request amending of this goal, IF possible w/in these new laws to make sure that any commercial uses are supported by 60-75% F THE RESIDENTS OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS. (not JUST OWNERS)

Goal 3 Objective e.: "Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit."

I request removal of this goal, though I do wonder if there is a way that is cost effective that would limit how long parking places could be tied up...so that they can be primarily used by shoppers.

Thanks
Andy Hudak

Whitefish, Mt 59937
PS: I would like to be informed of any incentives for small, affordable housing for service workers or 1st responders or medical folks in my community. I would certainly be willing t explore a 1 bedroom option on my property. (I THINK my zoning would have to change, but the one I have is absurd - given what has been approved all around me in the last decade! (The Springs expansion, Deer Park Condos across the street, etc.)

Alan Tiefenbach

From: GEWdowin <[redacted]gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2025 12:25 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Economic Development Chapter of the growth policy

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Good afternoon,

I ask that you take the following actions and give careful consideration to the detailed comments submitted by the Heart of Whitefish regarding changes needed to this chapter to keep Whitefish the town we love as it grows.

Goal 1 Objective e.: "Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers."

I request the removal of this goal. Given that only the planning administrator would have discretion to allow proposed uses, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both of which are harmful to our downtown business district, to be included in the plan. No thank you.

Goal 2 Objective j.: "Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas."

I request removal of this goal. Neighbors have always fought commercial uses in their neighborhoods. Without CUPs, which we understand will no longer be a planning tool, these uses would likely be by right. Residential Neighborhoods that could be zoned to allow commercial use include along Columbia Avenue, E & W 7th St., Pine Ave, Armory Rd, portions of Karrow Ave, Denver and Texas. No commercial in residential areas.

Goal 3 Objective e.: "Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit."

I request removal of this goal to pursue paid parking in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking will dissuade shoppers from shopping in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking would also encourage shoppers to take more vehicle trips to other communities, and to drive out to the Highway 93 strip, where there is no paid parking. Discouraging support of our small, locally-owned businesses is counter to the intent expressed in the visioning sessions. The economic playing field is not level if only downtown Whitefish requires shoppers to pay for parking. It's been working for years and year... let's leave it alone.

Thank you,

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Karen Voermans <[redacted]gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 7:34 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

I have been made aware of the upcoming meeting concerning future development. I am aware of Heart of Whitefish's concerns. Having lived in Whitefish for the past 45 years I have obviously seen alot of changes. Some for the better and some not so. We have done a great job on downtown. Let's continue to protect those businesses and our fown town feel. I agree with the following assessments. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Goal 1 Objective e.: "Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers."

I request the removal of this goal. Given that only the planning administrator would have discretion to allow proposed uses, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both of which are harmful to our downtown business district, to be included in the plan.

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Karen Voermans
[redacted]Dakota Ave
Whitefish

Alan Tiefenbach

From: carmen hemmer <[redacted]gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 7:21 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: The draft of the proposed Economic Development Chapter

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To: The Whitefish Community Development Board

I ask that you take the following actions and give careful consideration to the detailed comments submitted by the Heart of Whitefish regarding changes needed to this chapter to keep Whitefish the town we love as it grows.

Goal 1 Objective e.: "Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers."

I request the removal of this goal. Given that only the planning administrator would have discretion to allow proposed uses, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both of which are harmful to our downtown business district, to be included in the plan.

Goal 2 Objective j.: "Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas."

I request removal of this goal. Neighbors have always fought commercial uses in their neighborhoods. Without CUPs, which we understand will no longer be a planning tool, these uses would likely be by right. Residential Neighborhoods that could be zoned to allow commercial use include along Columbia Avenue, E & W 7th St., Pine Ave, Armory Rd, portions of Karrow Ave, Denver and Texas.

Goal 3 Objective e.: "Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit."

I request removal of this goal to pursue paid parking in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking will dissuade shoppers from shopping in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking would also encourage shoppers to take more vehicle trips to other communities, and to drive out to the Highway 93 strip, where there is no paid parking. Discouraging support of our small, locally-owned businesses is counter to the intent expressed in the visioning sessions. The economic playing field is not level if only downtown Whitefish requires shoppers to pay for parking.

Carmen Hemmer
[redacted] Palmer Drive, Kalispell MT 59901

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jj Anderson <[redacted]gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2025 8:29 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: The draft of the proposed Economic Development Chapter

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

To: The Whitefish Community Development Board
RE: The Draft of the Proposed Economic Development Chapter

I urge you to take immediate and serious consideration of the detailed feedback submitted by the Heart of Whitefish regarding this draft. The changes we request are not matters of preference — they are essential to preserving the character, cohesion, and economic vitality of Whitefish as we grow.

Goal 1, Objective e: *"Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving goods and services near local population centers."*
This goal must be removed. Placing zoning discretion solely in the hands of the planning administrator is not only undemocratic — it is ripe for abuse. Such concentrated power makes it far too easy for personal bias or a specific agenda to shape the future of our community in ways that do not reflect the will of Whitefish residents. Furthermore, this policy would open the door to unchecked strip development and sprawl, which directly undermines our downtown business district. These types of development dilute our sense of place, stretch infrastructure, and encourage car dependency. The integrity of our central business core — where local businesses thrive in a walkable, human-scaled environment — must be protected.

Goal 2, Objective j: *"Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas."*
This objective should also be removed. Commercial development within residential neighborhoods has consistently been met with resistance by residents — and for good reason. Without the Conditional Use Permit process, which we understand is being phased out, these developments could become "by right," stripping neighborhoods of any meaningful say in the process. The end result is fractured communities, heightened congestion, and diminished property values — all while drawing customers away from the downtown businesses we claim to support. Residential Neighborhoods that could be zoned to allow commercial use include along Columbia Avenue, E & W 7th St., Pine Ave, Armory Rd, portions of Karrow Ave, Denver and Texas.

Goal 3, Objective e: *"Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit."*
This goal must be removed. Implementing paid parking downtown will have the opposite effect of what's intended. Instead of encouraging turnover and boosting revenue, it will discourage people from visiting

downtown at all. It penalizes residents and tourists alike for spending time in the very heart of Whitefish. Unpaid, accessible parking invites people to stroll, to wander into shops, to dine, and to linger — precisely the kind of organic engagement our small businesses rely on. Paid parking, on the other hand, will shorten visits, deter impulse stops, and redirect traffic to Highway 93 and other communities where parking is free. It creates a two-tiered retail environment where downtown is disadvantaged — and that's not sustainable.

In summary, each of these goals threatens the fabric of Whitefish in ways that cannot be undone. They compromise our neighborhoods, our small businesses, and our downtown identity. We must move forward with policies that reflect the values and voice of our community — not concentrate authority, invite sprawl, or erode what makes Whitefish beloved by so many.

Jenna Anderson

Business Owner in Whitefish

May 15, 2025

Dear Community Development Board and Alan Tiefenbach:

Flathead Families for Responsible Growth (FFRG) is in support of the most recent red-line version of the Economic Development Element submitted by the Heart of Whitefish. This version captures important revisions and omissions in the most recent draft submitted by the Planning Department. It also corrects and highlights deficiencies in the CSBS consultant's report. In addition, we support the removal of Goal 1 Objective e; Goal 2 Objective j and Goal 3 Objective e.

The question of what kind of growth should the City be planning continues to be a point of discussion. It is the position of FFRG that the Growth Plan should be focused on a *moderate* growth rate. This position can be substantiated by growth discussions that were part of the plan development for the new elementary school.

Commercial nodes in residential neighborhoods have never been supported by those who live in those neighborhoods. Based on visioning sessions, there is no clear evidence that residents of the collector streets mentioned (Columbia, Pine, Karrow, Edgewood and E. 7th) would support having commercial in their neighborhoods. We think it would be a stretch to think these neighborhoods would welcome a brew pub, dispensary, or vape shop next door.

We would further support the deletion of Goal 3 Objective d. What kind of a program for the downtown area "would evaluate and determine a limit of certain prolific business types?" This would appear to be discriminatory or arbitrary in its application. We are unclear as to why and on what evidence GSBS would recommend this objective.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to comment.

G. Bradford Bulkley

[redacted]

President, FFRG
bbulkley@bulkleycapital.com

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling <[redacted]mcgarveylaw.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2025 1:02 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: There is very little support in the visioning sessions for locating commercial uses in residentially zoned areas.

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Hi Alan, Please post this and the email sent to you also on 5.21.25 "Summary of 19 pages, with yellow boxes" to public comment, economic development section. Sorry this is late. I was gone for 3 weeks. Best regards, Jon

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Fwd: There is very little support in the visioning sessions for locating commercial uses in residentially zoned areas.
Date: Wed, 23 Apr 2025 15:38:26 -0600
From: Jon L. Heberling <[redacted]mcgarveylaw.com>
To: Jon L. Heberling <[redacted]mcgarveylaw.com>

In fact, there is strong opposition to that.

The staff responses to economic development comments are attached to the staff memo of 2/20/25. In response to "delete goal 2, objective i", the staff claims as follows:

Visioning session comments were very much in support of small scale neighborhood serving commercial in selected areas to reduce vehicle trips.

This is not correct. Out of the hundreds of comments, just a few can be cited in support of the above quote. The staff included 19 pages of comment excerpts with yellow boxes around them. The boxes appear to be related to economic diversity in some way. See"Summary of 19 pages with yellow boxes" attached. On the 19 pages an "a", "b", "c" appear, labeling the yellow boxes on each page. A total of 50 yellow boxes appear on the 19 pages.

Very few of the comments in the yellow boxes support the claims by the staff, above quoted. It appears that only six support the claims by the staff, above quoted. See "Summary of 19 pages", column (3). This is six of a total of 50 yellow boxes.

Some of the yellow boxes contain comments which only mention "diversity", without saying what kind of diversity is meant. These are in column (1). The comments in column (1) cannot be used in support of diversifying businesses into residential zones.

Some of the yellow boxes contain comments which mention "economic diversity ". These are in column (2). "Economic diversity" normally means diversity in business kind, not diversity in business location. These comments in column (2) cannot be used in support of diversifying businesses into residential zones.

Column (3) contains comments referring to diversity in business location. There are only six. There is also column (4), "none". The comments in column (4) do not relate to "diversity" at all.

The staff claims that "visioning session comments were very much in support of" locating commercial uses in residential areas. This is simply incorrect.

In contrast to the staff's push for locating commercial in residential areas, 62 commenters considered "the loss of neighborhood character" to be one of the five biggest threats to Whitefish. See Whitefish Challenges, survey report for 6/22/23, to 10/31/23." (bar graph). Also, when asked "what do you value most about Whitefish?", 87 commenters pointed to "the unique character of Whitefish." See: "what do you value most about Whitefish? Survey report for 6/22/23 to 10/31/23". The visioning session participants clearly wanted to preserve and protect Whitefish, not to change the character of the residential neighborhoods.

Sent from my iPhone

SUMMARY OF 19 PAGES ~~OF~~ WITH YELLOW BOXES

		(1) MENTION OF "DIVERSITY" ONLY	(2) MENTION OF ECONOMIC DIVERSITY	(3) CAL INTO RES AREAS BUSINESS DIVERSITY OF LOCATION	(4) NONE NO REF TO DIVERSITY
1	1a		✓		
2	1b				✓
3	1c		✓		
4	2a	✓			
5	2b		~~✓~~		✓
6	2c		✓		
7	3a		.		✓
8	4a		✓		
9	4b		✓		
10	5		✓ ?		
11	6	~~✓~~			✓
12	7a	✓	~~✓~~ ?		
13	7b		✓ ?		
14	7c				✓
15	8a				✓
16	8b		✓		
17	9a		✓		
18	10				✓
19	11		✓		
20	12a				✓
21	13a			✓	~~✓~~ ?
22	13b				✓ ?
23	13c		~~✓~~		✓
24	13d		✓		
25	14a			✓	
26	14b				✓
27	14c			✓	~~✓~~
28	15a			✓	
29	15b			✓	
30	15c				✓
31	15d.				✓
32	15 E				✓
33	15 f				✓
34	15 g			✓	
35	15 h				✓

		(1) MENTION OF "DIVERSITY" ONLY	(2) MENTION OF ECONOMIC DIVERSITY	(3) MENTION OF CMIL INTO RES AREAS BUSINESS DIVERSITY BY LOCATION	(4) NONE NO REF TO DIVERSITY.
36	16a			?	✓
37	16b				✓
38	16c				✓
39	17a				✓
40	17b				✓
41	17c				✓
42	17d				✓
43	17e				✓
44	17f				✓
45	17g				✓
46	18a				✓
47	18b				✓
48	19a				✓
49	19b				✓
50	19c				✓

Areas to protect

lake
wildlife corridors — WF River
school - our future
water quality (lake, creeks, river)
walkability
(central ave)
(Big Mtn.)
views of mtns - vistas
small town
(neighborhoods w/ families)
emergency services preserve
(trails & town
& s/w)
WF

areas to grow:
- Karrow Ave
- Lion Mtn. - for septic concerns

obstacles:
traffic/truck route
STR
wildfire
lake pollution
a more diverse economy +
c

- bypass
- Pedestrian walking mall
- mall
- old NVH +
- skyler & wisconsin

VISION: a
[redacted]
small industry - recruiting
economic diversity
quality emergency services
things for kids to do
walkability to services
connectivity to Creek/Kalispell
- public transit
quality multi-modal transportation
arts & culture
* & both
- middle class economy
(is there a way for the TPA to support this?)

19 pages.

20 year goals

a community of all economic classes ie people a with flourishing local businesses with high paying jobs and industry beyond density just visitation, taking advantage of lands and affordable housing we have for high density residential development, with reliable valley wide commuter transportation, and non motorized transportation options, with clean Whitefish River, and whitefish lake, open spaces, farmland, ski slopes.

obstacles - state legislature, non resident home owners.

City zoning (WB-2) limits local serving business b
climate change, lack of political will

Vision statement - open space - could be hoovy

- more mixed uses, Downtown center but OK to allow more retail and local serving mixed use in other commercial zones C
- inclusive and welcoming

- green Small Town
- Outdoor Focus
- Healthy, walkable downtown
- Independent Retailers + Los Tourdantours a
- Surrounded By River, Lake & Bike, walking Trails

"Quietly doing things a little bit differently"

A unique small Mountain Community filled with outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy living peacefully + embracing our local flavors.

currently undergoing growing pains with people buying 2nd & 3rd homes, some being used for high cost rentals/Airbnbs thus causing an affordable housing crisis.

WHAT SHOULD IT BE IN 20y

- NATURE • SAFETY • EDUCATION JOB OPS • SENSE ~~OF~~ COMMUNITY
- DENSITY - NOT STRANGLING • ALL AMMENITIES STILL INTACT • ECONOMIC DIVERSITY • RENEWABLE ENERGY SUSTAINABLE • ATAINABLE HOUSING FOR WORKING CLASS • MORE PERMENATE RESIDANCE • ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - MULTI MODAL • FINANCIALLY STABLE • FOOD ACCESS - DESIGNED FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY - PROMOTING THE ARTS -

THE #

Describing WF

- IDILIAC MTN TOWN
- SMALL - BUT FEELS BIG
- FAMILY ORIENTED
- COMMUNITY
- THE ARTS
- WITH REAL WORKING PPL
- WITH EXPENSIVE FOOD BUT GOOD
- AND CULTURE WIT
- WILD FIRE
- WITH GREAT ACCESS TO OUT DOOR
- AND UNIQUE
- WITH GOOD M.D.'S
- INDIVIDUALITY WITH PROGRESSIVE FEEL
- SAFE
- ENVIRONMENTALLY CONCIOUS

20y THREATS

M.D.T.S - WIDENING RDS - FIRE SCRESS - APATHY IN THE COMMUNITY - VAIL - EPIC PASS ~~MORE ACCESS TO~~ COMMERCIAL a WINTER SPORT EXPANSION - CLIMATE CHANGE - COORPEATE AND OUT OF ST OWNERSHIP. ~~S~~ & SHORT TERM RENTALS - RELATIONSHIP TO ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES - IN MIGRATION/ CLIMATE REFUGEES - FOOD ACCESS

- Group Discussion - Now

- Lake Community
- GNP
- WMR
- Vistas + Mountain Views
- Honey Downtown
- Small Ski Town
- Walkability
- Trail network + Path network
- Traffic
- Resistance to growth
- Tourism
- Unaffordable
- Second Homes
- Outdoor Recreation
- Exclusive → Seasonal Workforce
- Hidden Homelessness
- Wealth gap

20 Years

- "Figured it out"
  - Attainable Housing
- ~~Economic~~
- Diversity
  - Economic → Workforce (a)
  - Housing
  - Multi-Modal
  - Safety
  - Car-Free Downtown ✓
- 2-Viaduct Town
- Public Transit ✓
- Mixed-Use (b)
  - Housing Security
- ~~Stay~~
  - Community investment
- Clean Lake
- Fire Prevention
- Environmental Stewardship
- Sustainability
- Density > Sprawl
- Anchor Commercial Node (c)

VISION

Small town friendly community w/ abundant trees; wildlife where people of all econ status, background can flourish

- high density, village, walkable, bikable streets following a European model in central w/ mixed residential of all types; teardowns, ~~affordable~~ neighborhood; community parks as we get farther from down-town

Safer pedestrian/bikeable pathways. Fewer no cars emph, homes (people actually living here)

Sustainability - sustain what is best of what we have already

NA Aspen NA Jackson. Steamboat?

- Resilience // Changing water levels / climate change -
- Flood / Fire

Diversified economy from tourism. Tech jobs. Higher Ed

Obstacles:
- natural → wildfires, lack of [illegible]
- Stress on aquifer
- lack of preparedness
- Big money
- Fear of change
- Greed
- monstrous legislature
- AirBNB
- Infrastructure [Wisconsin, Hwy 93]
- Traffic
- Lack of public transportation
- MT Dept Transportation [Discourage]
- LACK OF FORWARD THINKING re: unmanaged growth, private property acquisition

CHANGES TO VISION

- trails, active transportation
- more density // affordable / diversity (econ) a
- education, familie
- Europan model / structure - building out from center
- infrastructure
- outdoor recreation / trails / space

Green

no Years

- SAME town with a few more people
- Strong Sense of community where children don't have to leave to pursue good careers a
- Density with green areas instead of sprawl.
  - more density as infill
  - maintain neighborly mentality
  - connectivity of trails/bike paths
  - softening shoulder season.

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obstacles Road infrastructure
- no public transportation
- affordable housing
- parking
- State legislation

Rank the importance of the following elements in Whitefish
Small Town Feel
Open Space
Economic Diversity
Arts and Culture
Resort Destination

a

In a paragraph or less (or 10 bullet points), what is your vision of what Whitefish should be in 20 years?
A ski resort town that has refused to grow itself in size.
Certainly different from our fond memories of earlier times. The City does not have the unimproved space to grow without changing the characteristics of our neighborhoods and commercial arteries. Without expansion of the city limits the city can only grow upwards. Limiting growth will only exasperate a perceived cost of housing problem. Haphazard growth will only make the current transportation difficulties more extreme.
In 20 years Whitefish should be a similarly sized vibrant community that supports the people that live and work in Whitefish. Access to amenities should be easily accessible to all in the developed parts of town, with an emphasis on non-automobile forms of transportation. Whitefish as a community should exist harmoniously with the environment around it, supporting healthy land and water. a
Ideally, in 20 years Whitefish will look much like it does today.
An island of tranquility, populated by people of integrity and friendliness. A place where you can cross the street without fear of being run over by someone on the phone.
As town grows in population and development, connecting the bike path to allow access to businesses and basic needs like groceries will be necessary to help alleviate summer traffic. Balancing housing density and single family homes to maintain small town community while giving opportunity to all income demographics. Allowing PUD's in neighborhoods for small eateries and drinking holes outside of downtown will spread out the crowds downtown while maintaining local charm. Avoid becoming Bigfork, large lot residential sprawl with a dying downtown heart. Think small town Spokane, dense neighborhoods with unique charm making up a greater collective town space. b
vibrant unique sustainable better traffic flow
I see it as a community that has a relatively stable population with a larger majority of the residents being full time. This will be because there will a stable housing situation that has benefited from some expansion of boundaries plus some in-fill additions. Our public, outdoor recreation facilities will still be available and well maintained. We will naturally, gradually become more diverse in all senses of the word. The community will still pull together via events, philanthropy, and volunteerism.
hopefully the same
I hope that there is a local outdoor pool and splash pad put in for the community. If no pool, then at least an awesome splash pad for kids.
Small town feel, available affordable housing for people who want to live and work in Whitefish. A walkable and bikable city with less traffic driving thru town. Possibily turning Central Ave. into a walking promenade. More indoor and outdoor pickleball courts!
A town that protects the wildlife corridors and connectivity of open space for the wildlife of the state, valley, and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. A town that is focused on sustainable growth, prioritizing density over sprawl, and limiting growth overall to ensure that the open spaces and natural resources are managed for all and future generations. A town that supports local farmers and ranchers who sustain them. Local art scene with education and studio spaces and large scale community art opportunities. Private land easements/incentives for walkways/bikeways? Edgewood is so scary with people running in the winter while cars get ditched left and right. So many cyclists too and more to come. A town with clean drinking water and public park bathrooms open in the winter (baker park, I am talking to you) :)
Better pedestrian / bicycle safety by redirecting through traffic away from downtown. We can't accommodate all the traffic that is projected, so let's get bike/foot/ and group travel done better, safer.
I wish it could be like it was pre-COVID, but that is not possible. Would love for no more small houses/businesses to be demolished for the erection of big condo/townhouses in the town. The mountain and lake would remain the same.

a	'-hope to still see diversity in incomes and demographics which causes diversity in thought, sports, art, music -a focus on the outdoors and it's preservation, accessibility, and enjoyment -controlled number of short term rentals and 2nd home residence within the city. ie-you can only short term your main residence and for a max of 2 months...so that it's not empty houses and real community -increased walk ability, create commercial hubs in subdivisions to encourage small communities -have fun, well built 3-5 story apartment buildings with court yards and community spaces and diverse housing options, as well as reducing traffic -robust alternate energy transportation with in the community and cross cutting trails to reduce traffic drastically and encourage community - alot more trails for biking and hiking up into the alpine with bus system -net zero waste- require all commercial entities to only sell items that can be addressed or recycled in our valley's waste management.
	Whitefish should be a mountain town where residents are able to live and work, with readily available access to public lands surrounding Whitefish.
	Ideally Whitefish citizens are able to maintain the positive attributes and mitigate the negative effects of growth by continuing to emphasize a thoughtful approach to zoning, protecting the environment and exploring ways to make our community affordable for all who live and work here.
	Whitefish has the potential to be at the forefront of pedestrian friendly towns that maintain a grounded, modest, and environmentally friendly values. We can incorporate a walking friendly community that maintains natural spaces while keeping our lower and middle income class workers in town, instead of commuting from Kalispell or Columbia Falls. We can have interesting, lodge style, cabin style, brick style, or dense housing modeled after the train depot. We can have walkways to get all around town with native plants and trees along them. We can create more space for bicycle parking and outdoor dining.
b	Whitefish should encourage higher density, mixed use development in the areas surrounding downtown that have access to larger roads (ie Karrow, 93, hwy 40). However, changes to zoning must be weighed against what will truly encourage affordable housing vs what will encourage million dollar condo development. Affordable housing will likely require subsidy (as at alpenglow) and we can't sacrifice the town and traffic and lack of parking to high end developers for the sake of density. It's naive to think that will result in affordable housing.
c	Whitefish in 20 years may look very similar to how it does now... with the exception of a few high-density residential/commercial areas strategically placed near public transit (Ski bus stops) and bike paths... in town! No further south than the new town pump on 93.. Preferably even closer to Big mountain. Workers should be able to walk or bike to work, afford rent without living with 4+ roommates. In 20 years, my vision of whitefish is that it is mostly the same except that it's much easier to get around without a car, and rental terms are better controlled (instead of at the whim of the landlord)
d	If the trend of growth/migration over past 5 years continues and the greater trend in the US of remote working, growing wealth of upper class, and ease of capital from lending institutions continues, Whitefish in 20 years will be a full-blown resort destination community. Again, with the accompanying benefits and drawbacks. My hope is that Whitefish can harness the influx of talent and monetary capital to create a unique resort community with a diverse business segment (in cooperation with booming tourism sector), vibrant arts scene, continued and growing access to recreation opportunities (on public and private lands), all while keeping in "harmony" with the natural environment.

a	'- some hard decision to pull back some of STR license that are already in the city -buy in for public transportation and the funds to have increased stops and busses -change of opinions on community living and recognize the need to reduce our carbon footprints with house size, utilities and transportation. Building up to 5 stories in the old hospital area with large common green areas, courtyards and parks?? -quicker walking and biking routes in new developing subdivisions "spider web" to hubs -mandatory commercial spaces in new subdivisions and old ones like a coffee shop/breakfast that shares with an early eve pub/brewery, daycares, items that are more for that subdivision to walk to and enjoy community. -easements to green spaces through private properties to reduce driving and increase accessibility -large apartments and condos may have to be in areas, put the parking inside and green space around them, make them beautiful, fun, well built and sound insulated, public transportation will reduce the cars the residence will need.(the city maintenance yard and old hospital could be a fun development of these and leave trees all around the outside) -being a forerunner in fighting for a better community. net zero waste? Alternate energy robust public transportation? small communities within the community? accessibility to trails out your door? apartment/condos that are beautiful, quiet, full of light and full of community??
	Affordable housing for residents of Whitefish is the number one challenge to achieving what Whitefish should be in 20 years. In addition, if planning decisions are not made in a manner that support small-town characteristics Whitefish possesses now, this would be an obstacle to achieving what Whitefish should be in 20 years.
b	Over development Lack of common sense Disregard for infrastructure maintenance/improvement Failure to protect natural resources/environment
	People arguing they don't want more density in their neighborhood due to aesthetic or classism. City zoning regulations. Funding for developing dense housing.
	School levy process makes it hard for schools to keep up with population Geographic barriers leading to one road in and out 93 bypass is likely needed High cost of living leading to labor shortages
	Obstacles to achieving what Whitefish could and should be are height restrictions on high-density proposals, inefficient costs/returns on building low-income homes, public perception of high-density development being a bad thing, NIMBY-ism, and 2nd/3rd/4th homes that lay VACANT AND EMPTY for a majority of the year.
c	Obstacles to diverse business segment: Over focus on tourism. Entice, nurture, and grow a more diverse business community by an increase in zoning for commercial space (not just retail/restaurant/hotel) development intermixed with residential. That could be industrial complexes, larger office complexes, or space for business incubation programs. This would allow incoming residents to move businesses to the Flathead Valley. Thus, giving better job opportunities and increasing the income potential for local residents to afford to live in Whitefish. Obstacles to vibrant art scene: I believe the past that has included the Performing Art Center, Whitefish Theater Company, O'Shaughnessy Center has all been adequate. The local music scene could use a boost from just the performances at local bars and the help compete against the over produced Under the Big Sky music festival. There is a good mix of galleries on main and surrounding area - especially with Art Walk night. Obstacles to recreation opportunities: In talking to most newcomers to valley in past 20 years, the ability to access and recreate on private and public lands is high on priority. In the summer it is mountain biking on the many Trails (helped maintained by FAMB), hiking and running in Wilderness Areas/Glacier Park/State Lands/City Parks, enjoying the rivers and lakes on raft, motorboat, stand up paddle board, or tubes. In the winter it is nordic skiing, snowboarding/alpine skiing at WMR or in the backcountry. And that's just a short list. It is a must for the City to have a forward stance in protecting and preserving access to recreation opportunities both with private landowners and on public lands. Especially the community grows this becomes threatened by large estates and development - easement will be key. Obstacles "harmony" with natural environment: Quick points. Development must be done to respect the natural settings giving green spaces, proper bike&ped paths, lots of trees, less grass, more local gardening. Some basic ideas - Curb side Recycling and Composting. Encourage less reliance on large delivery of utilities- ie encourage personal solar and wind. Better built homes using more up to date building energy codes that are enforced. More plantings and landscapes around commercial buildings. Make easier opportunities for developments to be less reliant on cars. Better walking developments via non centralized commercial zones, more bike paths. Ebike parking and charging stations, bike & ped paths that are not just on side of roads. Capitalizing and redirecting funds from large second homes/estates by an underutilized housing tax(many Canadian resort towns have successfully implemented with little effect to economy). Better transit system between Kalispell, Columbia Falls, Whitefish, Glacier Park, and WMR. Maybe spear head a bike path between Kalispell/Whitefish/Columbia Falls. Enough Said Sorry for length.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR QUADRANT AND HOW?

Details of Individual Written Responses

West Quadrant	
Trails / Walkability	**32**
Narrow needs to be multimodal	9
Need more complete loops	8
More pedestrian flashers on 93	2
Protected sidewalks along 93	2
Tunnel under 40 & 93	
Bike path cut in half in Birch Point - connect it	
Bike path under highway at Kay Beller	
Better connectivity under 93 @ Miles to State Park	
Trail connections to river, lake and downtown	
Spencer to WF Hills	
Trail from Great Northern Heights to Seventh (Baker Park)	
Pedestrian crossing at 2nd / 93	
Need better bike path on Birch point	
Access from golf course to 93 a pedestrian issue	
More ADA accessible	
Pedestrian crossing at 2nd / 93	
Turn golf course into "multi trip" path	
Better connectivity between neighborhoods	
Sidewalks every 3d &4th	
Connect Baker Neighborhoods	
Need Bypass	**11**
Zoning / Land Use	**11**
Mixed use/retail along river	
Better use of City public works yard (housing, businesses)	
Create small community drive (coffee shops, eateries)	
Zoning reforms to allow variety of development along 93	
Need a roundabout junction	
Better building development along 93	
Less commercial centers	
Better Gateway development along 40/93	
Parking	**9**
All parking at rear of buildings	
Parking by river on Baker	
Parking for railway district	
Lake Beach parking too crowded	
More parking by State Beach	
Locals only get to park 2 hours at a time	
Locals should not get parking tickets	
Parking for locals in peak season	
Housing	**7**
Zoning reforms to encourage different housing types	
Higher density	
Affording housing without too much density	
Dormatory housing	
Narrow Improvements	**7**
Roundabouts vs stop lights	
Narrow / 93 signal	

South and East Quadrant	
Trails / Walkability	**18**
Edgewood / Armory Walking Path	6
Longer bike paths	
Pathways on Viserman and Monegan	
Shady Lane Bike Path	
Transportation Improvements	**11**
Whitefish stage and Hwy 40 dangerous	
Traffic speed	
Dillon Rd and Hwy 40 connection useage	
Lower speed on Viserman and Dillon	
Finish paving Monegan	
Monegan Road (general safety improvements)	
Need better east-west access into town	
2nd and Armory hard to turn left	
Airport useage increasing (noise)	**5**
Density	**3**
Opportunity for higher density development near trails	2
More workforce housing	
Find more places for good density	
Another viaduct	**2**
Sewage treatment plant (smell)	**2**
Less tear downs	**2**
Other	
Protection of rivers, including Haskill Creek	
Another bridge across river	
Truck bypass	
Protect Ag Lands	
Hospital site redevelopment	
More museums or cultural attractions	
Not well suited for BR because no fringe	
Underutilized parks	
High groundwater	
Better gateway development at 93/40	
Lower speed	
Zoning enforcement	
River Access	
Small scale mixed use commercial and residential	
Trader Joes	
Can the City be trusted? Development = tax dollars	
Dodger lane has become industrial - used a short cut for large trucks	

Downtown and Avenues	
Trails / Walkability	**28**
Safer, wider sidewalks	6
More river bridges	5
Bicycle underpass Baker	3
Kay Beller park to railway pathway	
Install bridge from The Yards to the bike path across the river	
Complete bike path to Smith Field	
Smith field to the lake	
93 / Spokane Improvements	**8**
Central / Spokane crosswalks dangerous	2
Spokane / 2nd Street underpass	3
More pedestrian lights	
Left turn signals, 13th and 2nd	
Tree lined medians	
Better design and landscaping along corridor	
River - remove culverts	**6**
Remove culverts	5
More access	1
Density	**6**
Lupfer and O'Brien closest to river	
Historic neighborhoods	
More infill	
Downtown density	3
Taller buildings	
Reduce setbacks	
Smaller lots	
Mixed housing closer to 2nd and south of 7th	
Viaduct ped improvements / make more attractive	**5**
Central Ave Pedestrian Only	**4**
Parking	**2**
Spokane parking behind buildings	
Parking structure	
More single family neighborhoods	**2**
More / preserve trees	
Other	
Widen Baker over river	1
Expand "Columbia Style neighborhood onto to hospital site	1
Pave roads yearly	1
No STRs in single family neighborhoods	1
Lights in parks	1
Bathroom for all parks	1
Trader Joes	1
More business opportunities near Super One	1
Better community center at Kay Beller	1
Control noxious weeds in open spaces	1
Tram to top of big mountain	1
Traffic calming	1
Reduce street parking	1
Prevent too much density	1

North Whitefish	
Wisconsin Ave Corridor	**16**
Too much traffic	5
Traffic flow	2
Reduce speed limit	2
Wisconsin only line through sandpoint	2
Repaint lane lines and turn lanes	
Better sidewalks	
Move turn lanes	
Big Mtn Roundabout	
More escape routes east	
More protected bike lanes	
Need second viaduct	**11**
Emergency / Fire Access	3
Better Wisconsin Pedestrian Crossings	**7**
Soroptomist Park	**5**
Remove fence	2
Add smaller dog run fence	2
Add sidewalk	1
Add sidewalk around	1
More lake access	**5**
Trails / Walkability	**4**
Extend sidewalk along Lakeshore to Les Mason	
Better trail connections to Big Mtn	
Trail around Lake	
Path end of Dakota / Glenwood need sidewalk	
Weeds	**4**
Too many massive buildings being constructed out of scale	**3**
Keep apartment ratio the same as other parts of town	**3**
No more high density projects	1
Too many apartments	1
Need workforce housing	**3**
BNSF	**3**
Lower noise	1
Less pollution	1
Silent Crossings	1
City Beach Infrastructure	**3**
Getting too crowded and no parking	
More boat parking at City Beach	
Better Parking	
Too many deer	**3**
Build pathway down E. Edgewood	**2**
Denver / Texas lot used as dog park and too many loose dogs	**2**

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR QUADRANT AND HOW?

Details of Individual Written Responses

West Quadrant	
Do not make Karrow a bypass	
93 to Karrow connections	
Widen	
Preserve large lots along Karrow	
Public Access	6
Better access to State Park	
Preserve access from south of 18th to green space	
Better access to Blanchard Lake	
No gated developments	
More public access to lake and river	
General Transportation	5
Transit loop (bus)	
Get traffic off Baker	
Adjust stoplights for snow days	
Speed limit on 93 & State park Rd	
Baker Ave 4 way stop	
Zinke houses	5
Preserving Open Space and Low Density	3
Preserve Ag Land	
Charter to preserve open space	
Veterans Park (Improve)	3
Better Birch Street Crossing	3
OTHER	
No gated communities	2
No bridge on Spokane - keep culverts	2
No more large development density	2
Too many septics	1
Wildlife	2
Reduce STRs	1
Quiet RR crossings	1
HWY 93 needs better lighting	1
No special bike lanes	1
Lights on x-country ski trails	1
Move trees along viaduct	1
Housing along 93 causing traffic issues	1
Open meadow parkland	1
Karrow pocket gathering places	1
Preserve cow creek	1
Start river protection standing committee	1
High ground water along Karrow	1
Water lower	1
Maintain water quality	1

South and East Quadrant	

Downtown and Avenues	
Lower height restrictions	2
"Avenues" not wide enough for cross town traffic	1

North Whitefish	
Other	
Fire mitigation	
Cost of water	
Extend Reservoir Road	
More mixed use near Denver-Edgewood	
Less vacant condos	
Limit growth	
Tree preservation	
Lack of community center	
Park on north side of tracks	
Increase housing density along RR tracks	
Better parking for Iron Horse Trails	
Locals should not have to pay resort tax	
More commercial space	
SUP storage for locals	
Close road at end of Montana	
Urban Blight	
Bldg Ht limitations on ridgelines and mountains	
Keep density close to DTWN	

WHAT IS UNIQUE OR SPECIAL ABOUT YOUR QUADRANT?

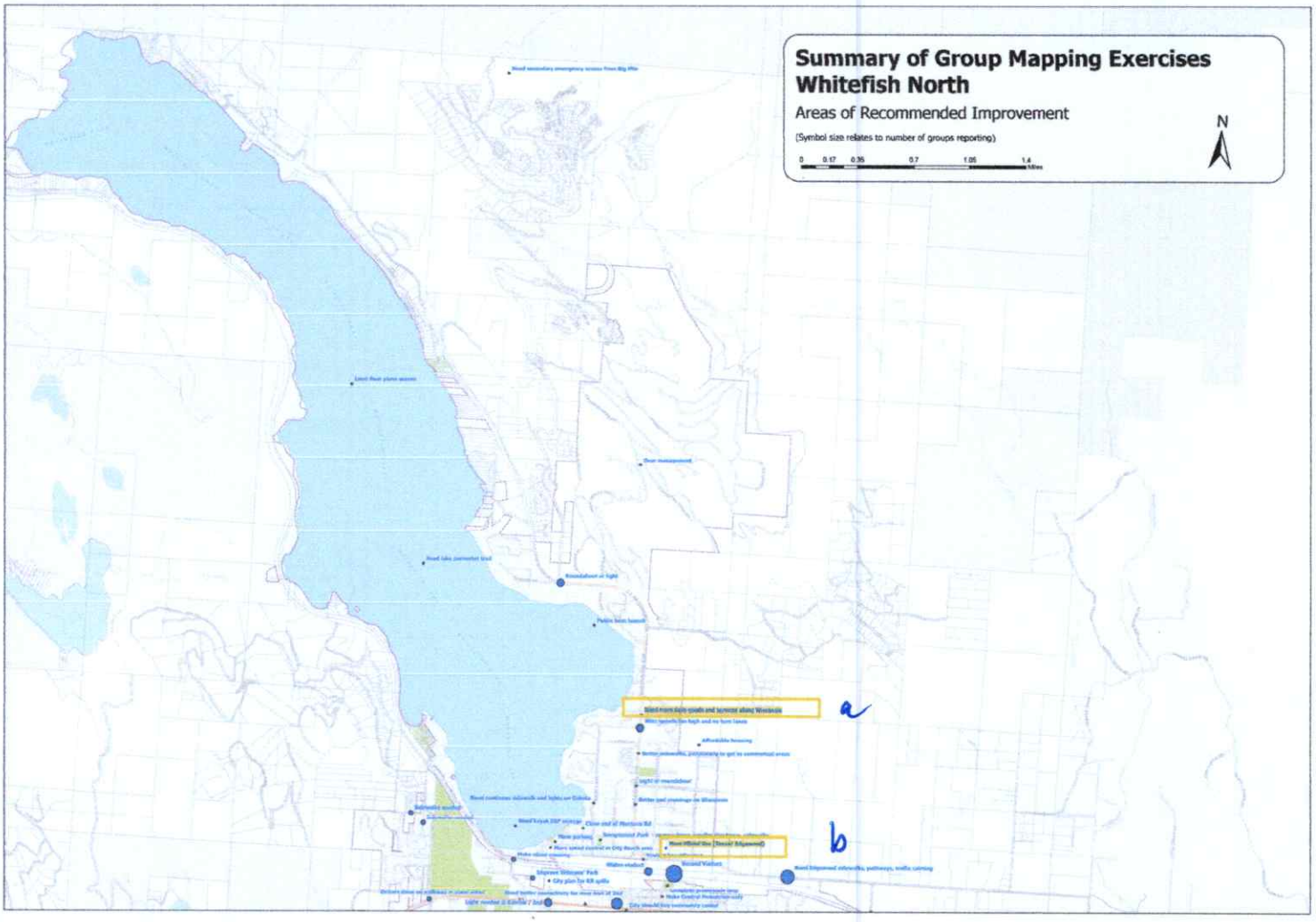
Details of Individual Written Responses

West Quadrant - 52 People	
Trails / Walkability	21
Golf course / Nordic Trails	18
WF River and river access	17
Need river protection committee	
Lakes (and accessibility)	14
Whitefish Lake State Park	7
Farmland and ranches	7
Blanchard Lake	6
Open space	5
Wildlife (and corridors)	5
Need designated corridors	
View of mountains from Kerrow and golf course	4
Lost Loon Lake	4
Springs and Wetlands	3
Forested Areas	3
OTHER	
Maple Beach	2
Undeveloped land	2
Amenities	2
Larger lot sizes	2
Riverside Park	2
Parks	2
Historic neighborhoods	2
Lakefront properties	1
South entryway	1
Smaller business hubs	1
Kerrow	1
Should not be used as bypass	1
Professional buildings	1
Friendly neighbors	1
Natural environment	1
Big Mountain	1
Northwest corner of the Flathead	1
Beginning of the Rail Mountains	1
Loon Mt WT Trail	1
Way to Canada	1
Quaint neighborhoods with little through traffic	1
Baker Hanna park	1
Working Bridge	1
Downtown	1
Rural Kerrow and Riverbend	1
Park on 7th St	1
Soccer Fields	1
Commercial off Garrison	1
Railroad	1
Stillwater River	1
Keep open space between WF and Kalispell	1
Quiet & nice	1
Architectural character	1
High groundwater along Kerrow	1
Lost Canoe	1
Small family farms	1

South and East Quadrant - 23 People	
Farmland	14
Please be careful because the corn sound is so relaxed	
Prime farmland	
Health Of Farm	
Close access to town / downtown	11
Interface between town and county	
Close access to amenities	
Walk to downtown	
Rural Feeling	10
Traffic is mostly light on the rural roads	
Meet people - few traffic	
Longer sunset	
Quiet	
WF River / Water quality	7
Wag park / Armory Park	6
Parks and Open space	5
Smith Fields	
Wildlife / Corridor along WF river	4
Access to bike paths	4
Walkability	4
Scenic Views	4
Trails (general)	3
Multi-Use river path	
Other	
Wide open spaces, soccer fields, music school	
2nd Viaduct	
Rural connectivity to Clubs	
Historic Buildings	
Lack of franchise businesses	
Traditional blocks vs cul-de-sacs	
Defined boundary on east end	
River access	

Downtown and Avenues - 42 People	
Historic Neighborhoods	21
Houses are different, have character	
Keep the houses small	
Alley (Scenic Homes, pedestrian emphasis	
Retain character	
Pitch or Hipped	
Recent new houses are terrible	
Mix of people	
Scale and massing	
On street parking and narrow streets	
Downtown	16
No chains	
Love Central Ave brick and quarter	
Historic	
Mix of stores	
Small scale	
Original false fronts	
Character	
Central school (beautiful brick)	
Walkable / Trails	14
Pedestrian Bridges	5
Lighting along sidewalks	
Love to be able to walk into downtown	
Children can walk to school	
Lighted crosswalk	
River corridor / river access	10
Parks	9
Particularly along river	
Love the morning quiet and the wildlife	
High school, Ballfield and Memorial Park	
Depot Park	
Depot park restrooms	
Farmers market at Riverside park	
Schools	7
Close to downtown	
Close to neighborhood	
Walkable to school	
Trees	7
Tree lined streets	
Particularly entrance to downtown core	
Historic Depot	5
Other	
Single family neighborhoods	2
Small town feel	2
Unobstructed views of mountains	2
No STRs	1
Mixture of condos and SF homes	1
Snow bus	1
Not a gated community	1
Library / O'Shaugnessy	1
Large open land south of 13th	1

North Whitefish	
Trails / Walkability	18
Walkable from around town	16
WF Trail	1
WF Lake	18
Water	1
Access	1
Neighborhood Housing Diversity	9
Old historic neighborhoods	3
Single family neighborhoods	3
Preserve SF neighborhoods	
Denser / Walkable Neighborhood - diversity more affordable	
Mission Point - mix of price, walkable all different neighborhoods	
Historic neighborhood diversity in housing types	
Quiet	9
Closer for afternoon	1
City Beach	8
Big Mountain	7
Affordable access to skiing	3
Views	2
Family Apartments	4
Scenic beauty	4
Should be designated view corridor	1
Too many trees, dont block views	
Sparcity of Development / Large Lots / Rural	4
Other	
Les Mason	3
Mix of Local Housing	3
Outdoor Access/Activities	3
Trees	3
Wildlife	3
Knowing Neighbors, Friendly, etc	2
Limited commercial development	2
Stoltze Land	2
WF River	2
Baker Tennis Courts	1
Commercial along Wisconsin	1
Community Spaces	1
Conservation easement off Wisconsin	1
Development opportunities east on Edgewood	1
Historic Architecture	1
Iowa no through street promotes safety	1
Railroad sounds	1
Rural / Farmland City Interface	1
Soroptomist Park	1
Isolated yet connected	1
Keep it local	1
Kids walking to school	1
Open space	1
People recreating	1
Vacant forested spaces	1
Access to Glacier Park	1


Summary of Group Mapping Exercises
Whitefish North
Areas of Recommended Improvement
(Symbol size relates to number of groups reporting)
0 0.17 0.35 0.7 1.05 1.4
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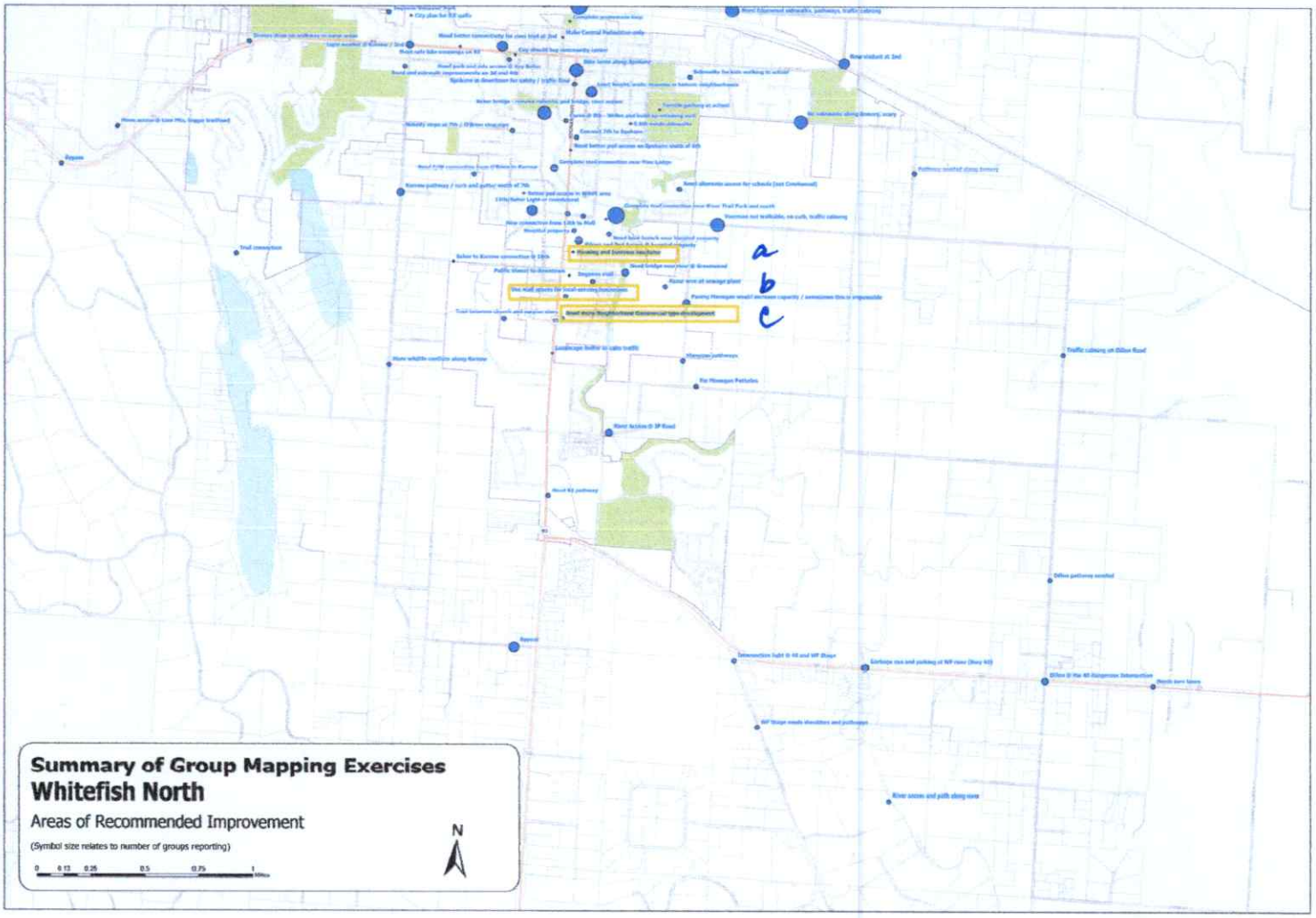
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Summary of Group Mapping Exercises
Whitefish North
Areas of Recommended Improvement
(Symbol size relates to number of groups reporting)
N

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Thursday, May 8, 2025 7:31 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: against paid parking

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Mr. Tiefenbach,

As a downtown merchant and a longtime supporter of the parking ramp, we are writing to request removal of the pursuit of paid parking in Whitefish. The current availability of the parking ramp provides the necessary amount of parking (the majority of the time), and the idea of adding a cost to that would only discourage shoppers and restaurant-goers. In addition, it is a waste of time and money to do continued and additional analysis on this situation. This should not be used as a revenue maker for downtown improvements--those long, hard fought efforts have been addressed with the resort tax and additional tax assessments on the downtown corridor.

Regards,
Amy and Eric May
owners
Bulldog Saloon & Grill

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Friday, May 9, 2025 1:46 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Economic Development Chapter

You don't often get email from [redacted]aboutmontana.net. Learn why this is important

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To Alan Tiefenbach and the Community Development Board:

As a business owner downtown for over 25 years I have very real concerns about the following issues.

The following goals and objectives in the draft chapter are of special concern to downtown businesses.

Issue:
Goal 1 Objective d.
Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local-serving
goods and services near local population centers.

Requested Action:
Request the removal of this objective. Given that only the planning administrator will have discretion to permit uses in a specific zone, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both of which would be harmful to our downtown business district. For example, this objective would pave the way to allow uses similar to those that are currently allowed only in our downtown business

district to be allowed in the WB-2 Hwy 93 S. zone, and potentially in residential neighborhoods.

For years we have kept the downtown district healthy by not allowing strip development or sprawl. I cannot understand why permitting sprawl is even under consideration. Who's to gain here, developers? Why not pay more attention to updating zoning to prevent any more CBD stores in areas that are not permitted for marijuana, as an example.

Issue: Goal 2 Objective j.

Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood serving light
commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas.

Requested Action:
Request removal of this objective. Neighbors have always fought commercial uses in their neighborhoods.
Without Conditional Use Permits (CUPs), which we understand will no longer be a planning tool and to date have given residents the opportunity to oppose such proposals, these uses would be by right. Residential Neighborhood streets that could be re-zoned to allow commercial are Columbia Ave, East and West Seventh Street, Pine Ave, Armory Rd, portions of Karrow Ave, Denver Ave. and Texas Ave.

I really oppose allowing commercial in residential areas. Again, what's the point? Why is this even being considered? Who benefits other than developers.

Issue:

Goal 3 Objective e.
Study the feasibility of a demand-based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over
and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new
public parking lots, and/or public transit.

Requested Action:
Request removal of this objective to pursue paid parking in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking will
dissuade shoppers from shopping in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking would also encourage
shoppers to take more vehicle trips to other communities and other commercial areas in Whitefish, where there is no paid parking. The
economic playing field is not level if only downtown Whitefish requires shoppers to pay for parking. Recently enacted ordinances and the Employee Parking Permit Program are already addressing parking turn-over in our downtown.

Being downtown for over 25 years I fully support the current timed parking with leases available for employees/owners. I don't see logic behind this. It will not increase turnover or availability. It will just burden the business owners and employees. Try creating revenue by taxing short term rentals instead of shoppers supporting our local businesses. Add an extra tax on short term rentals for parking infrastructure revenue as they just exacerbate our parking situation downtown.

Thanks for letting me comment and I would have probably done a better job if I hadn't just noticed that this needed to be in by 5pm today!

Thanks for your time and service to our community.

Susan Schnee

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Zak Anderson <[redacted]explorewhitefish.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 8, 2025 10:07 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Economic Development Input from the Convention and Visitors Bureau
Attachments: Contribution of Tourism to the Whitefish Economy - Edit and Update by the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau (1).pdf

You don't often get email from zak@explorewhitefish.com. Learn why this is important

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Alan - Attached is an updated draft of the two sections on tourism within the Economic Development Plan. I've revised the content to reflect the most current data on market trends, public sentiment, and the economic impact of the visitor economy in Whitefish. In addition, I've added context to better illustrate the connection between tourism and broader economic development efforts.

In short, I believe it's important that the Growth Policy recognizes tourism as a vital component of our community's economic health—and as an asset that can be strategically leveraged to support economic diversification. Rather than framing economic growth and tourism as competing forces, I suggest viewing them through the lens of mutual benefit.

Please let me know if you have any feedback or suggested changes and thank you for all the hard work on the Growth Policy.

-Zak

--

Zak Anderson
Executive Director
Explore Whitefish
Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau
Email [redacted]explorewhitefish.com
Phone 406-862-3390
Visit Us At Explorewhitefish.com

Contribution of Tourism to the Whitefish Economy

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Whitefish's economy—43% of all jobs are at least partially reliant on visitor spending. According to the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR), nonresident visitors spent over $1 billion annually in Flathead County during 2022 and 2023, the highest of any county in Montana. Explore Whitefish, the city's official tourism organization, estimates that in 2024, 57% of every dollar spent in Whitefish was by a nonresident, contributing to an annual visitor economy of approximately $200 million.

Whitefish holds a unique position as a small town because of the intersection between the visitor economy and the local economy. Locally owned businesses earn most of their profits during the busy summer months and rely on local patronage throughout the rest of the year. Tourism brings substantial benefits to Whitefish—excellent restaurants and unique shops are possible because of visitor spending—but these businesses also depend on consistent local support.

Whitefish benefits from its proximity to Glacier National Park, which recorded 3,208,755 recreation visits in 2024, marking the second-highest visitation year on record. Meanwhile, annual visitation to Whitefish has remained relatively steady. The top three visitor activities in Whitefish and the surrounding area (including Glacier National Park) continue to be scenic driving, hiking, and wildlife watching. However, the tourism industry remains highly seasonal, with significant fluctuations in employment and revenue. July and August consistently represent the peak season in Whitefish. To mitigate these fluctuations, Explore Whitefish works to manage visitation during the peak summer months through destination management messaging and promotes tourism during the shoulder seasons.

Outdoor recreation is a major driver of local tourism. The Whitefish Trail, which features 47 miles of non-motorized multi-use trail and 15 trailheads, attracts mountain bikers and hikers. A study by Headwaters Economics and Whitefish Legacy Partners indicated that the Whitefish Trail contributes $6.4 million in annual spending by visitors and locals, supporting 68 additional jobs and $1.9 million in labor income. Overall, outdoor recreation spending by visitors to Whitefish amounts to approximately $101 million annually, supporting 1,460 jobs and $41 million in labor income.

Montana does not impose a statewide sales tax. However, in 1996, Whitefish voters approved a 3% "resort tax" on lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail purchases to offset visitor impacts on tax-funded services. In 2024, resort tax collections exceeded $6 million. According to VisaVue data, 57% of spending in Whitefish is attributable to

visitors. Since VisaVue data does not include lodging expenditures—which contribute significantly to resort tax collections—it is reasonable to estimate that nonresidents contributed approximately $3.75 million to the resort tax in 2024.

As of 2025, the allocation of these funds is as follows:

- 48% for streets, sidewalks, and underground utilities
- 25% for property tax relief
- 10% for community housing
- 10% for paths and other park acquisitions and improvements
- 2% to the Whitefish Trail for maintenance
- 5% to merchants for tax administration

Thus, visitors have contributed significantly to the livability of the community for residents.

Tourism-Related Impacts

Despite its economic benefits, the success of the tourism industry in Whitefish has created certain challenges. Two of the most pressing issues are employee housing and the availability of workers. Service industry employees, who typically earn less than $35,000 per year, are finding it increasingly difficult to secure adequate housing in Whitefish, where the median home sales price exceeds $1 million and median monthly rents are $2,500—32% higher than the national average, according to aggregated data from rental listing websites.

It is also difficult to attract workers willing to commute from nearby communities for relatively low wages. As a result, businesses are hesitant to locate in areas with limited access to employees. Recent efforts by Housing Whitefish—a local nonprofit that provides workforce housing assistance—have aimed to reduce rents for qualified applicants. According to Daniel Sidder, Executive Director of Housing Whitefish, the average monthly rent per person for rental assistance applicants was $800, offering a more accurate picture of the cost of living for working residents.

Other commonly cited impacts of tourism include the rise in second and third home purchases and the proliferation of short-term rentals (STRs). STRs have a range of effects: they impact local hospitality businesses, alter residential neighborhoods, increase summer traffic, and reduce market share for hotels that contribute to the 3% resort tax. According to AirDNA, as of 2025, the 59937 ZIP code—which includes the city of Whitefish and surrounding unincorporated areas—had approximately 1,700 STR listings. Of these, about 400 were licensed within city limits, suggesting that roughly 1,300 STRs were located outside city boundaries but still within the same ZIP code.

To provide a strategic, long-term framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish community and reduce tourism's negative impacts, the City of Whitefish and the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau collaborated to develop the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP). A steering committee was formed in 2017, with the plan adopted in 2020 and updated again in 2024.

Public support for tourism declined following the surge in visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Whitefish Community Tourism Survey (developed by the STMP committee), tourism sentiment has evolved significantly since 2023. In that year, only 30% of respondents agreed with the statement, "The overall benefits of tourism in Whitefish outweigh the negative impacts," while 47% disagreed. By 2025, over 50% of respondents agreed with that statement, and more than 69% agreed that tourism benefits the community via resort tax collections: "Resort tax revenue generated supports vital city infrastructure and residential tax credits."

Overall, tourism has brought lasting benefits to the broader Whitefish community by helping to build and sustain the amenities that make the town attractive to residents, small businesses, and future employers. Whitefish is distinct from other recreation-focused towns in the Rocky Mountains in that it is more than just a winter ski town or a summer gateway to Glacier National Park—it is a year-round community that strategically reinvests its visitor economy into local infrastructure, trails, parks, and public spaces.

With slightly more than half of all spending in Whitefish coming from nonresidents, visitor dollars help keep small businesses open during the shoulder seasons and slower periods. This stabilizing effect not only supports jobs and tax revenue, but also helps keep prices lower and services more viable for year-round locals. In this way, tourism has helped Whitefish preserve its small-town character while offering the amenities of a much larger community. Economic growth and development plans would be wise to build on the success of tourism in Whitefish. Accordingly, growth policies should be designed to leverage the visitor economy to grow business sectors beyond tourism.

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Tuesday, April 22, 2025 2:40 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Economic development

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Economic development

Dear Alan,
This confirms that at the 4/17/25 meeting, I moved to change the work sessions to formal meetings. This passed 5 to 2. I note from your 4/9/25 email that as to economic development goals and objectives, you will put this topic on the agenda for the 5/21/25 work session at 6PM. I am withdrawing my comments on economic development goals and objectives, in favor of the Heart of Whitefish version, which covers narrative, vision, goals and objectives, as submitted to you by email of 4/18/25, by Rhonda Fitzgerald. So it is the Heart of Whitefish version and the staff version which should be considered by the Board on 5/21/25. Please do proper public notice of this for the 5/21/25 meeting. Please place this email in the public comment section on the website, under economic development. Best regards, Jon Heberling.
Sent from my iPhone

PO Box 1964
Whitefish, MT. 59937

April 18, 2025

Dear Alan,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Economic Development Chapter of the new Growth Policy. Attached please find our edits to your draft, followed by footnotes for those edits. General edits in the narrative are for clarity and accuracy, and for elements that our members have commented they feel were overlooked in the GSBS study and the draft chapter.

The GSBS Study is disappointing and does not accurately portray the complete economy of Whitefish. The study appears to have simply taken the most available data and statistics and plugged it into the final report.

The draft Economic Development Chapter, and especially the proposed goals and objectives, appear to seek to drive rapid development and growth in Whitefish. Given that the GSBS report was noted as a primary source for this chapter, nowhere in the GSBS report is rapid growth called for.

The draft chapter portrays what we have as lacking and bad, especially the seasonal visitor economy, which is made up of many longtime community-serving businesses, and makes up 50% of our local economy. Also, the influx of affluent residents has had an outsized influence, some negative and some positive, on our town's development. This appears to have been overlooked in the GSBS report and the draft chapter.

Whitefish is a small town and the overwhelming sentiment of residents is to maintain the small-town character. A recent flood of new residents working remotely in high-paying jobs has driven a rapid increase in housing costs.

The residents of a small town support the businesses that are necessary to them. You can tell what businesses are necessary to residents by what survives over time.

PO Box 1964
Whitefish, MT. 59937

Over time, Whitefish residents have altered their discretionary spending habits. Online shopping and shopping at nearby general merchandise big box stores have become a larger proportion of residents' discretionary spending. As a result, businesses have had to adjust their product offerings, or fail.

This has been demonstrated through hard-learned lessons such as the mid-1980s exodus of downtown businesses to then recently built malls, where these businesses failed.

It is not realistic to think that by opening up a specific zone to additional business types, residents will support those businesses. Our history tells us otherwise.

The WB-2 is a perfect example where many businesses have located and residents have not supported them. Now they are gone, or going. Examples - Most recently Army/Navy, Big Mountain Glass, Carquest, Shopko Hometown, Sprous Reitz, Dollar Tree Store, Radio Shack, and many moderately-priced family restaurants and franchises (Numerous restaurants in the mall, Denny's, Pizza Hut, Taco Johns, TCBY, City Brew Coffee)

Our visitor economy is strong seasonally, yet our year round economy is fragile. Our downtown again has empty storefronts, just as it did from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s. New ordinances allowing recreational drug dispensaries in most zones are rapidly changing the character of our community.

Please include this letter, our edited chapter and footnotes in the public record.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Fitzgerald

Heart of Whitefish

[redacted]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What was originally an economy ~~heavily reliant~~based on the timber and railroad industries is now made up of a strong seasonal visitor economy, and a mix of healthcare, education, railroad, retail, information, entrepreneurial and services industries.(a.)
~~is now primarily tourism based and includes the service and retail industries.~~

BNSF is still a major employer in the city, employing approximately ~~230~~ 420 people.(b.)

*~~At least~~ Approximately **43%** of all jobs in the City of Whitefish are related to tourism.(c.)*

$69,919
Whitefish Median Household Income

$67,915
Montana Median Household Income

< $35,000
Average salaries of service workers

21% of working Whitefish residents work remotely.

TOP WHITEFISH EMPLOYERS 2023	
Logan Health	650
Winter Sports	110 (650 seasonal winter)(b.)
Averill Hospitality	144 (~~282~~202 seasonal summer)(b.)

*In ~~2022~~2023, non-resident spending in Flathead County was **$~~818 MILLION~~ $1 BILLION**, with the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau reporting tourism bringing in approximately **$390 MILLION** for the City of Whitefish in 2023. Resort tax brought more than **SIX MILLION** dollars into the city in 2023.*

Areas of Expected Job Growth(***)

- Manufacturing
- Health Care
- Tourism

Areas of Expected Job Decline

- Transportation
- Warehousing
- Information Services

Businesses Most Lacking in Whitefish

- Personal and business services
- ~~Construction and mining~~ (d.)
- ~~Clothing retailers (for locals)~~(e.)

76% of employees who work for Whitefish businesses do not live in Whitefish.

Shifting consumer habits for some **Goods and Services** has resulted in shopping online and at nearby big box general merchandise stores. ~~**Goods and Services** limited by zoning or availability in Whitefish results in Whitefish residents driving to other nearby communities for their needs~~.(e.)

"Availability of Land, Operating Costs, and Housing"

Listed by stakeholders as biggest constraints to doing business in Whitefish

"Availability of attainable housing , Hiring of staff, and Seasonality"

Identified by existing businesses as biggest constraints to doing business in Whitefish.

SUPPORTING A ROBUST RESILIENT ECONOMY

Vision: "We support local business retention and expansion, and encourage a diverse year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique small-town character and qualities, through policies supporting moderate growth for our community. The recent rapid change and development pressures have been overwhelming to many Whitefish residents, who wish to retain our small-town feel." ~~We will continue to support local businesses and find innovative ways to diversify our year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities. We will endeavor to provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs to serve our local population."~~(f.)

Whitefish has weathered many economic ups and downs since its incorporation in 1905 after the Great Northen Railway made Whitefish a stop in 1904. In 1929, the Empire Builder rail service was completed from the east to west coast, bringing in ~~droves of~~ visitors from far away, many of whom stayed for the outdoor beauty and jobs at local mills or the railroad. An early 1900s timber boom was tempered by the Great Depression that lasted from 1929 to 1939. In 1947, Big Mountain Ski area installed lifts and soon after ~~winter touristsskiers~~ began finding their way here to recreate. Whitefish Lake also drew in visitors and summer resort cabin owners for its productive fishing. In the 1980s, many local timber mills shut down due to changing federal policies and ~~high paying~~timber jobs became scarce. At that time, there were homes and businesses that sported signs that stated: "Supported by Timber Dollars". ~~Several~~ Empty storefronts ~~were boarded up~~appeared downtown after businesses left to new malls constructed in Whitefish and Kalispell, and subsequently failed. The economy began to pick~~ed~~ up in the late 1990s.~~, and T~~the early 2000s saw a huge jump in real estate prices and new home starts as more people discovered Whitefish via the Internet and as a result of the housing bubble nationwide.~~, including recreationists driven out of other mountain towns due to high real estate prices.~~ In 2008, the Great Recession hit, causing many in the construction and real estate industries to lose their jobs. In 2003, local businesses partnered with the City to develop the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan. Implementation of the plan began in 2009 using a combination of resort tax funds and commercial property tax increment funds. This investment revitalized the town's commercial core. ~~and many local families to move away~~. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and 2020 brought a huge influx of new people and businesses to Whitefish who were fleeing population centers for a more laid-back mountain lifestyle, many of whom were able to maintain their ~~previous~~ high-paying jobs by working remotely. A consequence of this was a steep increase in housing prices. This trend may be reversing as remote workers are being called back to in-person work. Additionally, over the last several decades there has been a significant migration of affluent residents to Whitefish, including retired people, remote workers, and simply affluent people who are neither retired nor remote workers, but have chosen to live here either full or part-time. These affluent residents have had significant impacts, some positive and some negative, on the economy, the town's development, the cultural, the recreational, and on social amenities

that make Whitefish desirable. Over the next twenty years, there will likely be other major economic shifts for reasons that are hard to predict.

It is vitally important for a community to not rely on one industry for its economy, as economies change and downturns or closures in that industry can have catastrophic effects on small towns. Economic diversity is critical in achieving a strong, stable, resilient community. A healthy economy adds to all aspects of the community, from jobs to infrastructure to community services. A growing, diverse economic base with a trend toward higher paying jobs for residents provides the ideal framework on which a city prospers and develops.

Logan Health is the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, and health care and associated services is considered an industry of potential growth in the area. However, Approximately tourism is by far the largest contributor to half of the Whitefish economy is driven by tourism, providing the majority of businesses and 43% of jobs and bringing nearly $400 million into the city in 2023. The tourism

industry is highly seasonal; there are wide fluctuations in tourism-related employment and revenue throughout the year.

Many Whitefish residents are employed in high-paying professional-level jobs, ~~who and must~~ work remotely or have chosen to commute out of the city into other areas ~~due to lack of these jobs in Whitefish~~. Conversely, many workers in the ~~lower paying~~ tourism-related service industry ~~cannot~~ can no longer afford to live in Whitefish, having been driven out by rising housing costs, and must commute into the city by car since there is no local commuter transit. ~~Rising land costs, E~~employee shortages and housing affordability make it difficult for local businesses to retain and find workers. Due to factors such as ~~restrictive zoning,~~ high lease rates ~~downtown~~, low inventory, and sky-high property prices and construction costs, it can be difficult for new businesses to afford or find locations to open.
~~, leading to a deficit of locally available essential goods and services that residents rely on~~.(2)

The City of Whitefish enjoys many assets – it is in a highly desirable location, surrounded by lakes and mountains, with an abundance of natural resources and a wealth of available outdoor activities. It is vital to protect those assets, as they are a major economic driver. Whitefish has locational advantages as well, including being along an international highway corridor, having major rail access, being near an airport, and in proximity to Glacier National Park. The vibrant downtown strengthens Whitefish's unique identity, and the educated and talented citizenry and visitors generate beneficial social interaction to facilitate idea-exchange. Whitefish is uniquely poised to capitalize on its assets to broaden its economic base ~~beyond purely a visitor~~compatible with the visitor economy and enhance its economic sustainability and resilience.

ECONOMIC DRIVERS

The City of Whitefish was formerly an economy heavily reliant on the timber and railroad industries but by the early 2000s became ~~primarily~~ 50% tourism based. At the time of the 2010 census, the three major industries in the City were accommodation and food service, retail trade, and health care and social assistance. In 2024, the same three major industries dominated the Whitefish economy. However, 69% of Whitefish residents are employed in the management, business and financial sectors. As ~~only about 10%~~ 800 of the jobs offered in Whitefish are in those same industries, a large number of Whitefish residents ~~work remotely or commute into other areas~~[1]commute into other areas or work remotely. 64.1% of residents are employed outside of Whitefish for work.(3)

TABLE A: CITY OF WHITEFISH TOP INDUSTRIES (percentage of jobs)

Year		Year	
2010		2020	
Accommodation and Food Service	20.5%	Accommodation and Food Service	21.1%
Retail Trade	16.6%	Health Care and Social Assistance	17.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	16.4%	Retail Trade	15.7%
Educational Services	8.8%	Professional, Scientific, Technical	8.4%
Finance and Insurance	6.1%	Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	6.8%
* Source: 2010 and 2020 Census	68%		70%

[1] The source of recent statistics comes from the 2023 Whitefish Economic Growth Policy Update prepared for the city by GSBS Consulting.

TABLE B: CITY OF WHITEFISH TOP EMPLOYERS			
Year	Employees	Year	Employees
2007		2023	
Whitefish Mountain Resort	100 (535 seasonal winter)	Logan Health	650 (510 chamber #)
North Valley Hospital	249	Whitefish Mountain Resort[2]	110 (650 winter)
Whitefish School District	240	Averill Hospitality	144 (282 summer))
BNSF	230	Whitefish School District	250
City of Whitefish	101	BNSF	230 420
		Glacier Restaurant Group	175 (210 seasonal high)
*Source: 2007 Growth Policy		*Source: Whitefish Chamber of Commerce	

The City of Whitefish median household income is **$69,919**; higher than $66,395 for Flathead County and $67,915 for the State of Montana, but lower than the $74,755 national average. Gallatin County has the highest median household income in the State at $83,064 [3]

Contribution of Tourism to the Whitefish Economy

Tourism ~~is the largest contributor to~~makes up 50% the Whitefish economy, comprising approximately 43% of all jobs. The 2007 growth policy noted the Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) reported non-resident visitors spent $314 million in Flathead County. In ~~2022~~2023, the ITRR reported non-resident spending in Flathead County to be $~~818 million~~1 billion, with the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau showing tourism bringing in approximately $390 million for the City of Whitefish in 2023. Whitefish benefits from its proximity to Glacier National Park; in 2023 there were approximately 3 million visitors at the park[4]. The top three visitor activities in Whitefish and the surrounding area (including Glacier National Park) are identified as scenic driving, hiking and wildlife watching. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is highly seasonal and there are large fluctuations in tourism-related employment and revenue. July and August have consistently been the high season in the City of Whitefish. The Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau ~~has recently been targeting~~targets messaging to highlight tourism during the shoulder seasons to boost the slower periods, and Glacier National Park's new vehicle reservation system is ~~helping~~ attempting to more evenly distribute visitation levels throughout the season[5].

Outdoor recreation is a huge driver for local tourism. The Whitefish Trail, which has 47 miles of non-motorized multi-use trail and 15 trailheads mostly on state-owned land, is a big draw for mountain bikers and hikers~~ that come from all over the country~~. A Headwaters

[2] Winter Sports maintains 100 year-round employees, with 650 during the winter ski season and 200 in the summer season.
[3] US Census https://data.census.gov/profile/Whitefish%20city,_Montana?g=160XX00US3079825
[4] The Montana Travel Industry - 2023 Summary (Melissa Weddell, ITRR)
[5] Kelsey Evans, Tourism Outlooks: "Shoulder Seasons Grow, Snow Forecast Optimistic", The Whitefish Pilot, March 28, 2025, https://whitefishpilot.com/news/2024/oct/23/tourism-outlooks-shoulder-seasons-grow-snow-forecast-optimistic/

Economics and Whitefish Legacy Partners study showed the Whitefish Trail contributes $6.4 million in annual spending by visitors that come to enjoy the trail and by locals that purchase or rent outdoor gear at local stores. Whitefish Trail visitor spending translated to 68 additional jobs and $1.9 million in labor income. Outdoor recreation spending by people visiting Whitefish mainly for general outdoor recreation in the area amounts to about $101 million in spending, 1,460 jobs, and $41 million in labor income annually.

Montana has no state-wide sales tax. In 1996, the voters of Whitefish approved a 3% "resort tax" that applies to lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail to offset visitor impacts to tax-funded services, so the full burden doesn't fall on local residents. In 2023, approximately six million dollars was collected. As of 2025, the funds will be split 48% for streets, sidewalks and underground utilities, 25% for property tax relief, 10% for community housing, 10% for paths and other park acquisitions and improvements, 2% to the Whitefish Trail for maintenance, and 5% goes to merchants for the administration of the tax.

Tourism Related Impacts

There have been issues related to the ~~dominance~~ strength of the tourism industry in Whitefish. Two of the top issues relate to employee housing and availability of employees. Service workers, who typically earn less than $35,000 per year, are having an increasingly difficult time finding adequate housing in Whitefish given the median home sales price of over a million dollars and per capita monthly rents averaging ~~of at least~~ $~~1,200~~[6]860(4)~~.~~ Also, it has proven difficult to attract employees who will commute from nearby communities ~~for low wages~~(5), and businesses are reluctant to locate in areas where the employee pool is limited. According to a report from GSBS consulting, 76% of workers employed in Whitefish do not live in Whitefish.

Other impacts relating to tourism commonly cited include the explosion of 2nd and 3rd home purchases and proliferation of short-term rentals (which impact local hospitality businesses, residential areas and the housing market), additional summer ~~tourist~~ traffic, the wide seasonal fluctuations in business and employment, and the difficulty protecting the natural resources and character which draw residents and visitors to the area. Local support for tourism declined following the significant uptick in visits during the 2020 pandemic. Results from a survey conducted by the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2018 showed 69% of residents agreed with the statement that tourism makes Whitefish a good place to live. This dropped to only 22% of residents in 2023. Visitor spending has ~~shown a 10% decline year every year since 2021 and is now at pre-pandemic levels.~~remained flat for several years, even though hotel occupancy has declined.

To provide a strategic, long-term vision and framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish ~~tourism economy~~community and reduce tourism impacts on the community, the city and the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau joined together to develop a Whitefish

[6] The $~~1,200~~ 860 (4) represents the median rent paid per person, not the total cost of rental units.

Sustainable Tourism Management Plan. A steering comittee was formed in 2017. ~~This~~ the final plan was ~~first~~ adopted in 2020 and was updated in 2024.

Other Significant Industries in Whitefish

Healthcare and social assistance is the next largest industry in Whitefish, comprising approximately 18% of the jobs. The main contributor is the 25-bed Logan Health critical access hospital along with supporting medical clinics and services. The hospital, formerly known as the North Valley Hospital, formed in 1905 until it merged with the Kalispell regional healthcare system in 2016 before becoming part of Logan Health. They are the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, providing 650 year-round jobs. Healthcare employment offers career-oriented jobs (often called "primary jobs") which pay significantly higher wages than tourism. Healthcare is one of the industries projected for future growth in Whitefish. Other industries projected for future growth in Whitefish include tourism, professional, scientific, and technical services and manufacturing.

Whitefish School District is a major employer in the city, providing approximately 250 jobs in 2023, about the same number of jobs reported in 2010.

Although no longer the main economic driver of the Whitefish economy, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corporation (BNSF) still maintains a significant presence in the city. The Whitefish location generates at least ~~230~~ 420 (6) local jobs, hosts the busiest Amtrak Station between Portland and Minneapolis, and is an integral component of the freighting network between the east and west coasts. In the past, there was a rail spur that served a local timber mill. That has been removed, but the railyard and adjacent industrial properties have the potential to help accommodate a rail-served industrial site or a site with the ability to load or unload goods from railcars, eliminating the need for intermediate transport of large goods by truck from Seattle and other international shipping ports.

There was a national trend of residents of urban areas moving to rural and mountain towns during the COVID-19 pandemic and working remotely. It is estimated that 21% of Whitefish workers are remote workers, many of which are employed with out-of-state jobs. This trend has brought households with higher incomes into the community which raises prices and exacerbates the lack of affordability in the Whitefish housing market, although the trend may to be reversing.

Commercial Areas in Whitefish

There are generally four commercial areas in the City of Whitefish (see the Layout of the City Map on Page X). The first is the downtown core, which contains the majority of the tourism, entertainment, food, and civic uses in the city. The downtown area also provides the highest density of jobs (see the Job Density Map – Exhibit X). The second commercial area is neighborhood-oriented businesses, restaurants and professional offices located in pockets along Wisconsin Avenue north of the railroad tracks. The third commercial area contains a gas station, professional offices and lodging establishments along the US 93 corridor north of the Whitefish River bridge on US 93 to the downtown

core at East 4th Street. The fourth and largest commercial area is located along the US 93 South/Spokane Avenue corridor from the Whitefish River Bridge on US 93 south to the city limits near Highway 40 West. Virtually all automobile-oriented uses such as a mall, fast food restaurants, auto dealerships, service stations, supermarkets and most light industrial uses are located in this area.

The community values locally owned businesses as well as the unique commercial character of Whitefish. To protect those values, zoning has been implemented which prevents franchise or formula style chain businesses downtown and limits them in other commercial zones. While not currently regulated, formula services and formula hotels should also be limited downtown in order to further safeguard the unique business climate. The city's architectural review standards also have strict limitations with regard to franchise business design and color schemes. Outside of the downtown, most of the US 93 South corridor from East 6th Street to Highway 40 West is zoned WB-2, Secondary Business District. There have been concerns over the years regarding businesses along this corridor negatively impacting revenues of the downtown businesses, particularly the impact of "big box" style retailers. To better regulate those uses, the city instituted bulk and scale restrictions which require conditional use permits for buildings over 10,000 square feet so that impacts can be reviewed with more scrutiny. A new requirement for an economic impact study with any proposal for such businesses would better help decision makers weigh their effects on the local economy.

Economic Diversification

Diversifying the economy beyond a seasonal tourism base to attract "primary jobs" has been a recurrent strategy of the city. Both the 1996 Growth Policy and the 2007 Growth Policy (as well as previous economic studies) discuss the need for economic diversification. A common theme has been strengthening the economic base by seeking year round, high paying industries. The 1996 plan mentioned public opinion rates "small and non-polluting industries" as the most preferred type of economic growth in Whitefish. The 2007 Growth Policy stated it should be a policy of the City to promote beneficial job growth in the base economy, especially in areas that tend to diversify it beyond visitation-based business and industries. During visioning sessions for this plan update, virtually all comments about economic development expressed the need for providing a greater diversity of jobs for the residents of Whitefish.

Availability of Locally Needed Goods and Services

Unlike many commercial zones nationwide, the WB-2, Secondary Business District has very prescriptive zoning with regard to allowed retail and service uses, listing a few very defined permitted uses. That was intentional, so the zone generally would not directly compete with the downtown WB-3 General Business District, which allows all types of retail sales and services. That originated ~~when~~ after several downtown businesses left Central Avenue to relocate in the Mountain Mall when it was built in 1985 during a time when the economy was struggling. Those relocated businesses subsequently failed. While the mall is grandfathered for all retail and service uses, the downtown core was meant to be the center of financial, retail, governmental, professional, institutional, and cultural activities. Through the implementation of the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan ~~Over the years~~, the downtown has become a vibrant retail and entertainment hub and a significant visitor draw. ~~Due to that,~~Over time,

the retail offerings have become ~~mostly~~ more visitor-serving ~~due to the escalating cost of real estate~~due to changing patterns of customer demand. Existing community-serving downtown businesses include a toy store, record store, independent book store, sporting goods stores, jewelry stores, kids clothing store, thrift stores, food markets/grocery stores, snowboard shop, third-generation shoe and clothing store, liquor store, bakery, kitchen store, florists, pet supply store, yarn store, bicycle shops, yoga studios, coffee shops, barber shops, and art education studio. ~~Uses~~ Uses such as art galleries~~,~~ and boutique western wear~~, and jewelry stores have~~stores have ~~replaced~~ taken the place of the third-generation hardware store, which relocated to the WB-2 district for a larger space, and an electronics store ~~,~~and drug store, which were replaced by formula stores in the WB-2 district. ~~and other retailers of necessary goods for residents~~ Shifting consumer preferences for nearby big box general merchandise stores and online shopping have repeatedly caused general merchandise stores in the WB-2 district to cease doing business.~~that were historically prevalent on Central Avenue.~~

During visioning sessions and the most recent economic study, ~~many~~ some public comments regarding economic and commercial development expressed the ~~need~~ desire for more locally available goods and services. ~~Many~~ Some comments suggested more mixed use~~, as well as opportunities for limited neighborhood serving commercial in populated areas distant from downtown~~. There have also been discussions about how to reduce operating costs to keep locally serving businesses more affordable, particularly restaurants. ~~In addition to zoning review, strategies discussed in the study included encouraging more "temporary" businesses such as "pop up shops"(7) or food trucks.~~(7)

While using Vision Whitefish 2045 as their senior project, several Whitefish High School students provided ~~solid~~ their arguments for ~~more available and affordable~~availability and affordability of goods and services in Whitefish.

Economies do not follow jurisdictional boundaries. ~~Everyday goods and services such as clothes, shoes, or school backpacks which are not affordable or available locally due to market demand or zoning restrictions can be found fifteen miles south in Kalispell.~~(8) When local residents ~~have~~ choose to drive to other communities for ~~goods~~everyday goods and services such as clothes, shoes, or school backpacks, or to shop online, this results in "leakage" of income, jobs and finances to areas outside the city. There are also residents who are too young or old to drive, or who cannot afford an automobile, for which traveling to other areas for essentials is difficult due to limits on public transportation. Such leakage also causes an increase in vehicle trips, which conflicts with sustainability, climate action, and emission reductions goals in this plan and plans such as the Whitefish 2018 Climate Action Plan and 2022 Transportation Plan.

While there is no simple solution to these issues, ~~further evaluating city commercial zoning districts so as to better maintain local sustainability and~~supporting retention and expansion of current community-serving businessses is recommended to maintain local sustainability and reduce vehicle trips ~~is~~ as recommended in the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, as well as strongly pursuing valley-wide commuter public transportation partnerships.

Impact of Agriculture on the Whitefish Economy

Preserving and supporting local farms also has a positive impact on the economy. Local produce grown nearby can be sustainably transported to market without using the quantities of fossil fuels required to send products from somewhere else to local grocery

stores. This “direct sale” puts more of the revenue in the grower’s pockets by eliminating intermediaries typically involved in brokering and distribution of produce. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)[8], local produce stands, farmers markets ~~and other temporary agricultural markets~~ significantly reduce operating costs, and these savings can be passed on to consumers at the same time increasing profits for the farmers. As fuel prices continue to rise and as consumers become more sensitive to the issues of processed and genetically altered foods, organic and local farming should become a growth

[7] A “pop up shop” is a temporary retail space that is set up for a short period of time, typically ranging from a few days to a few months.

[8] Community Supported Agriculture is a model where consumers directly buy shares of a farm’s harvest in advance in a “subscription” scenario. CSA members receive fresh products on a weekly basis throughout the growing season.

industry. Whitefish School District's Center for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship facility includes a greenhouse, production gardens, and orchards. Flathead Valley Community College offers courses in organic agriculture, including working on a certified organic farm. But all agriculture in Flathead County faces challenges due to development pressures and real estate prices rising at much higher value than the price of farm products.

Previous Economic Development Studies

There have been several previous economic studies completed for the City of Whitefish. In 2002, there was a study prepared by a Jobs for Whitefish Taskforce (*Baker Avenue City Property Development Program - Phase 2A Report*). This study was intended to determine highest and best uses to attract favorable high wage jobs along Baker Avenue in the vicinity of Flathead Avenue. Recommendations included creating incentives to attract or grow "desirable" businesses, fostering "incubator businesses" to help local startups grow and succeed, and considering the needs of present and future industries when determining location and types of infrastructure improvements. This report also states that the "do nothing" alternative would move Whitefish away from quality jobs and diversification as has happened to resort towns such as Jackson Hole, Ketchum or Aspen. Similar recommendations are repeated in a recent 2023 economic study (discussed below).

In 2015, the *Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan* was updated (first adopted in 2006). This plan presented strategies such as regulatory changes to address scale and massing of buildings to protect and enhance downtown character and synergy and the types and timing of public projects, such as pedestrian-friendly retail parking projects, to stimulate private investment. It called for expanding the retail core into an expanded shopping loop into the Railway District.

In 2018 and 2019, an economic performance analysis was completed as part of the *Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan* and the *Highway 93 South Corridor Plan*. Finally, an economic analysis and market study was completed by GSBS Consulting for the entire city as part of this community plan to inform this chapter and to meet statutory requirements (discussed below).

Economic Development Analysis for Statutory Requirements

The Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) has specific requirements regarding economic development. These include assessing existing and potential commercial enterprises, summarizing job composition and labor force, assessing local constraints to commercial enterprises, inventorying existing and potential commercial sites, and analyzing local facilities and financial feasibility of supporting existing and potential commercial enterprises for the projected population.

Due to the expertise needed for this analysis, staff retained a consultant to complete this study. (The complete report is included as Appendix X.) The consultant reached out to more than 30 business and industry stakeholders over a 6-month period, met with many stakeholders individually, held two group economic forums and coordinated extensively with staff. Seventeen stakeholders ended up participating.

TABLE C: STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN GSBS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY

AppCOM	Heart of Whitefish
Averill Hospitality	KCM Enterprises
BNSF	Montana West Economic Development
Chamber of Commerce	Mountain Mall
City of Whitefish	National Parks Realty
Explore Whitefish	Two Bear Capital
Garden Wall Inn	Whitefish Mountain Resort
Glacier Bank	The ZaneRay Group
Haskill Creek Farms	

Stakeholders were engaged in discussions of the following topics:

- Attainable Housing
- Economic Diversification
- Areas of Growth and/or Opportunity
- Tourism
- The Downtown Area and Commercial Expansion
- Public and/or Private Infrastructure
- Policy

The consultant's report was presented to the Community Development Board in June of 2024 ~~and serves as a resource for this plan element.~~ Key takeaways from these discussions~~is report~~ include:

- The three industries of expected job growth are manufacturing(footnote ***), health care and tourism.
- Industries expected to decline are transportation, warehousing and information technology.
- Trends that may have an impact on Whitefish's economic future include an increase in remote workers, increases in short-term rentals and second-home ownership which result in decreased year-round economic activity, unavailability of employee housing, ~~ongoing consolidation of economic activity into the tourism sector~~, and increases in commuting.
- Economic strengths include a strong tourism economy, proximity to Glacier National Park and airport, and the opportunity to capitalize on a significant rail network which is advantageous to industries that rely heavily on transporting large volumes of goods.
- Economic weaknesses include ~~lack of economic diversity~~, ~~lack of affordable restaurant establishments for local residents~~, ~~hyper specific zoning resulting in deficiency of basic essentials, and manufacturers and businesses leaving due to cost of land,~~(2) unobtainable housing and low employee pool.
- There is an increasing amount of development pressure for housing on properties presently zoned for industrial or commercial uses.
- ~~A recommendation to further study the pros and cons of a potential downtown electronic paid parking program to increase parking turn over in front of businesses and discourage employee parking in these areas.~~(9)

- Benefits of forming a community group focused toward facilitating discussions between municipalities and other economic development organizations to ensure goals are in alignment and do not conflict with each other.Another committee?
- ~~Considering regulatory changes to ensure the downtown is not dominated by one particular type of business (such as all art galleries or jewelry stores).~~(10)
- A review of properties ideal for commercial development and recommended types of industry.

Additionally, the State Legislature in 2023 enacted laws that require cities to allow multi-family and mixed use by right in all commercial zones while also limiting parking requirements for such uses. As such, there is increasing pressure on the remaining vacant commercial properties to be developed into housing rather than typical commercial uses. While housing is an important need, we also need to consider whether there is enough available commercial and industrial property to meet the economic needs of our growing community over the next twenty years and beyond.

SUMMARY

A healthy city economy is balanced, resilient, and inclusive, supporting both current and future generations. It should be diversified across multiple industries, reducing dependence on a single sector. The economic benefits should be shared broadly among the population. Goods and services should be readily available locally to all residents. The *vision* is to balance the availability of needed jobs, goods and services with the community's desire to support local businesses and retain its scale, identity and charm.

DRAFT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

1. Encourage a ~~diverse~~ balanced year-round base economy that continues to provide~~s~~ (delete s) essential jobs, goods and services, recognizing that the needs of local residents and neighborhoods shall not be less important than the needs and interests of businesses~~.~~

   Objectives:

   a) Pursue all feasible alternatives to provide affordable housing for those who work in the City of Whitefish.

   ~~a)~~b) Evaluate where commercial and industrial areas may need to grow or revitalize to meet expected demand over the next twenty years and beyond.

   ~~b)~~c) Preserve existing industrial and commercial zoning and only support rezoning for residential purposes if a significant public benefit can be demonstrated, such as workforce housing.

   ~~c) Consider incentive programs for certain business sectors to entice relocation or establishment of high-wage businesses within the city.~~Consider incentive programs or low-interest loan programs to retain and expand existing businesses within the city.

   ~~d) Review zoning to diversify business locations and to encourage necessary local serving goods and services near local population centers.~~(2) and (8)

~~Goal~~

   ~~e)~~ Investigate opportunities and partnerships to identify and recruit clean, community-compatible industry to Whitefish.

   ~~f)~~ Support local and valley wide commuter public transportation to and from downtown to accommodate residents, visitors, and local employees.

   d) Support resiliance measures. Resiliance - planning and accomodating growth that has already occurred.

   Goal

2. Support local business retention and expansion, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

   Objectives:

   a. Coordinate with BNSF and compatible industries to identify available land and opportunities to capitalize on existing rail access, including adding a new rail spur to accommodate rail-served industry and local loading or unloading of shipped goods.
   b. Encourage the development of primary-job creating enterprises through such strategies as timing of infrastructure improvements and/or emphasis on building or redevelopment of building types that allow for small business growth (such as business incubators or co-working spaces).
   c. ~~Continue to restrict and regulate big box retail and explore adding an economic impact analysis requirement for proposals for those uses~~Prohibit big-box retail.
   d. Continue to prohibit formula retail and restaurants downtown and modify code to include regulation of formula hotels and services. Continue to regulate formula businesses in other commercial areas to support the unique character and shopping experience of Whitefish and promote locally owned

businesses.

e.

~~e.~~ f. Create a local group, network, or committee that has recurring conversations regarding trends and specific areas of growth with other municipalities, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations to share

information to help develop and encourage sustainable business-attracting strategies. Another committee?

f.g. Actively pursue partners and grants to fund and establish business incubators to provide technical and logistic support to new businesses.

g.h. ~~Support creative lower cost enterprises that cater to locals such as food trucks or temporary "pop up shops" using existing under utilized buildings, facilities or outdoor spaces.~~ (11)

h.i. ~~Require~~ Encourage all new commercial development~~,~~ subdivisions and infrastructure upgrades to include the installation of conduit for high-speed internet ~~and~~ congruent with explor~~ing~~e grant or funding opportunities for this type of infrastructure to meet the needs of the current population and prepare for potential growth.(12)

~~i. Consider future zoning amendments to allow small scale neighborhood serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas.~~Prohibit commercial uses in residential zones other than those currently allowed. ~~.~~(13)

Goal

3. Maintain the downtown core as the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of the community.

Objectives:

a. Continue implementation of the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan.

a.b. Maintain zoning consistent with the uses desired downtown and the recommendations of the Downtown Business District Master Plan.

b.c. Create an overlay district for the downtown area to protect and enhance downtown character, scale and massing.

~~c. Consider a program for the downtown area that can evaluate and determine a limit of certain prolific business types. For example, create a maximum allowance on certain business types to be able to emphasize inclusion of other businesses i.e. if there is a large number of art galleries or jewelry stores, consider a maximum number of those business types in the area to increase diversity of commercial offerings in the downtown core~~ (10)~~.~~

d. ~~Study the feasibility of a demand based paid downtown parking program to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking and to create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit.~~ (9)

Goal

~~d.~~ Pursue the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan recommendations for increasing pedestrian-friendly retail parking facilities including a second parking structure and parking lots.

4. Protect the natural resources and unique character and qualities of Whitefish for the continued health of the visitation economy and quality of life for residents.

Objectives:

a. Work with Whitefish Convention and Visitor's ~~Center~~Bureau, ~~Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to~~local, state and federal agencies to

explore ways to promote sustainable resource-based tourism without endangering vital natural resources.

b. Support the goals and objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan.

c. Continue to work with the Montana DNRC, Whitefish Legacy Partners, and other public and private agencies to support, protect, and maintain outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities such as the Whitefish Trail, Smith Lake Disc Golf Course, and other public recreation facilities.

Goal

5. Support organic and other localized farming as a means to broaden the community's economic base and to preserve and enhance rural character.

Objectives:

a. Map active local agricultural operations as part of the land use data base.
b. Explore incentives for the growth and retention of localized agriculture.
c. Determine appropriate zoning and locations in rural agricultural areas to allow limited farm-based produce stands, and farmer's markets.~~, farm stops and related artisan food and beverage.~~
d. Continue to partner with the Whitefish Farmers Market

6. Goal

Any plan that has been adopted by the City of Whitefish shall by its adoption become a part of this growth policy.

Footnotes - Heart of Whitefish Economic Development Chapter draft edits:

(1) Cover page changes:

***GSBS study identifies manufacturing as an area of potential growth, even though pg. 6 paragraph 1 of the study says that manufacturing has declined by 20% or more. This is contradicted by Table 2 showing manufacturing jobs as having increased by 50% between 2010 and 2020. Also, which types of business fall under manufacturing? Do they include brewpubs, and marijuana grow operations? Brewpubs are essentially bars, and would more accurately be included under tourism serving business as are bars and restaurants.

a) Based on GSBS Economic Study tables listing job sectors.
b) Employment number edits from the 2024 Whitefish Chamber Community Guide. If included, the list of top employers should include all top employers in an easy to read table, per Chamber community guide, which is up to date as of the end of 2024.
c) 43% includes sectors that are also resident serving, such as retail, restaurants, arts, entertainment and recreation.
d) These industries do not show as lacking in Tables 1. and 2. in the GSBS Economic Study.
e) Shifting consumer preferences have resulted in residents shopping at nearby general merchandise big box stores and online. GSBS counts four clothing stores, when in fact, by observation there are more than 15. Existing clothing stores include a third-generation clothing and shoe store, two thrift stores, two western wear stores, three sporting goods/clothing stores, multiple casual clothing stores, four women's clothing stores, a children's clothing store, and the Army/Navy clothing store. The army/navy store is in the process of closing.
f) Visioning comments were almost universal in their concern with recent rapid growth, and wished to see the community remain a small-town.

<u>Narrative edits:</u>

General edits in the narrative are for clarity and accuracy, and for elements that our members have commented they feel were overlooked in the GSBS study and the draft chapter.

(2) Whitefish does not lack essential goods and services. Small towns are characterized by a typical mix of businesses, government, and facilities to provide essential goods and services. By definition, essential goods and services are those that are considered fundamental to human survival and well-being.

- **Examples of Essential Goods:**
    - Food
    - Water
    - Shelter
    - Clothing

- Basic utilities (electricity, heating)

- **Examples of Essential Services:**
  - Healthcare services
  - Law enforcement
  - Firefighting
  - Transportation infrastructure
  - Telecommunications
  - Essential government functions
- **Essential Businesses:**
  - Grocery stores
  - Pharmacies
  - Healthcare facilities
  - Gas stations
  - Banks
  - Laundromats/laundry services

Economic Perspective:

Essential goods are typically in high demand and have low price elasticity, meaning that changes in price have a relatively small impact on the quantity demanded.

Compared to other towns of similar size, Whitefish has a remarkable variety of goods and services.

(3) Pg. 5 Economic Drivers paragraph addition: Source: Figure 1 pg. 7 GSBS Economic Study
(4) Source – Housing Whitefish
(5) Wages in Whitefish are higher than in other nearby communities.
(6) Source – Whitefish Chamber Community Guide
(7) Pg. 11, paragraph two. - Pop-up stores and food trucks are highly tourist oriented and are not year round businesses.
(8) All goods and services are allowed in at least one zone in Whitefish. See also (2)
(9) Enforcement, new parking ordinances and the employee parking permit program implemented as a result of the 2019 Parking Management Plan are already achieving this objective. The GSBS consultants misunderstand parking in Whitefish, and mistakenly state on page 24, left column, under perceived parking problems, that there are not time limits on parking.

It is a proven fact based on history with paid parking that paid parking in Whitefish drives customers away from the very businesses that this plan seeks to retain. The parking playing field is not level with nearby businesses offering similar goods without requiring customers to pay for parking. Paid parking will also cause more vehicle trips as customers are pushed to drive farther for goods and services. This goes against the goal of the Climate Action Plan and committee's work. The Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan Public Parking section pg. 68 states "adequate downtown parking ensures a competitive shopping environment with outlying highway commercial areas." Paid parking would create a competitive disadvantage for our downtown.

Goals and Objectives edits:

(10) Supply and demand drives the mix of allowed businesses locating downtown.

(11) These types of businesses are highly tourist oriented and only operate seasonally.

(12) This requirement would increase building costs and affect affordability.

(13) Without CUPs, which we understand will no longer be a planning tool, these uses would likely be by right. Neighbors have always fought commercial uses in their neighborhoods.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Arps, Dani <Dani.Arps@mt.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 3:46 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; Byrom, Gus
Cc: Schwend, Ann
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element

Alan, I am reading it now. It looks good, I like your annotations throughout the document. I'd maybe suggest replacing the word "high" with "peak" in regards to the busiest tourism times and the winter seasonal ski resort employment. At the bottom of page 5, could you hyperlink the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism plan? I'd recommend hyperlinking in any available documents that you reference in these sections with local documents, when possible. You do a nice job of maintaining objectivity throughout although this can be an especially emotional discussion at the local level. Everyone has an opinion on economic development. I think your approach is thoughtful and thorough. Nice work.

Dani Arps

Community Technical Assistance Program Planner

Montana Department of Commerce

T: 406-841-2818 C: 406-470-1080
commerce.mt.gov

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 3:39 PM
To: Byrom, Gus <gbyrom@mt.gov>
Cc: Schwend, Ann <Ann.Schwend@mt.gov>; Arps, Dani <Dani.Arps@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element

Thanks Gus

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Byrom, Gus <gbyrom@mt.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 3:33 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Cc: Schwend, Ann <Ann.Schwend@mt.gov>; Arps, Dani <Dani.Arps@mt.gov>
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element

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Alan-

Thank you for sharing these materials related to your Economic Development Element. Congratulations on your efforts. I see your deadline for submittal of any comments is April 18.

Will take a look.

Keep going!

Take care,

Gus

Gus Byrom

Planner

Montana Department of Commerce

T: 406-841-2777
commerce.mt.gov

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 3:17 PM
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element

Good afternoon,

Attached is the DRAFT Economic Development Element for Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's Growth Policy Update.

The Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) has specific requirements regarding economic development. These include assessing existing and potential commercial enterprises, summarizing job composition and labor force, assessing local constraints to commercial enterprises, inventorying existing and potential commercial sites, and analyzing local facilities and financial feasibility of supporting existing and potential commercial enterprises for the projected population.

Due to the expertise needed for this analysis, staff retained a consultant to complete the study. The consultant reached out to more than 30 business and industry stakeholders over a 6-month period, met with many stakeholders individually, held two group economic forums and coordinated extensively with staff. Seventeen stakeholders participated. Based on the study and the existing growth policy, Staff drafted initial goals and objectives, and these were presented to the Community Development Board along with the report in two separate public meetings - April 18 and June 20 of 2024. Staff asked the Board if they were overall supportive of the report and the goals, and the Board said they were.

Since the time of the presentation of the report and the goals and objectives last year, the Community Development Board has had renewed interest in the economic development goals and objectives, with a considerable amount of discussion about this topic beginning in September of 2024.

At a March 19, 2025 work session intended to discuss the natural resources element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the Board again raised the economic development goals and objectives. The Board moved to put this topic on the agenda for a **May 21, 2025** work session at **6PM**. At least one Board member has noted their intent at this upcoming work session is to give direction to staff regarding whether Whitefish aspires to be a "rapid growth" or "moderate growth" community.

Planning Staff had initially hoped to present this plan element later in the process, while the land use and housing elements were underway. However, staff did not want the upcoming discussion at the work session to occur with limited information or uninformed participation, so we decided to get in front of it, finish the plan element, and get it out for review so all interests were informed equally. Please note the economic development element as prepared by staff does not mention moderate versus rapid growth scenarios – it recommends strategies to increase economic diversity and access to daily goods and services.

If you have any comments on this draft, please submit them to me by **5PM ON FRIDAY, APRIL 18.** After this, revisions will be made, and it will be provided to the general public for review and comment.

HERE [engagewhitefish.com] is the link to the study that was used as background to prepare the plan element.

If you have not subscribed to the Growth Policy Website, it is highly recommended as all progress is posted and you will receive updates through newsletter alerts.

https://engagewhitefish.com/vision-whitefish-2045 [engagewhitefish.com]

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
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Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Friday, February 21, 2025 8:22 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: FW: Comments for Growth Policy

From: Cameron Dexter <cameron@flatheadcitizens.org>
Sent: Thursday, February 20, 2025 4:39 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Comments for Growth Policy

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Citizens For A Better Flathead echoes the Heart of Whitefish's comments regarding Goal 1 Objective d. Copied below:

Goal 1 Objective d. Request removal of this goal to pursue paid parking in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking will dissuade shoppers from shopping in downtown Whitefish. Paid parking would also encourage shoppers to take more vehicle trips to other communities, where there is no paid parking. The economic playing field is not level if only Whitefish requires shoppers to pay for parking.

Goal 3 Objective d. Request the removal of this goal. Given that only the planning administrator would have discretion to change zoning, this goal has too much potential to promote strip development and sprawl, both harmful to our downtown business district, to be included in the plan.

Background: As a result of the Montana Land Use Planning Act, Whitefish must create a new community plan, formerly known as a growth policy. The last Growth Policy was updated in 2007 and has served Whitefish well.

The Challenge: Based on the Montana Land Use Planning Act, once the current community planning process (Vision Whitefish 2045) is complete and the plan is adopted by the City Council, there will no longer be opportunities for public input on proposed zoning changes and development proposals. Sole discretion for interpreting whether proposals are compatible with the plan will rest with the Planning Administrator.

The Solution: Avoid inclusion in the Community Plan any goal and objective that leaves open to interpretation items that could harm our community's economic vitality.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling >
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2025 3:30 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Jon Heberling comments 1/14/25 on Economic Development Goals and Objectives
Attachments: img20250114_14332945.pdf

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Al, At the CDB meeting on 1/16/25, I made a motion to consider the changes to the Economic Development Goals and Objectives per my comments of 1/14/25 as first item on the agenda for the February work session. The motion passed 5-2. I handed out copies of the 1/14/25 comments to the Board members. Please post these 1/14/25 comments to the public comment section of the Growth Policy website. Also, please send a copy of this email to all Board members, along with my 10.7.24 comments on the Growth Policy, Economic Development, Goals and Objectives. Best regards, Jon

-------- Original Message --------

Subject: Jon's comments 1/14/25 on Ec Development Goals and Objectives

Date: Tue, 14 Jan 2025 14:37:39 -0700

From: Jon L. Heberling >

To: Jon L. Heberling>

JON'S COMMENTS 1/14/25

SUPPORTING A ROBUST ECONOMY

Vision: "We will continue to support local businesses and find innovative ways to diversify our year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities. ~~***We will be self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs.***~~***"*** THE GOAL IS MODERATE GROWTH, NOT RAPID GROWTH

A healthy economy adds to all aspects of the community from jobs to infrastructure to community services. Economic diversity is important in achieving a strong, stable community. A growing economic base provides the framework on which a city prospers and develops.

Logan Health is the largest employer in the City of Whitefish, and health care and associated services is considered an industry of potential growth in the area. However, tourism is by far the largest contributor to the Whitefish economy, providing the majority of businesses and jobs and bringing nearly $400 million into the city in 2023. The tourism industry is highly seasonal; there are wide fluctuations in tourism-related employment and revenue throughout the year.

~~The majority of~~ MANY Whitefish residents are employed in high-paying professional-level jobs and must work remotely or commute out of the city into other areas due to lack of these jobs in Whitefish. Conversely, workers in the lower-paying tourism-related service industry cannot afford to live in Whitefish and must commute into the city. Due to rising land costs, ~~employee shortages due to~~ housing affordability, ~~and restrictive zoning, there is a deficit of essential goods and services~~. AND PROBLEM OF LOCAL BUSINESSES HAVE DIFFICULTY FINDING WORKERS.

The City of Whitefish enjoys many assets – it is in a highly desirable location, surrounded by mountains, with an abundance of natural resources and a wealth of outdoor activities. It has locational advantages including being along an international highway corridor, having major rail access, being near an airport, and in proximity to Glacier National Park. The vibrant downtown strengthens Whitefish's unique identity, and the educated and talented citizenry and visitors generate beneficial social interaction to facilitate idea-exchange. Whitefish is uniquely poised to capitalize on its assets to broaden its economic base beyond a visitor economy and enhance its economic sustainability.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

1. Encourage a diverse year-round base economy ~~that provides a full range of jobs, goods and services~~. AND INTERESTS THE GOAL IS MODERATE GROWTH, NOT RAPID GROWTH. THE NEEDS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS SHALL NOT BE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF BUSINESSES AND TOURISM.

   Objectives:

   a. Determine specific commercial areas to grow and expand, and/or areas to revitalize.
   b. ~~Preserve existing industrial and commercial zoning and only~~ support rezoning for residential purposes if a significant public benefit can be demonstrated, such as ~~work-force~~ AFFORDABLE housing.

c. PURSUE ALL FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVES TO PROVIDE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR THOSE WHO WORK IN THE CITY OF WHITEFISH.

d. ENCOURAGE REMOTE WORK BY RESIDENTS.

c. ~~Consider incentive programs for certain business sectors to entice relocation or establishment of businesses within the city.~~

d. ~~Consider zoning changes to diversify business locations and to allow needed goods and services, such as revising the WB-2 Secondary Business District (WB-2).~~

e. ~~Investigate opportunities and partnerships to identify and recruit clean, community-compatible industry to Whitefish.~~

Goal

2. Support local business and entrepreneurial opportunities. PRECIOUS TAX PAYER DOLLARS SHALL NOT BE USED TO ACCELERATE ECONOMIC GROWTH.

Objectives:

a. Coordinate with BNSF and compatible industries to identify available land and opportunities to capitalize on existing rail access.

b. Encourage the development of primary-job creating enterprises through such strategies as timing of infrastructure improvements and/or emphasis on building or redevelopment of building types that allow for small business growth (such as business incubator businesses or co-working spaces).

c. ~~Create a city staff position focused on economic development and resiliency strategies~~.

d. ~~Create a group, network or committee that has constant conversation for specific areas of growth with municipalities, Chamber of Commerces, and economic development organizations to share information and develop business-attracting strategies~~.

e. Actively pursue partners and grants to fund and establish business incubators to provide technical and logistic support to new businesses.

f. Pursue partnerships with Flathead Community College or local schools to assist in workforce development.

g. Support creative lower-cost enterprises that cater to locals such as food trucks or temporary "pop-up shops" using existing under-utilized buildings, facilities or outdoor spaces.

h. Require all new commercial development, subdivisions and infrastructure upgrades to include the installation of conduit for high-speed internet and explore grant or funding opportunities for this type of infrastructure to meet the needs of the current population and prepare for potential growth.

i. ~~Consider future zoning to allow appropriate small-scale neighborhood-serving commercial in select residential neighborhoods.~~

i COMMERCIAL USES SHALL NOT BE SPREAD INTO RESIDENTIAL AREAS.

Goal

3. Maintain the downtown core as the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of the community.

AS TO ANY PROVISIONS IN SAID PLAN, OR ANY OTHER PLAN, WHICH ARE INCONSISTENT WITH PROVISIONS OF THIS GROWTH POLICY, THIS GROWTH POLICY SHALL PREVAIL.

Objectives:

a. Maintain zoning consistent with the uses desired downtown and the recommendations of the Downtown Business District Master Plan.

b. Create an overlay district for the downtown area to protect and enhance downtown character, scale and massing.

c. Consider a program for the downtown area that determines a limit of business types. For example, create a maximum allowance on business type to be able to emphasize inclusion of other businesses – i.e. if there is a large number of art galleries, consider

a maximum number of those business types in the area to increase diversity of offerings in the neighborhood.

d. Increase turn-over and availability of business patron parking and revenue for downtown improvements through such measures as a paid parking program.
e. Support local and valley wide commuter and visitor public transportation to and from downtown.

Goal

4. Protect the natural resources and unique character and qualities of Whitefish for the continued health of the visitation economy.

   Objectives:

   a. Work with chambers of commerce, DNRC and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to explore ways to promote sustainable resource-based tourism without endangering vital natural resources.
   b. Support the goals and objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Master Plan. AS TO ANY PROVISIONS IN SAID PLAN OR ANY OTHER PLAN, WHICH ARE INCONSISTENT WITH THIS GROWTH POLICY, THE PROVISIONS OF THIS GROWTH POLICY SHALL PREVAIL.

Goal

5. Support organic and other localized farming as a means to broaden the community's economic base and to preserve and enhance rural character.

   Objectives:

   a. Map active local agricultural operations as part of the land use data base.
   b. Protect existing operations to the extent possible through agriculture indemnity statements on plats and prior notice conditions of approval.
   c. Explore incentives for the growth and retention of localized agriculture.
   d. Determine appropriate zoning and locations in rural agricultural areas to allow limited farm-based produce stands, farmer's markets, farm stops and related artisan food and beverage.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, November 18, 2024 1:12 PM
To: Richard Hildner
Cc: David Taylor; Wendy Compton-Ring
Subject: RE: Growth Plan Comments
Attachments: June2024 Newsletter.pdf

Richard, before I answer your questions, let me provide some background.

The Montana Land Use Planning Act has specific requirements for an economic development study:

Economic development. (1) The land use plan must:

(a) assess existing and potential commercial, industrial, small business, and institutional enterprises in the jurisdiction, including the types of sites and supporting services needed by the enterprises;

(b) summarize job composition and trends by industry sector, including existing labor force characteristics and future labor force requirements, for existing and potential enterprises in the jurisdiction;

(c) assess the extent to which local characteristics, assets, and resources support or constrain existing and potential enterprises, including access to transportation to market goods and services, and assess historic, cultural, and scenic resources and their relationship to private sector success in the jurisdiction;

(d) inventory sites within the jurisdiction, including zoned, unzoned, vacant, underutilized, and potentially redeveloped sites, available to meet the jurisdiction's economic development needs;

(e) assess the adequacy of existing and projected local facilities and services, schools, housing stock, and other land uses necessary to support existing and potential commercial, industrial, and institutional enterprises; and

(f) assess the financial feasibility of supporting anticipated economic growth in the jurisdiction.

If you read this, it is specific to studying what enterprises are expected or projected, labor force characteristics and requirements, and how we are supporting or constraining those enterprises. We are also supposed to do an inventory to assess where our available land is for those enterprises.

Because there is a level of expertise required for this, we contracted with an outside consultant in September of 2023.

At the consultant's request, we provided them a list of 30 representatives of the business or economic development community. Over a period of six months, the consultant reached out to these entities and 22 responded. The consultant met with every one of them individually and had three group meetings as well.

In March, staff received the first versions of the report. We red-marked and sent it back to them. We had two work sessions with the community development board – one in April and one in June. These work sessions were advertised, we sent notifications through the engagement site (see attached), and the work sessions were noticed on the agendas. The community development board received copies of the consultant's report. During these work sessions, the consultants were present virtually to answer questions from the Board or the public. Using this report, staff prepared goals and objectives summarizing what the report was telling us. At the June work session, we brought the final report and the objectives to the Board for input regarding whether we were going in the right direction and they told us we

were. We informed the Board we would circle back with them in another work session when the economic development element was finished. That is as far as we have gone thus far.

With that, I will try to address what I can in RED below.

Good morning Alan,
I want to apologize ahead of time for any typos and other errors in this email. I am unable to use my right arm due to a recent surgery so I have resorted to dictation in order to communicate with you. I know you pulled the section in the growth plan draft on the economic summary, but I wanted to follow up with some questions that I hope will be answered before the next iteration is presented to the public. The following is in no particular order, but is in some respect the order in which I took notes prior to and during, the work session with city council.

I am confused as to why construction and mining are the two businesses most lacking in Whitefish. I don't believe we have ever been seriously considered a mining community and there are certainly lots of construction companies that work not only in Whitefish, but in the entire Flathead valley.

I believe this category is used because that is the way it is categorized by the US Census.

By calling out "goods and services not allowed by zoning in Whitefish" has resulted in residents driving to other nearby communities for certain goods and services. Is this a hidden justification for box stores? Also in the section supporting a robust economy I'm curious what does it mean where it says "we will be self sufficient and provide a full range of goods and services."?What constitutes a full range of goods and services and for whom? I feel like this is a meaningless statement that is open to a very wide range of interpretations that may not be consistent with the desire of the citizens of Whitefish. It seems to me that the entire Flathead valley including Columbia Falls, Kalispell, and Whitefish provides the majority of goods and services required by our local community without having to double up on such goods and services in Whitefish itself. Clothing for example for just about everyone is available within a 15 mile drive from Whitefish or only a click away on a computer.

The vision statement "we will be self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods and services" was drafted based on the report informing that many services needed by locals were not available in Whitefish. This does not necessarily mean big box stores. The Board has the purview to remove that portion of the vision statement if they choose.

The consultants heard from members of the business community that restrictive zoning had been an impediment to businesses and services locating or staying in the city. During visioning, we received comments that there are goods and services not available to residents and there should be more "neighborhood commercial". Whitefish High School Seniors using the growth policy as their senior project have written senior papers with this topic as well. Our climate action plan and our transportation plan put a high priority on reducing traffic and greenhouse gas emissions. During visioning sessions, the number one topic that residents visualized for Whitefish in 20 years is that it be walkable and that you should not need a car to live here. Suggesting people get in their cars and drive to Kalispell for essential goods and services or for work does not appear to be consistent with these statements. What about those that don't have cars, or can't afford to drive to Kalispell regularly or do not want to have to drive? Under MLUPA, we are not even sure it is LEGAL to preclude goods and services identified as needed by the report.

I was also further confused by the statement "the majority of Whitefish residents are employed in high paying professional level jobs and must work remotely or commute out of the city into other areas due to lack of these jobs in Whitefish". What jobs are they talking about and where is the data to support such a statement? Elsewhere, it says that 21% of Whitefish residents work remotely. 21% hardly seems like a majority.

Based on the report, those industries are management, business and financial sectors. This was provided by the consultant.

What does goal 2.i really mean?

This means to study if there is appropriate types of neighborhood commercial that could be near or in certain residential areas. We did have comments during visioning sessions for more neighborhood commercial. Note that the PRESENT growth policy supports limited neighborhood commercial along collector streets in all areas shown on the future land use map as Urban. Many of the residential areas are designated as URBAN.

Goal 3.d references a paid parking program yet there are no details as to what might be involved in such a shift in traditional parking in Whitefish.

This is a recommendation to "Increase turn-over and availability of business patron parking and revenue for downtown improvements through such measures as a paid parking program." This has been discussed for some time, including at the present by the Climate Action Committee. This is a recommendation to consider a paid parking plan, we would not have the details at the time of the growth policy.

Page 7 references a need for diversification. What kind of diversification is being suggested? How did the consultant reach this conclusion?

Based on the report, it is discussing diversity in primary jobs, jobs for locals, and relaxing overly restrictive zoning. The consultant reached this conclusion by talking to stakeholders, studying the issue and being an expert.

Next, could you give me a definition of what constitutes a stakeholder? Shouldn't the general public be included as a stakeholder? Who decides who gets to be a stakeholder? Does a stakeholder get a louder voice at the table?

The report lists the stakeholders on Page 17. The public would be involved in this process, but we have not even released the draft plan element yet.

The map on page 20 is unreadable.

I don't understand this comment. The map on page 20 shows commercial areas and the legend. It is readable.

On page 25 there is reference to a "fluid" sidewalk. What is a fluid sidewalk?

Probably a bad choice of words. It says a "fluid sidewalk, trail, bike path, public transportation, and road system" meaning integrated.

In the economic summary snapshot, I question why School District 44 is not mentioned since it has 250 employees? Among the businesses lacking in addition to mining and construction, is clothing retailers for locals only. Does this mean you have to show ID to buy locally in a clothing store? I know that sounds a little snarky, but how will the clothing offerings be relegated under such a statement? What is the clothing vibe for locals?

The snapshot shows the top three employers. If we added the school district it would have been the top four employers - that is the only reason. Regarding "locals" - the issue is that the clothing stores in town are primarily in the downtown, expensive and geared to tourists. Present zoning does not allow clothing stores along US 93 south, where land is cheaper, and less likely to be tourist-oriented. We have been told locals can't even buy affordable coats or shoes in the city.

I've also taken a quick look at the demographics section of the plan, and I'm curious as to the seeming disconnect between an aging population and an effort to provide employment and housing for a younger population.

I don’t understand this question, but this does not relate to what the statutory requirements tell us to do. The MLUPA requirements are very specific and the report addresses as required.

Currently, how many housing units can be built north of the viaduct with current zoning? How many housing units could be constructed north of the viaduct in an expanded city limit?

That is very complex question and not one we are prepared to answer.

Finally, I understood you to say that the section on environment has been completed, but I don't see it on the website. Am I in error? Please let me know.

It has been completed but is going through department review. I will send a newsletter alert when it has been posted for public review. It is tentatively scheduled for the December Board.

Again, thanks for your patience and dealing with my efforts to use dictation as a means of communicating.
Richard

Richard Hildner
[redacted] 5th St
Whitefish, MT59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alyssum Ahler <alyssum@ffrgmt.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 5, 2024 3:53 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Follow Up from City Council Work Session

Hi Alan,

Thank you for clarifying, and I apologize again for the mix-up. It sounds like this was all a simple miscommunication. A member of the Community Development Board reached out directly to one of our board members, and I was looped into the conversation and encouraged to share, assuming the timing was right. I should have checked with you first, and I regret any confusion this may have caused.

We're all so appreciative of how open and participatory this process has been, and FFRG is fully supportive of helping keep the community engaged and informed. Thank you for all the work you and the team are putting in—it's really exciting to see the pieces coming together!

On Tue, Nov 5, 2024 at 2:27 PM Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org> wrote:

> Hi Alyssum,
>
> I am not yet sure on the timing. The team is scheduled for an update meeting this Tuesday, and this is one of the topics. As we had two work sessions about the economic development report last May and June and the work session and report were announced on the website when this happened, we were blindsided regarding why information was out there that we would be discussing it on the 21st.
>
> The next work session will be on the demographics section, which will be announced soon. I am wrapping up the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards element, and we anticipate having the first section of this out in December or January.
>
> **Alan Tiefenbach**
>
> Long Range Planner
>
> City of Whitefish
>
> 418 E. 2nd Street
>
> P.O. Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Alyssum Ahler <alyssum@ffrgmt.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 5, 2024 12:17 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Follow Up from City Council Work Session

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Alan,

I hope you're doing well. I wanted to reach out sooner after the last City Council work session, but time got away from me. It appears a member of our board received some inaccurate information about the agenda, as the economic development section wasn't actually scheduled for discussion. I'm truly sorry for any unintended distraction this may have caused during the meeting.

That said, it's clear that the community has some reservations and questions about this section. When would be a good opportunity to bring these concerns to the Community Development Board? Are there specific meetings you'd suggest, or should I direct folks to submit comments at any time? What is the preferred method for submitting written comments?

Thanks so much for all your hard work. We're looking forward to the next update and really appreciate staying informed and involved.

--

Best Regards,

Alyssum Ahler

Executive Director | FFRG MT

406.471.7402

October 21, 2024

Whitefish City Council,

We have reviewed the comments regarding the proposed revision to the economic chapter of the proposed Whitefish Growth Policy from Flathead Families for Responsible Growth and support their recommendations.

In addition to the points raised by Flathead Families for Responsible Growth, we think it is important to ask the question: “does Whitefish have the infrastructure in place to support new growth everywhere?” Highway 93 would provide access to a number of the properties identified for future economic development. Yet, improvements to this highway are not currently funded and are many years off. Proposed economic development needs to be safeguarded through policies that limit potential land use until concurrency standards are met.

The broad and vague nature of the three policies cited by the Flathead Families for Responsible Growth show that these changes are contrary to the initial Whitefish Vision in 2007, which sought to maintain “small town character.”

Sincerely,

Cameron Dexter
Director of Policy & Planning
Citizens for a Better Flathead

Citizens for a Better Fleathead PO BOX 2198 Kalispell, MT 59903 406-756-8993 www.flatheadcitizens.org

Comments on Economic Growth Plan 10/21/24

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Economic Growth Plan as part of The Whitefish 2045 Community Plan. I participated in the Visioning Session for my community quadrant. I'd like to address vision first, then the economic plan.

Unfortunately, I felt our session at Grouse Mt. Lodge was disjointed and disorganized. Why were we restricted to commenting on only our quadrant? Whitefish is a small enough community and because of the interrelationships of services amongst the downtown, schools, recreation, we should have identified the top issues that affect the entire community. Smaller meetings helped facilitate better discussion but it should have addressed the entire community. Our small group spent at least 15 minutes trying to understand our map, then wasted more time on colors of sticky notes, instead of discussing major issues, I pitied the planner that had to try and synthecize the various products that came from this effort.

The draft vision statement under "Challenges" does not adequately address concerns about growth, traffic congestion, lack of parking or what the 2022 Transportation Plan intends to do about it. As permanent residents, during the summer months, we experience gridlock on Spokane Ave and Baker Ave is non-stop traffic from Spokane to 7th St. Traffic crossing the viaduct into downtown is also reaching capacity limits. In the summer months, we rarely go into downtown because of congestion and lack of parking. During the summer months we simply "hunker down", cook at home because of lack of dinner reservations available and do not enjoy the amenities the town has to offer.

In the community plan there's a need to address future growth, transportation gridlock and stage any future growth and expansion in line with adequate transportation and infrastructure capacity.

The City needs to fully evaluate an alternative that proposes very limited or no future growth so that the community can evaluate the vision and consequences.

Downtown is no longer the commercial center of Whitefish. Recognition of the importance and connections to south Whitefish are needed. The interdependency of services of Whitefish, Columbia Falls and Kalispell are also needed.

Comments on the Economic Study: Many good recommendations are included in the report. Some exceptions are:

The plan did not address problems with existing transportation and infrastructure. Traffic and parking in downtown core have reached capacity. What are the recommendations to accommodate future economic growth in the goals and objectives?

76% of workers live out of town. Workers need more transportation (bus) options. Intermodal transport is a good recommendation. Transportation to and from the airport is needed. Encourage visitors to take advantage of the great trail systems and minimize more cars in town through tourism promotion. 21% of workers work from home. The recommendation for highspeed internet was a good one. Workers in the digital age require less bricks and mortar shopping. Maybe more commercial development for shopping will not be necessary. Big box stores and an array of services are available in Kalispell and are not difficult to access.

No economic development position is needed on the city staff. Economic development will be market driven and grow organically. The City needs to emphasize core services and reduce taxes. Affordable housing is just one aspect of cost of living. The city needs to address that high taxes, high utility costs are part of cost of living and affordability to live in Whitefish.

Dennis and Gail Kennedy

[redacted] Fairway Dr

Whitefish, Mt

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 3:42 PM
To: Harding
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Economic Development Vision Statement

Tom,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

-----Original Message-----
From: Harding
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 10:07 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Economic Development Vision Statement

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Tom Harding
1[redacted]East 9th Street
Whitefish, MT 59937

The vision statement offers a major fallacy in its opening statement, “We will be self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services and jobs.”

As a citizen of this community for over seven decades, I’d like to advise the folks who created this idea that it is an economically impossible proposal. No large "box store” would limit themselves to a community of 10,000 — there is not sufficient business to justify the capitalization required. Property values are too high for “industrialization” by major employment manufacturing types of business will not happen when existing areas are next door to our community. You can’t have it all.

We do have a great variety of recreational opportunities because of forward thinking, but those opportunities took years to develop and were fortunate to grow,. They evolved over decades. We don’t need major retailers (they exist ten miles south of our community), we don’t need industrialization since those zones exist in Columbia Falls and Kalispell and

don’t require being re-created and duplicated. The factors of dysfunctional communications between county and city government play into these issues as well.

Work with the successful businesses that exist in the community today. Expand and augment those assets. Don’t infringe on zoning that has done a decent job of protecting residential areas. We do NOT need “business” in residential areas. We have generally sufficient staff and direction for growth without looking for industrial and commercial additions; rather, I might suggest a focus on workforce housing to create a broader array of economic diversity for Whitefish! Let’s slow down the economic growth and develop ideas to retain the community and its strengths in which I have lived, worked and for decades. This vision statement is very off base — shame on the consultants who allowed this to be offered to our community..

Thank you for allowing comments.

Tom Harding

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 3:49 PM
To: Amy Peterson
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: City plan

Amy,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

-----Original Message-----
From: Amy Peterson>
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 3:44 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: City plan

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Amy Peterson
[redacted] Livermore flats
Whitefish

I moved here over 30 years ago loving the community feel. I believe we will loose our uniqueness by expanding commercial development outside the current zones. We are close enough to kalispell for box stores and any other services we need beyond what we already have. Preserving the beauty and uniqueness that is whitefish is a priority!
Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 3:23 PM
To: Andree Larose
Cc: Henry Elsen; Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Comments on Proposed Economic Development Policy

Andree and Henry,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Andree Larose
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 3:21 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Cc: Henry Elsen
Subject: Comments on Proposed Economic Development Policy

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Whitefish Economic Development Policy. Here are some concerns and observations we have.

The draft policy frequently refers to revising Whitefish zoning regulations, and even describes a possible minimalist zoning approach. Although zoning regulations can and should be reviewed and simplified or clarified where needed, a wholesale revision as advocated in this plan could be very destructive to legitimate efforts by the City through the years to understand neighborhoods and control harmful growth or incompatible land uses. That is step backward in our view. The policy should be revised to incorporate a more measured approach to a zoning review.

The proposed policy talks about self-sufficiency and takes a zero-sum approach to services, stores, and jobs that already exist in other parts of the Flathead Valley. This is short-sighted

and unnecessary. Existing shopping and industrial areas near Whitefish, such as the shopping complex north of Kalispell, should be recognized as a resource to Whitefish residents, not held up as something to be corrected. Whitefish does not need and cannot support new big box stores or similar large commercial developments that would be duplicative of existing commercial areas. Allowing such developments would be highly disruptive to the current efforts to control and monitor growth in ways that preserve the small-town community atmosphere that many of us like and want. A clothing store would be nice - a new Walmart would not be. The proposed policy makes little distinction between the two. It should be revised accordingly.

We support the policy's emphasis on solving traffic and other infrastructure problems in Whitefish. This summer's traffic was very difficult to maneuver, and economic planning and development should make addressing this a priority.

We think that the draft policy's introduction of the concept of allowing more commercial use in residential areas could be good *if* it is done carefully. Small-scale groceries or neighborhood restaurants in certain areas, with plenty of public input as part of the process, could make for some nice, walkable amenities in those neighborhoods. But, again, the policy be very clear that these uses must be small-scale, should specify the types of uses allowable, and ensure they are compatible with the overall neighborhood. The current use of the term "appropriate" is not adequately defined.

Finally, we don't think adding a specific position for economic development and sustainability (sustainability is not discussed much if at all in the policy to begin with) is necessary or affordable for the City at this time. Identifying personnel in existing departments to handle the issues raised in the policy would be a much more prudent way forward.

Henry Elsen & Andrée Larose
[redacted] Haugen Heights Rd.
Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 2:24 PM
To: Sheila Shapiro
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Public Comment on Economic Development Vision for Whitefish

Sheila,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Sheila Shapiro
Sent: Sunday, October 20, 2024 9:46 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Public Comment on Economic Development Vision for Whitefish

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[redacted] Mountain Park Drive
Whitefish, Montana 599367
October 21, 2024

Whitefish City Clerk
Whitefish City Council
Economic Development Vision

Michelle Howke and City Council Members;

This is written public comment from the Family of Sheila Shapiro, a Whitefish resident and homeowner for 45years. Thank you all for taking the time, effort and interest in asking for Community Feedback and goals for the future of Whitefish growth. I specifically do not use the word Development as you may note. The past few years have brought about a tornado of changes, many of them greatly appreciated. But we need to step back and consider our community of families and friends, needs and reasons for living here.

We can stop, take a breath, and consider all that we have accomplished as well as maintained: continued excellent schools, improved roadways, a charming Downtown, great food and local shopping, as well as local and tourist amenities. I do not think we need to be self-sufficient but continue to be inter-connected and interdependent as a Valley of similarly satisfied residents and happy tourists. We do not need enormous Boxstores when we have plenty of those in neighboring towns. People like to explore and shop elsewhere anyway, and as the Dollarstore has gone out-of-business, cheaper value is more possible outside of a tourist-attracting, high-rent area.

We need to contend with our traffic issues before creating more. One-way IN and OUT of town seem the likeliest choices. Whitefish government is already full to the brim and more staff means more expenditures, more meetings and more juggling of opinions, however well-meaning. We want to house the service workers we already cannot keep in town. This is a #1 priority, then the HELP WANTED signs can begin to diminish. I'm not a fan of using Public Lands for development unless they are within the community, have public services already and underused for other recreational purposes. And then only for affordable, rentable housing.

In summary, this Vision needs to be specific, prioritized and revisited in 2-3y, with a cap on development that doesn't have current infrastructure. We must look to the future needs and availability of water, electricity, waste management and sustainability, please.

Gratefully,
Sheila Shapiro

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 1:54 PM
To: Vicki Bernstein
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: The future health, wealth and well-being of Whitefish.

Vicki,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

-----Original Message-----
From: Vicki Bernstein
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 1:48 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: The future health, wealth and well-being of Whitefish.

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To: The City Council of Whitefish
Thank you for your dedication and forward thinking leadership on behalf of the citizens of Whitefish.
I hope you will take the time to consider my concerns about the economic development goals and objectives for Whitefish.

I participated in the citizens visioning sessions held earlier this year. The public concerns were based around sensible growth, affordable housing and keeping the unique quality of our city. The proposed economic development vision seems to promote the opposite of what the citizens want for Whitefish.

Please primarily focus on affordable housing.
Please remember the public prefers moderate growth not rapid growth.
Please let the year-round residents enjoy the shoulder seasons.
Please do not allow a business zone within a residential area.
Please keep the big box stores out of Whitefish.
Please do not create a city staff position focused on economic development, that will likely lead to rapid development.
Please keep the friendly small town unique quality of Whitefish.
Please slow down growth!
Thank you
Vicki Bernstein

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 12:52 PM
To: Norma MacKenzie
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Economic Development Vision

Norma,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Norma MacKenzie <> **Sent:** Monday, October 21, 2024 12:46 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Economic Development Vision

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Michelle,

I am writing with concern about the city's Community Plan, on tonight's Work Session Agenda, which appears to lean toward more rapid economic growth rather than looking at the overall pace of growth of Whitefish. Part of the Economic Vision states that we (Whitefish) "will be self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services and jobs." Does that mean we change zoning and begin to allow large box stores because they offer goods or services we do not have and not take advantage of driving 12 miles or less down the road for those same services and goods? We are and have always been an inter-dependent valley of jobs and services. Whitefish has never been a self-sufficient community. Years ago we had a local hardware store, pharmacies, dime store, and gift shops locals loved. While those services are still available they can only be found down the road. We do not need to replicate those services along with the medical, governmental, and box store offerings we now have available. The suggestion of spreading commercial areas into residential areas for closer proximity is confusing. Again, as a community we do not require miles of traffic to buy goods and services. Commercial corridors already exist on Baker Ave., Central Ave., Wisconsin Ave., Highway 93 North and South, and Highway 40. Citizens participating in the visioning process held earlier this year listed growth as a leading concern

in Whitefish behind a lack of affordable housing. This economic vision seems to promote the opposite. We need to slow down and aspire to controlled, moderate growth over a rapid growth economy.

Respectfully,

Norma MacKenzie
[redacted] Farm to Market Rd.
Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 11:38 AM
To: Pamela Hughes
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Public Comment for Oct. 21st work session: Economic Development Goals and Objectives

Pamela and Richard,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Pamela Hughes
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 11:17 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Public Comment for Oct. 21st work session: Economic Development Goals and Objectives

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

To the Whitefish City Council,

There are a couple of objectives we find alarming in the recent *Economic Goals and Objectives.* As residents of Whitefish residents for31 years, we feel we are Flathead Valley residents, too. We seek goods and services throughout the entire Valley. The proposed plan strives to duplicate shopping and services available elsewhere in the valley. The line in the Economic Vision to be "*self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs*" is faulty and grandiose. We don't need to match the other towns in the Flathead Valley. We will likely continue to be a tourist destination, so we need something that allows local residents to remain.

Objective 1c: INCENTIVE PROGRAMS FOR CERTAIN BUSINESS SECTORS. Not necessary for incentives. Accept on as case by case basis. Give wiggle room in the Economic Vision. Remember that many of our everyday needs are already being addressed on-line, too.

Objective 1d: CONSIDER ZONING CHANGES TO DIVERSIFY BUSINESS LOCATIONS AND TO ALLOW NEEDED GOODS AND SERVICES. Make sure, it falls within the current zoning regulations. Allow development in areas that are already commercial (downtown, Hwy 93 south of town, some on Wisconsin Ave.) but leave established neighborhood alone.

Objective 2C: CREATE A CITY STAFF POSITION FOCUSED ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES. In order to fulfill a job description within the Economic Vision, "*self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs,"* the growth could be forced and not organic to actual needs. The Economic Vision Statement is faulty and then someone is hired to fulfill it? We object to another person being hired for this reason.

The Economic Vision also uses wording that is vague: *"protecting our unique character and qualities."*
Name those qualities: possibly fresh air, buffer for wildlife on Forest Service Lands, access to year-round outdoor recreation, safety for children, etc.

Why is there no mention of the Whitefish School District and the number employed in it? It employs people who cannot afford housing in Whitefish. We thought affordable housing and traffic were the major problems that were listed as leading concerns, yet the Economic Goals and Objectives do not mention that.

Sincerely,

Pamela and C. Richard Hughes
[redacted] Fairway Dr.
Whitefish, MT

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 11:05 AM
To: Brad Bulkley
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Community Plan Update - Economic Development Plan Draft

Brad,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a good day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Brad Bulkley
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 11:01 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Community Plan Update - Economic Development Plan Draft

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Michelle:

I have lived half the year in Whitefish for the past 35 years and am co-founder of Flathead Families for Responsible Growth ("FFRG"). My love for the community and desire to preserve what's special about Whitefish led me to form the group. I have reviewed the Economic Development draft and feel it is missing the mark. The following are key points of concern:

- **Objective 1d** proposes "diversifying business locations to allow needed goods and services," which essentially means spreading commercial businesses into residential areas. According to the GSBS report, this would involve placing "businesses and services in closer proximity to residences."
- **Objective 2c** suggests creating a City staff position dedicated to stimulating economic growth—a role that has never existed before in Whitefish.

- The draft's Economic Development theme statement suggests we aim to be **"self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs."** While this sounds beneficial, achieving this would mean adding hundreds of new types of businesses to our community, according to the GSBS report (Table 5: Location Analysis-Whitefish & Flathead County). This could lead to Whitefish becoming more like larger neighboring cities, even including new types of box stores, which are currently not permitted here.

It's essential that we clearly define the type of growth we want for our community. The cur**r**ent draft does not specify whether we aim for slow, moderate, rapid, or accelerating growth. We need to ensure this Community Plan reflects our shared vision for Whitefish. In our haste to accommodate growth, we should be cautious that we don't take our wonderful community in a direction we all will regret later.

With best regards,

G. Bradford Bulkley

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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 11:07 AM
To: Bonnie Baker
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: City Council 10/21 Work Session Comments

Bonnie,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a good day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Bonnie Baker **Sent:** Monday, October 21, 2024 10:48 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: City Council 10/21 Work Session Comments

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Public comments to be considered for the 10/21 City Council Work Session.

1. Growth & affordable housing is on the top of my list. We need to slow down our growth. Slower moderate growth will serve us better in the future.
2. We do not need to be self-sufficient from the rest of the Valley. Kalispell provides all that we need and is only 12 miles away. If we act on being "self-sufficient" as described, we will lose the character of our beautiful town.

3. No on allowing commercial areas in residential areas. Businesses should be in the business corridor, not in neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time.

Bonnie Baker
[redacted] Geddes Avenue
Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 9:20 AM
To: Chris Crumal
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Economic Development Visioning

Chris,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Chris Crumal
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 8:55 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Economic Development Visioning

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Hi Michelle,

If you could forward the following to City Council I would appreciate it very much.

I'm writing in regards to the City of Whitefish Economic Development Vision. In reading through the document I find I have concerns about a few of the Goals and Objectives as stated.

Under "Supporting A Robust Economy" the last sentence reads: "We will be self sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services and jobs." Does this mean we allow more box stores in close proximity? In the planning groups I attended no one suggested we need to bring the box stores of Kalispell to Whitefish. We need to be careful about the self sufficient part, I prefer to drive to Kalispell rather than have those goods and services closer.

We need to be very careful about developing a city staff position for economic development. One, we're adding more expense to our already large city budget by doing so. Two, attracting new business is a tricky issue. We have to be careful to attract businesses that will utilize our current workforce, perhaps offer new vocations to those that no longer want to wait tables or serve drinks. We do not want to entice

businesses that require hiring from out of the area that would surely increase demand for housing and exacerbate our current infrastructure pressures.

If I understand it correctly this document suggests an objective of Economic Development is to spread commercial areas into residential areas to be in closer proximity to residences. I could not disagree more. This opens the door to a 7-11 on the corner of East 2nd and Park or a gas station at Waverly Pl and Dakota. Driving into town for goods and services is so easy and preferable to adding traffic to our already stressed residential streets, we need to keep the two zones separate and distinct.

From the input I've heard during the visioning sessions, growth is the biggest problem we are facing, our small town is losing it's sense of itself, losing that friendliness and sense of community that I've known for forty five years. It is important that we do what we can to **moderate** our growth so that we can maintain what we all love about Whitefish, not pursue ways to increase our population.

Thanks for considering these points.

Chris Crumal
[redacted] Haugen Hts Rd
Whitefish

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 8:43 AM
To: T Quinn
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Comments for City Council Work Session 10/21/24

Teresa,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

-----Original Message-----
From: T Quinn
Sent: Saturday, October 19, 2024 2:22 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>;
Subject: Comments for City Council Work Session 10/21/24

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Dear City Council,
Goals 3, 4, 5 - I approve.

Goal 2 (c) - I oppose a staff position. Perhaps a citizen group could help.

Goal 2 (i) - No - too ambiguous. Would it be an Apline Deli or a grocery store?
What is "neighborhood serving".
What is small-scale?

Other:

1. Affordable Housing is among the most important issues.
2. Promoting Growth is counter productive to a health Whitefish.
3. We have plenty of goods and services and Large Box Stores Junction (I call it Consumption Junction) just 12 miles away. Lucky us.
4. Whitefish will thrive if it continues to be small, charming, and beautiful.
Concentrate on landscaping,
outdoor art, and aesthetic additions.

The downtown character is as responsible, if not more so, than the ski resort for tourism.

Thank you for your work.
Teresa Quinn
1[redacted] Kinnikinnik Circle
Whitefish, MT

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 8:36 AM
To: Nancy Cawdrey
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Economic vision statement

Nancy,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a good day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

-----Original Message-----
From: Nancy Cawdrey
Sent: Sunday, October 20, 2024 7:50 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Economic vision statement

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I read through some of the economic development vision and do not believe Whitefish needs to be self-sufficient - growth has been very fast these past few years, and it seems to me that Kalispell and other locations in the valley provide close-by adequate services for most of us . I would like to see a slower growth policy in this wonderful town. There is a small town appeal that Whitefish offers , and lots of economic growth might well spoil that aspect.
Nancy Cawdrey, business owner and resident Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 8:34 AM
To: Elizabeth Pitman
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: Economic development work session

Elizabeth,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a good day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk PO Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

-----Original Message-----
From: Elizabeth Pitman
Sent: Sunday, October 20, 2024 8:01 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Economic development work session

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To whom it may concern,

Reading through the materials for this work session, I had some concerns.

There are a few statements and ideas that make me a bit concerned about how the future of Whitefish may look.

1. The last sentence of the economic development vision statement read, "We will be-self sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services and jobs."

—This is a statement that leaves a door wide open for future developers to consider adding chain stores or box stores to our community. We have always been a community in a valley where towns town rely on each other for different goods and services. It is not the end of the world to drive 15 minutes to by new underwear.

2. Under the economic development goals and objectives 2d it reads, "Consider zoning changes to diversify business locations and to allow needed good and services, such as revising the WB-2 Secondary Buisness District (WB-2)."

—This is another statement that seems to leave a different door wide open for development in residential areas. At the visioning meetings I attended in the last year, numerous locals expressed the desire to maintain the character of Whitefish (small downtown, local businesses, neighborhoods, tight-knit community, walkability, and close sense of nature). This statement is at odds with that idea.

Finally, the one page economic summary fax sheet is very disjointed and hard to follow. Under businesses most lacking in Whitefish is “mining.” Is this real? The biggest pause this gives me is whoever is putting the ideas forward and presenting them seems to be out of touch with Whitefish completely. A lot of people gave energy and time at those meetings and we have mining on our economic summary sheet as a job lacking?!

This is so important in shaping our future. We have to be thorough and smart in our planning.

Thanks,
Elizabeth Pitman

Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2024 8:38 AM
To: Gayle MacLaren
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs
Subject: RE: thoughts for the Monday work session

Gayle,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Have a great day!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org

From: Gayle MacLaren **Sent:** Saturday, October 19, 2024 4:17 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: thoughts for the Monday work session

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Dear City of Whitefish Council Members,

As you work through the draft of the "growth policy" I would ask you to consider the last line of the vision statement. During the vision sessions I do not remember wanting to be Self-Sufficient. We do not need to be Kalispell-- Driving 11 miles to shop for basics is not an inconvenience. Box stores are great where they are. (Perhaps more public transportation would be a better solution). I also do not remember wanting rapid growth. We have been growing beyond our infrastructure as it is.
Why was the school district left out of the stakeholders? It would be so nice if our teachers could live where they work!!
Please consider the fact that Whitefish is not broken and needing to be fixed; it only needs moderate guidelines for the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration and all of your wonderful dedication to our lovely town.

Gayle L MacLaren
[redacted] Fairway Drive

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Whitney Beckham
Sent: Thursday, September 19, 2024 4:47 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: David Taylor; Wendy Compton-Ring
Subject: Re: September 19, 2024 Work Session

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear all,
I'm sorry to miss the work session today but want to express my support for Jon Heberling's proposal for 'moderate growth' as opposed to accelerated growth.
I support the draft language on the whole, but do agree we do not need to accelerate or encourage growth overall. Using services available in the Flathead Valley as opposed to encouraging those types of services in Whitefish seems appropriate.
Best -
Whitney Beckham
Sent from my iPhone

> On Sep 17, 2024, at 7:59 AM, Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org> wrote:
>
> Good morning, Community Development Board members!
>
> As a reminder, there will be a work session on Thursday, September 19, 2024 at 5PM to discuss Vision Whitefish 2045.
>
> There is no regular meeting, so this will be the only discussion on that evening.
>
> It appears I did not send you an agenda for this upcoming meeting so I have attached one.
>
> I have also included the staff memorandum and the body of the previous email I sent two weeks ago which describes the topic and has links to the resources.
>
> ---
> --
>
> I am pleased to present the first draft section(s) of Vision Whitefish 2045!
>
> As we discussed, given the complexity and amount of review that will be required for Vision Whitefish 2045, I hope to get drafts to you at least 2 weeks in advance (if not more), rather than the Thursday before.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Tuesday, September 17, 2024 9:02 AM
To: Jon L. Heberling
Cc: David Taylor
Subject: RE: Comments on Economic Development section, per memo 6/20/24 by Al Tiefenbach, attachment "Economic Development goals and objectives."
Attachments: September19-2024-CDB-Worksession Memo.pdf; Framework_Setting_Climate_Vision.pdf

Thank you for your comments, Jon.

This Thursday we'll be talking about the updated vision statement and the first background information of the plan. I have attached the staff report and that section again.

We WILL be circling back on the Economic Development Element this winter where I will include the entire write up, not just the goals and the objectives. When we get to that, I'll make sure we include your comments with it.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Jon L. Heberling
Sent: Monday, September 16, 2024 3:39 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Comments on Economic Development section, per memo 6/20/24 by Al Tiefenbach, attachment "Economic Development goals and objectives."

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-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Fwd: Comments on Economic Development section, per memo 6/20/24 by Al Tiefenbach, attachment "Economic Development goals and objectives."
Date: Thu, 12 Sep 2024 13:13:10 -0600
From: Jon L. Heberling
To: Jon L. Heberling>

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Comments on Economic Development section, per memo 6/20/24 by Al Tiefenbach, attachment "Economic Development goals and objectives."
Date: Thu, 12 Sep 2024 13:10:33 -0600
From: Jon L. Heberling
To: Jon L. Heberling

Comments on the Economic Development Theme Statement

I suggest eliminating the last sentence. At first glance, being self-sufficient seems like a good idea. But if one looks at the GSBS economic report, attached to the staff memo of August 15, 2024, one finds a host of business types found elsewhere in the County, and not in Whitefish. GSBS, table 5. To provide a "full range of goods and services", Whitefish would need hundreds of business types not currently found in Whitefish. This could result in box stores in Whitefish. It would also result in major growth, which is not necessary for Whitefish, and not consistent with the visioning sessions. For some goods and services, surely we can continue to rely on Kalispell locations.

Comments on Economic Development Goals and Objectives.

My comments can be summarized in one word: "alternatives". As a lawyer, I litigated environmental impact statements several times. One thingthey do is to evaluate alternatives to the agency proposal. I'm used to seeing that, and I think it would be appropriate here. In the Economic Development Goals and Objectives, there is just one proposal, which I will call "more rapid growth". I think there should be an alternative for local

residents, which I will call “moderate growth“. At the visioning sessions, there were many concerns that growth is too rapid. See First Visioning on line surveys, "what is the biggest threat to Whitefish". The threat of Growth is apparently second to the threat of Affordability. There were a few if any concerns that growth is too slow. To my knowledge, no one proposed more rapid growth.

Whitefish is a popular town. It is blessed or cursed with rapid growth. Development pressures are strong. The City alone cannot control the economy. All the city can do is try to react and manage growth in the economy,which is happening anyway.

The More Rapid Growth proposal.

The More Rapid Growth proposal outlines a number of ways to stimulate the economy, which under current circumstances are not necessary, and are not consistent with the Visioning.
Objective 1C “incentive programs“ would cost the city in staff time, at least.
Objectives 1D and 2i call for spreading commercial uses into residential areas. This is not necessary, and was not suggested even once at the visioning sessions.
Objective 1E calls for recruiting businesses into Whitefish. This is not necessary, and would cost in staff time.
Objective 2c calls for creating a“city staff position for economic development“. With fringes, this could cost the city 70,000 or more in taxpayer dollars each year.
Objective 2D calls for “constant conversation“ on economic development. This too would cost in staff time.

Per the above, substantial taxpayer dollars would be spent on accelerating growth. Could we add up the total cost? It is doubtful that the voters of Whitefish would want to accelerate growth anyway. There was no support for that at the visioning sessions. I think it is fair to saythat whatever the City of Whitefish does, we will have a robust economy.

Moderate Growth proposal.

A “moderate growth“ alternative would not use taxpayer dollars to stimulate the economy. Objectives 1c, 1d, 2i, 1e, 2c and 2d would be eliminated. Add Objective 1f : Encourage remote work. Add Objective 1g: The City will pursue all feasible activities to provide affordable housing for those who work in the City of Whitefish. Add Objective 1h: "Moderate growth is encouraged, not more rapid growth".

Based on history, it is likely that most development proposals will be approved by the City Council. The

Moderate Growth alternative would use staff time to manage the growth which is already happening. The GSBS report did not much analyze the contribution to the Whitefish economy from construction, nor did the GSBS report analyze the contribution to the Whitefish economy from increase in property values. The GSBS section on property values increases was dropped, after it was pointed out that GSBS had used US Department of Labor statistics, and not the more current and correct data from the Montana Association of Realtors. It now appears that repair work on this section is left to the planning staff. Some homeowners have made more on the increase in home value than from their jobs, in some years. To what extent do construction and property value increases drive the Whitefish economy? It has been mentioned that 40% of new housing construct
io
n
is sold to non-residents as second homes, or investment properties. This is another mini economy which deserves more analysis. What role does it play?

The work at home category is 21% of Whitefish residents, GSBS table 1. This is larger than any other category of jobs. Objective 2H calls for funding for high-speed internet, and other infrastructure. This needs to be detailed more. Certainly Whitefish does not want to be left behind on this issue. What shortfalls, if any, can the City cure? At what cost? In theend, the moderate growth alternative can best be further developed and analyzed by the planning staff.

Multipliers

An additional area of economic analysis which might be feasible is economic multipliers. I seem to recall from economics class that a manufacturing job results in four other jobs at grocery stores, healthcare, retail, etc. I believe other job categories had lower multipliers. So what is the multiplier for a work at home tech job? A construction job? A tourism job? How do these jobs contribute to growth in the economy? There may be alternatives and approaches other than a “moderate growth“ alternative above. The planning staff through their expertise may be familiar with some. Is there planning literature on economic growth in ski towns, with alternative approaches to manage that?

In the end, zoning choices to accommodate growth may be the same under a Moderate Growth alternative.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling <[redacted]mcgarveylaw.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 8, 2024 6:16 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Fwd: Comments on Growth Policy, Economic Development, Goals, and Objectives by Jon Heberling 10/7/24

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Per our discussion at the work session on 9/19/24, please send this on to the members of the CDB. Thanks, Jon

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Comments on Growth Policy, Economic Development, Goals, and Objectives by Jon Heberling 10/7/24
Date: Tue, 08 Oct 2024 18:13:26 -0600
From: Jon L. Heberling <[redacted]mcgarveylaw.com>
To: Jon L. Heberling <[redacted]mcgarveylaw.com>

Whitefish has experienced rapid growth in recent years. So, where do we go from here? Do we press down on the gas pedal and accelerate more rapid growth, by stimulating the Whitefish economy in a number of ways? Or do we ease off on the gas pedal, knowing that we have strong winds behind us from many tourism dollars, from people wanting to move here and buy houses, and from more and more people working remotely. Even without stimulation, the Whitefish economy will be robust. So, I would urge that the goal be moderate growth, not more rapid growth.

The "more rapid growth" proposal.

For the new Growth Policy, the draft Economic Development section pushes for more rapid growth. In the draft, Economic Development, Goals and Objectives, the planning staff headed by Dave Taylor presents six ways to stimulate growth.

1. Objective 2c calls for a City staff position focused on economic development. This would be to stimulate more rapid economic growth. The City of Whitefish has never before had such a staff position. It would be expensive.

2. Objective 1d calls for spreading commercial into residential areas. 1d would "diversify business locations to allow needed goods and services." €œ The meaning of this is described at the GSBS report, attached to the June 20, 2024 staff memo, page 2. This calls for "businesses and services to be in closer proximity to residences."

3. The Economic Development theme statement proposed by the staff states: "we will be self-sufficient and provide a full range of goods, services and jobs." Having a full range of goods and services sounds good, until we find out what it means. The GSBS report, table 5, shows "€œbusiness types within category missing from Whitefish."Compared

to Flathead county as a whole, little Whitefish is missing 720 "€œbusiness types." 720! To provide a "full range of goods and services"€œ as proposed by the planning staff, Whitefish will need about 720 new business types, per GSBS table 5. Whitefish would end up looking a lot more like Kalispell. The 720 would even include 12 new kinds of box stores . Table 5. Since box stores are currently not permitted in Whitefish, why would the planning staff propose a Goal which would allow them? If regulations must flow from the Growth Policy, then a proponent of a box store could argue that since the box stores are allowed by the Goal ("ful

l range"), the City must allow box stores.

4. Objective 1e calls for recruiting industry to Whitefish. This too would accelerate growth.

5. Objective 1C calls for "€œincentive programs" for "establishment of businesses within the city." This too would push for more rapid growth.

6. Objective 2d calls for "€œconstant conversation" for more growth. Although participants at the visioning sessions considered rapid growth one of the biggest threats to Whitefish, the planning staff, in these Economic Development, Goals and Objectives, pushes a "more rapid growth" proposal.

Visioning

Online surveys were done for the first visioning. Results were nicely summarized in bar graphs, in the Whitefish Challenges Survey Response Report, June 22, 2023 to October 31, 2023. Responses to the question "what is the biggest threat to Whitefish?"€œ were displayed by type size. "Affordability"€œ had the largest type size. "Growth" appears to be tied for second with "short term rentals".€ ("traffic" had large type, but a lower number on the Q1 5 biggest threats bar graph. This will need to be clarified.). To my knowledge, no one at the visiting sessions voiced a concern that growth was too slow.

A "€œmoderate growth" proposal

A "moderate growth" proposal would allow the City of Whitefish to ease off the gas pedal, and stay off the stimulants. At least moderate growth would still occur. We cannot put up a gate to bar tourists. We cannot prevent out-of-state people from purchasing houses. Nor can we prevent people from working remotely. We cannot prevent businesses from growing and adding more employees. Nor would we want to. Whatever growth policy Whitefish adopts, Whitefish will still have a robust economy. A "€œmoderate growth"€œ policy would not use tax dollars to stimulate the economy. Expensive Objectives 1c, 1d, 2i, 1e, 2c, and 2d would be eliminated. I would add Objective 1f: Encourage remote work. Also, add Objective 1g: the City will pursue all feasible activities to promote affordable housing for those who work in the City of Whitefish.

The last sentence of the vision theme would be eliminated. This includes the "€œfull range of goods and services"€œ language discussed above, which would push for 720 new business types in Whitefish.

Be clear about what kind of growth we want

The theme for Economic Development should include a statement of what kind of growth the City seeks. The City should be open and candid with the voters about what kind of growth is the goal of this growth policy. The current draft does not say. Only "€œresponsible" growth is mentioned, which could be at any pace of growth. Do we want slow growth? Moderate growth? Rapid growth? Or accelerating growth? I would suggest that the vision theme say: "The goal is moderate growth, not rapid growth.

Sent from my iPhone.

The below link will take you to a revised and red-marked version of the vision statement, a draft of the first plan sections, and an outline with progress indicated.

All of this will be posted on the engagement site next Wednesday accompanied by an email notification to all subscribers.

Please also refer to the attached staff memorandum.

<image002.png>
Vision Whitefish 2045 Work Session

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413
<image001.png>

<09-19 Agenda.pdf>
<September19-2024-CDB-Worksession Memo.pdf>

SUMMARY OF HEBERLING REWRITES ON WATER QUALITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	
DESCRIPTION OF COMMENTS	**STAFF RESPONSE**
Add new goal No sediments, nutrients or other harmful pollutants shall enter Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River or related waters, from land development activities.	This is unnecessary. The first objective already reads: *"It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land maintenance or land disturbance, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, chemical contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the target goal for all development activity."*
Add New Objective: The City of Whitefish shall obtain information on land development activities, for the purpose of meeting the above goals.	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding this. The city already does this through building permits, grading and erosion control plans, subdivision review, etc.
Add New Objectives: The City of Whitefish may perform scientific studies and data gathering, as authorized by the City Council. Sites and activities identified as threats to Whitefish Lake, or Whitefish River shall be monitored, and if violations are detected, enforcement actions shall take place. A water quality information center shall be maintained through the city website, for organizing and posting all relevant information, for the benefit of public participation with links to appropriate sites. The website should link to partner agencies and organizations with applicable information. The city may rely on the Whitefish Lake Institute if the WLI performs functions 3d, 3d, and 3g. The City of Whitefish shall track 303(d) compliance. As described in the background information, Whitefish Lake is not compliant for PCBs and mercury. Whitefish River is not compliant for PCBs and oil and grease. All available facts and data from others shall be gathered. A report on the facts	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding these. These are all tasks performed by DEQ, WLI, the State and the Fed. The city does not perform scientific studies, provide periodic reports, maintain water quality information centers, track 303 compliance or monitor or enforce water quality activities. We do not have the authority, knowledge, personnel or resources.

leading to the listings, and probable sources, shall be prepared. The city may request funds to perform studies in furtherance of the above goal. These objectives do not require the city to analyze water samples or conduct scientific studies. Periodic Reports Goal: Each five years the city of Whitefish shall obtain or prepare reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake and in the Whitefish River. *(with very specific requirements regarding what the report is required to include.)*	
Add New Goal Nutrients Goal: No septic wastes shall enter Whitefish Lake or Whitefish River, or associated water tables. The city shall support future efforts to describe and mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake and Upper Whitefish River.	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding this. This is unnecessary and duplicative with the first objective listed above. Staff does support adding the following language (added): *"Identify and mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake. and Upper Whitefish River"*
Add New Objectives regarding septic contamination: The information from public records on septic systems within the city limits, which are over 40 years old, should be updated This information was initially gathered by the Whitefish Lake Institute in 2012. As to any septic systems within the city limits, which are over 40 years old, the owner should be notified and given educational materials, along with a request that the septic system be inspected and brought up to current standards. If the septic system is not inspected and updated within six months of notice, the city should consider taking action. The City Council should consider an ordinance to make it a misdemeanor to use a septic system over 40 years old, which after notice has not been inspected and brought to current standards within six months of notice.	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding these. Virtually all septic systems in the planning area are NOT within the city limits. Flathead County Health Dept issues septic permits and the city does not have or maintain permit information. People rarely annex into the city unless they want utilities or their septic fails, in which case they are required to connect to sewer as a condition of annexation. There is a handful of properties on septic in the city that were annexed years ago, and when these fail they will be required to connect to sewer. Staff is not aware of any of these existing septic properties (that are in the city limits) being adjacent to WF lake or river. The city does not have the authority to criminalize aging septic systems, that is Flathead County Health and DEQ's purview.

Add New Goal and Objective: Storm drainage Goal: No sediments, nutrients, or other harmful pollutants shall enter the Whitefish River from storm drainage. Objective: Start planning for MS4 requirements applicable to cities over 10,000 population.	Staff DOES NOT recommend adding the goal and objective. The goal is already listed in the first objective. The Public Facilities Element will have the following objective: *"Begin preparations to become compliant with MPDES Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements for a MS4 community by ensuring accurate mapping of all public and private outfalls, stormwater facilities and green infrastructure."*
Add new goal and numerous objectives regarding golf courses.	Staff DOES NOT recommend adding these. In regard to the goal, this is already covered generally in the first objective. In regard to all the recommended objectives, there was initially language similar to this in the narrative as suggestions of what golf courses could do. Several on the Planning Board wanted it removed because it was too regulatory and that it singled out golf courses where there are other sports fields that present similar issues. If this is retained, this should be referred to the golf courses for their comments. Staff changed language in the narrative to be more general and apply to "sports fields" as well as golf courses, and added an objective which states: "For recreational fields owned by the city but leased to another entity, the City of Whitefish should evaluate future lease renewal language to determine whether additional practices could be required to mitigate environmental contamination and conserve natural resources, including water and energy."

Add New Objective: The City Council is encouraged to enact a regulation requiring that at the time of sale or transfer of land, a septic inspection shall be required.	The city has no way to track when properties are sold, nor a way to enforce getting that information. Staff could require a septic inspection in instances when property owners petition to annex for water service only. Staff SUPPORTS a modified version (added) "Consider city policy which requires all properties remaining on septic systems to provide proof of a recent septic inspection prior to annexation."
Add New Objective: The City of Whitefish should consider incentives to mitigate impacts from aging septic systems, such as deferred annexation in exchange for waste water agreements for a period of 30 years to match a rural special improvement district term length.	Staff SUPPORTS adding a slightly modified version. ~~*The City of Whitefish should consider*~~ *To mitigate impacts to neighborhoods with aging septic systems, provide incentives such as deferred annexation in exchange for waste water agreements for a period of 20 years to match a rural special improvement district term length.*
Add New Goal *Be creative and thorough in devising other ways to maintain and improve water quality.*	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding this goal as shown. Due to all the other author's rewrites and complete reorganization of the goals and objectives, this new goal appears to be added as a place to compile all the "left-over" existing goals and objectives that did not fit into the author's rewrites. As mentioned above, many of the proposed new goals are duplicative with the very first goal, and many of the new objectives are unnecessary, not enforceable or not within the capability or purview of the city.
Revise objective as follows Existing Continue to explore and implement more environmentally friendly fireworks alternatives. Proposed Move all fireworks off Whitefish Lake due to the risk of perchlorates entering drinking water from Whitefish Lake.	Staff RECOMMENDS COUNCIL DIRECTION. As mentioned in the draft, in 2021, the Whitefish City Council passed a fireworks ordinance which aims to reduce perchlorate fireworks in city displays to less than 50% by 2025. Proposing to remove fireworks off WF Lake is a departure from what is required by the ordinance and should be addressed by the Council prior to this objective being changed.

per 6/25/25 Vision WF update, link

ENVIRONMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Air Quality

Goal

1. Maintain and improve air quality for the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, including through continued exploration of ways to further reduce air pollution.

   Objectives:

   a. Continue to implement the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program.

   b. Continue to monitor Whitefish air quality, and work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on a monitoring program.

   c. Continue to identify additional sources of air pollution and explore programs and regulations that will improve Whitefish air quality. Examples could include measures the city could take to reduce automobile trips, championing for public transit and other alternatives to automobiles, encouraging electric versus fuel-powered equipment and promoting anti-engine idling policies.

Water Quality

Goal

1. Maintain and improve water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams.

   Objectives:

   a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land maintenance or land disturbance, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, chemical contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the goal for all development activity.

   b. Continue to partner with Whitefish Lake Institute and / or other entities to address and monitor water quality, identify and address sources of contamination, provide periodic reports, and public access to such information ~~where feasible.~~

N NSS. ✓ ~~CPB~~. TENDS TO CLOSE PB RCP.

? ~~QUARTERLY~~ ANNUAL.

MERCURY, OIL AND GREASE, AND SEPTIC LEACHATE.

7 TWO

c. At least every five years, the City of Whitefish shall obtain or prepare reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake including benchmarks, facts, trends and scientific conclusions on the condition of the Lake. BENCHMARKS SHALL INCLUDE: CHLOROPHYLL, NITROGEN, PHOSPHORUS, SURFACE TEMPERATURE, DEEP LAKE TEMPERATURE, DISSOLVED OXYGEN, TCPS,

d. The City of Whitefish shall track 303(d) non-compliance. A report on the facts, leading to the listings, and probable sources, should be prepared.

e. Annually report on BNSF activities, cleanup and monitoring activities related to Whitefish Lake and Whitefish River, ~~AND~~ INCLUDING COMPLIANCE WITH ALL APPLICABLE STANDARDS, DEGREE OF

f. Identify and mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake and Upper Whitefish River

g. Consider city policy which requires all properties remaining on septic systems to be inspected prior to annexation.

h. To ~~mitigate~~ impacts to neighborhoods with aging septic systems, provide incentives such as deferred annexation in exchange for wastewater agreements for a period of 20 years to match a rural special improvement district term length.

i. In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the city, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake for swimming, but not for watercraft, due to the risk of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species as transported by watercraft.

j. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups or agency partners, such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, Whitefish Legacy Partners and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront, riparian and watershed lands as open space.

k. Initiate ~~a public information~~ campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

l. Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

m. Start planning for MS4 requirements applicable to cities over 10,000 population.

ENSURE THAT TESTING IS BEING DONE ON ALL STORM DRAINAGE OUTFALLS INTO THE WHITEFISH RIVER AND INTO WHITEFISH LAKE, AT ~~LEAST~~ QUARTERLY

1p. ENSURE THAT FIREWORKS ARE MOVED OFF THE LAKE, UNLESS A TOXICOLOGY REPORT CONCLUDES THAT THE RISK OF PUTTING PERCHLORATES, A KNOWN CARCINOGEN, INTO THE LAKE IS OF INSIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON HUMANS

n. Continue to implement and monitor programs and coordinate with other agencies to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

o. Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to magnesium chloride deicer on City streets and sidewalks.

p. ~~Continue~~ to explore and implement more environmentally friendly fireworks alternatives with the goal of eliminating perchlorates. ADD T

q. Evaluate and prepare for impacts to surface municipal water supply in event of wildfire

r. Proactively engage county, state and federal resource management agencies to reduce and prevent water quality degradation.

s. For recreational fields and golf courses, owned by the city but leased to another entity, the City of Whitefish ~~should~~ SHALL evaluate future lease renewal language to ~~determine whether~~ REQUIRE TO environmental certifications and additional practices ~~could be required to~~ SHALL limit and mitigate environmental contamination of ground and surface water and to conserve natural resources, including water and energy.

t. ~~Encourage private~~ recreational facilities such as sports fields and golf courses, to get environmental certifications from accredited environmental or professional organizations.

u. Continue to educate the public on the water quality impacts of non-organic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, promoting best practices and environmentally friendly alternatives.

Wildlife and Habitat

Goal

1. Minimize and/or mitigate impacts to both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and their habitats as development occurs.

Objectives:

a. Work with partner organizations such as the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to develop guidelines or regulations for development proposals in

Comments on Whitefish Growth Policy Hazards Section, June 18, 2025

My name is Steve Thompson. I live at [redacted] Ramsey Avenue, and I serve as chairman of Climate Smart Glacier Country.

I recommend that the Growth Policy Hazards Section be amended to refer to the map, at-risk residences, and economic impact analysis that are included in the Flathead Annex to the Western Montana Hazard Mitigation Plan. The Western Montana Hazard Mitigation Plan, recently adopted by the Whitefish City Council, and the adjacent Flathead Annex, shows that 794 Whitefish residents live within the HAZUS 100-year floodplain (p 29). 315 residences are located within this flood zone representing $35 million of estimated lost value in the event of a 100-year flood event. I suspect these numbers would be even higher today than when this analysis was conducted.

Most of these residents are located east of Spokane Avenue and west of Mill Avenue between Railway and Fifth Street. The flood risk in this neighborhood does not appear to be directly related to the Cow Creek floodplain. This reflects the reality that many of the megafloods that have recently afflicted the US are not your grandfather's flood in which high waters leap out of an existing waterway. Rather, they are known as pluvial floods, which occur when intense rainfall overwhelms the capacity of drainage systems, such as storm sewers, and causes water to inundate land or property, independent of overflowing water bodies like rivers or streams. The section on Whitefish Flood Prone Areas on page 7 of the draft Hazards Section refers only to flooding due to overflowing water bodies, including Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, Cow Creek, Lazy Creek, Swift Creek, and Haskill Creek.

I recommend that this Whitefish Flood Prone Areas subsection be expanded to address the emerging threat of pluvial flooding. Suggested language: Much of the flood-prone residences within the city of Whitefish are in areas vulnerable to pluvial flooding, which occur when intense rainfall overwhelms the capacity of drainage systems, such as storm sewers, and causes water to inundate land or property, independent of overflowing water bodies like rivers or streams.

In the section on FEMA's rating system, beginning on page 8 of the draft Hazards Section, I recommend adding a new second paragraph that reads:

It is recommended that the City participate in FEMA's Community Rating System. It is further recommended that the City collaborate with Flathead County, Kalispell, Columbia Falls and non-governmental partners to expand public outreach and flood awareness, mapping, flood damage reduction, and warning and response.

I encourage the reference to statistics in the Flathead Annex of the regional hazard mitigation plan because the large number of affected residences and economic value at risk would justify the effort required to participate in the CRS program.

Given the increasing risk of extreme precipitation events and flooding, due to climate change (as well noted in footnote 8 on page 7), public outreach and flood awareness efforts should go beyond those affected by a 100-year flood to also consider impacts and mitigation strategies for those affected by a 500-year event on the scale of the 1964 Flathead flood or the 2022 upper Yellowstone floods. I don't believe this needs to be specifically stated in the Hazards Section, but the City should be thinking along these lines.

Flathead County is the only local jurisdiction that currently participates in the CRS, and this only at a minimal level. County residents outside of the 3 cities receive a 5% discount on flood insurance premiums. Nine other Montana jurisdictions participate more robustly in the Community Rating System and their residents receive up to a 20% discount in flood insurance premiums. Those communities are the cities of Miles City, Three Forks, Missoula, Bozeman and Great Falls, and the counties of Cascade, Lewis and Clark, Missoula, and Yellowstone.

I would also like to correct a minor factual error in the Hazards section on page 4. The single vehicular access that serves the Birch Point community does not also serve Whitefish Lake State Park. The single vehicular access across the railroad tracks to the state park is, appropriately, on State Park Road.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Mike Koopal <mike@whitefishlake.org>
Sent: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 11:55 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: David Taylor; Craig Workman; Wendy Compton-Ring
Subject: RE: Water Quality Section
Attachments: Water Quality - Proposed Draft Update.docx

Three places where I feel WLI should be acknowledged for your consideration.

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 11:29 AM
To: Mike Koopal <mike@whitefishlake.org>
Cc: David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Wendy Compton-Ring <wcompton-ring@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: Water Quality Section

If you believe there are some inconsistencies you believe I have not addressed, I am happy to look at them.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Mike Koopal <mike@whitefishlake.org>
Sent: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 11:27 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Cc: David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Wendy Compton-Ring <wcompton-ring@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: Water Quality Section

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Hi Alan,

As previously emailed to you, Mr. Heberling does not represent WLI. I have reached out to clarify this with him. You have received all WLI comments. Thank you for incorporating those. I like the response table that you created to address Mr. Heberling's comments.

My additional comments relate to what you reference below as WLI achievements. There are numerous community benefit projects that we have initiated/coordinated/completed as directly related to items listed in the draft, and I believe credit should be given where it's due. The existing draft has inconsistencies related to this thought; however, I'm not going to lose sleep over it. I also stated in my previous email that I will be out of town for your June work-session.

Again, thank you for your hard work on this important community project.
Cheers,
Mike

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 10:48 AM
To: Mike Koopal <mike@whitefishlake.org>
Cc: David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Wendy Compton-Ring <wcompton-ring@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Water Quality Section

> You don't often get email from atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov. Learn why this is important

Mike, just as a reminder to our previous discussion:

In May of 2024 Wendy and I met with you to discuss the (then) upcoming Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element (ENRH) of Vision Whitefish 2045. You suggested issues we should address from the perspective of WLI. We addressed these topics.

In November of 2024 I sent the draft out for agency review. You submitted some minor comments; nearly all were incorporated. What was not incorporated were several references to WLI achievements because this is a city document, but I did mention WLI, what they do and their relationship with the city.

In January of 2025, the ENRH element was first discussed starting with the Environment Section. This same section was discussed again in March.

Since February, I received 4 different sets of extensive comments, mostly goals and objectives regarding water quality, from Board Member Heberling. Each set is slightly different.

Staff commented at a March 19, 2025 work session that many of these goals and objectives are duplicative, are not enforceable, are not advised or are within the purview of other agencies. They are also reorganized in a manner not consistent with all the other draft sections. You were in attendance at this work session. Some of these comments would have significant repercussions to our public works department.

At the May 21, 2025 Community Development Board work session, Board Member Heberling persuaded the Board to place his water quality comments back on the agenda for discussion. I received a 5th version on May 22, 2025.

Mr. Heberling has maintained that he has consulted with WLI on these comments, both in writing and verbally in the work sessions. You can see this in his comments (attached).

Staff has updated the draft that originally came to you to incorporate as many of his comments as we could, but it is still our opinion that many of them are duplicative, not something that the city does, are not enforceable, are not advised, or are the purview of other agencies. I have included a "response table" identifying what we did or did not incorporate and why.

You mentioned you might have some additional edits. If you do, please get them to me by the end of the week and I need to address and prepare a staff report for a June 18, 2025 work session in which these will be discussed.

It might be in your best interest to be there on behalf of WLI so it is clear what you are or are not supporting.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 10:14 AM
To: Mike Koopal
Subject: RE: Water Quality Red Marks

Thank you Mike.

When we have finalized what we suggest (what you have already seen) I will send the updated draft to you. You may want to consider being at the work session, because Jon keeps mentioning how he has worked with WLI on the edits.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Mike Koopal <mike@whitefishlake.org>
Sent: Monday, June 2, 2025 9:09 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: Water Quality Red Marks

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Alan,
I have discouraged Jon from seeking to add 303(d) compliance monitoring since that is the purview of DEQ, and a water quality reporting website since WLI already does much of that. In reviewing the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element, your edits look good and provide consistency with the previous water quality chapter.

I have approached WLI's contribution to the Growth Policy as advisory but there has been some confusion about the process and level of detail.
Even though Jon and I have talked, that doesn't represent WLI's recommendations. I will reach out to Jon and let him know that I wish him not to use my or WLI's name in the conversation.

There are a few edits I'd like to suggest if you could send me a copy where I could do that.

FYI- I'll be out of town on June 18th. Thanks for your hard work on this!
Cheers,
Mike

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2025 10:48 AM
To: Mike Koopal <mike@whitefishlake.org>
Subject: Water Quality Red Marks

> You don't often get email from atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov. Learn why this is important

Mike,

More than a year ago, Wendy and I met with you and discussed everything you believed should be added into the water quality section of Vision Whitefish 2045. Months later, when the draft was finished, we sent it to many agencies (yours included) and included mostly all your comments

Six months after Planning Board discussions regarding the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element of Vision Whitefish 2045, Jon Heberling (one of the Board members) has presented us with a detailed list of additions to the element. He has persuaded the Board to put them on the agenda for a June 18th Work Session.

He has stated he has worked with you on these revisions, and has suggested WLI supports them. We thought this conversation had already occurred at a previous work session (which you attended) when we explained why these should not be added, but he is adamant these be discussed.

We are puzzled by this, because many of these revisions are suggesting the city should be doing efforts already within the purview of WLI, other county, state or federal agencies, or things we do not have the staffing or resources to do (such as putting together a water quality center and tracking 303 compliance).

These include extensive requirements for the city to perform scientific studies and issue reports, create a water quality information center, track 303 compliance, and monitor or penalize aging septic systems (we do not issue septic permits). These are all things no city government I am aware of does. He also made a significant amount of arrangement of the goals and objectives, although we do not believe it is necessary, does not match the format of the rest of the plan, and much of it is duplicative.

We DID add "Continue to partner with Whitefish Lake Institute to address and monitor water quality and identify and address sources of contamination" because it is our understanding that WLI does much of what I mentioned above.

I have included the draft with all of Mr. Heberling's red-marks at the bottom. All the red-marks are his suggestions, and what has been crossed out is what we recommend for removal (with explanations noted). We believe much of this, as far as the city goes, is the responsibility of WLI, unenforceable or within the purview of another agency such as DEQ, EPA or Flathead County.

Could you please let me know your position, because he IS saying WLI is on board with these and I need to clarify.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon Heberling <jheberling@mcgarveylaw.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 6:18 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Motions at the 5/21/25 CDB meeting

ATTENTION: External Email - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk<mailto:help@cityofwhitefish.gov> if in doubt.

Hi Alan , this confirms that at the 5/21/25 meeting of the CDB, I made a motion to accept an adopt the heart of whitefish version of the economic development section, including the vision, narrative, goals, and objectives, dated 5/21/25. Scott Whitney Phil and Jon voted for. Mallory and Toby voted against.

I made a motion to add the water quality section to the agenda for the June meeting. This passed 5 to 1, with Scott, Whitney, Phil, Jon, and Toby voting for, and Mallory against. The chair clarified that the water quality section will be first on the agenda. On 5/22/25 I sent You the water quality section March 5, 2025 “red changes are after the 3/19/25 meeting, and after additional consultations with Mike Koopal of the whitefish Lake Institute.“ This will be the subject of motion and vote. Best regards, Jon Heberling.
Sent from my iPhone

March 5, 2025

Note: Materials from the Feb. 20, 2025, work session, staff version are underscored.

WATER

RED CHANGES ARE AFTER THE 3/19/25 MEETING, AND AFTER ADDITIONAL CONSULTATIONS WITH MIKE KOOPAL OF THE WHITEFISH LAKE INSTITUTE.

1. General goal

Maintain and improve water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams.

2. General goal

It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land maintenance or land disturbance, private or public, shall cause soil, erosion, chemical, contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or storm water discharge that adversely impacts any water body, wetlands, roads or other properties. Zero sedimentation, and zero nutrient loading shall be the ~~target~~ goal for all land development activity.

3. Sediments

Goal: No sediments, nutrients, or other harmful pollutants shall enter Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, or related waters, from land development activities.

Objectives

~~a. All environmental laws shall be strictly enforced.~~

b. The City of Whitefish shall obtain information on land development activities, for the purpose of meeting the above goals.

c. The City of Whitefish may perform scientific studies and data gathering, as authorized by the City Council.

d. Sites and activities identified as threats to Whitefish Lake, or Whitefish River shall be monitored, and if violations are detected, enforcement actions shall take place.

e. A water quality information center shall be maintained through the city website, for organizing and posting all relevant information, for the benefit of public participation with links to appropriate sites. The website should link to partner agencies and organizations with applicable information. THE CITY MAY RELY ON THE WHITEFISH LAKE INSTITUTE, IF THE WLI PERFORMS FUNCTIONS 3d, 3e AND 3g.

f. The City may request funds to perform studies in furtherance of the above goal. These objectives do not require the City to analyze water samples or conduct scientific studies.

g. The City of Whitefish shall track 303(d) compliance. As described in the background information, Whitefish Lake is not compliant for PCBs and mercury. Whitefish River is not compliant for PCBs and Oil and

Grease. All available facts and data from others shall be gathered. A report on the facts leading to the listings, and probable sources, shall be prepared.

4. Nutrients

Goal: No septic wastes shall enter Whitefish Lake or Whitefish River, or associated water tables.

Objectives

a. The City shall support future efforts to describe AND mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake and upper Whitefish River.
b. The City Council is encouraged to enact a regulation requiring that at the time of sale or transfer of land, a septic inspection shall be required.
c. The information from public records on septic ~~fields~~ SYSTEMS within the City limits, which are over ~~30~~ 40 years old, should be updated. This information was initially gathered by the Whitefish Lake Institute in 2012.
d. As to any septic ~~fields~~ SYSTEMS within the City limits, which are over ~~30~~ 40 years old, the owner should be notified and given educational materials, along with a request that the septic ~~field~~ SYSTEM be inspected and brought up to current standards. If the septic ~~field~~ SYSTEM is not

inspected and updated within six months of notice, the City should consider taking action.

e. The City Council should consider an ordinance to make it a misdemeanor to use a septic ~~field~~ SYSTEM over ~~30~~ 40 years old, which after notice has not been inspected and brought to current standards within six months of notice.

f. The City of Whitefish should consider incentives to mitigate impacts from aging septic systems, such AS deferred annexation in exchange for waste water agreements for a period of 30 years to match a Rural Special Improvement District term length.

5. Periodic Reports

Goal: Each five years the City of Whitefish shall obtain or prepare reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake and in the Whitefish River.

Objectives

a. The section of the report on the condition of Whitefish Lake shall describe:

1. scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the lake.
2. the facts and data relating to each such benchmark.
3. trends in the data, and,
4. draw scientific conclusions on the condition of the lake.

b. The section of the report on the condition of upper Whitefish River shall describe:

1. scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the river,
2. the facts and data relating to each such benchmark,
3. the trends in the data, and
4. draw scientific conclusions on the conditions of the Whitefish River.

c. Report on BNSF activities, cleanup and monitoring activities during the past five years.

d. THE CITY MAY RELY ON THE WHITEFISH LAKE INSTITUTE, IF THE WLI PERFORMS SAID FUNCTIONS 4a, 4b AND 4c.

6. Storm drainage

Goal: No sediments, nutrients or other harmful pollutants shall enter the Whitefish River from storm drainage.

Objective: Start planning for MS4 requirements applicable to cities over 10,000 population.

7. Golf Courses

Goal: Zero sediments, and zero nutrient loading from the golf courses into Whitefish Lake, Lost Loon Lake, and other water bodies and water tables, from human activities.

Objectives: Golf courses ~~should~~ ~~shall:~~ SHOULD

a. Adopt practices and technologies that conserve natural resources, including water and energy.

b. Join programs such as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program for golf Courses, which is a network of golf courses dedicated to the goal of developing environmentally sound maintenance practices.

c. The City of Whitefish shall use future lease renewal language with the Whitefish Golf Course on city property to require all practices in ~~this~~ section.

d. Develop a Site Assessment and Environmental Plan in order to develop and implement an overall environmental policy and long-range plan, maintaining ongoing records to document programs on the long range plan.

e. Maintain ongoing records to measure and document progress toward environmental improvement.

f. Assess and ~~update~~ apply course best management practices and integrated pest management procedures. Any materials purchased should be ~~on~~ of the kind less harmful to the environment and water resources.

f ~~g.~~ Employ the principles of Integrated Plant Management to prevent and control weeds, diseases and insects.

g ~~h.~~ Use control measures that suppress pest populations with minimal environmental impact.

h ~~i.~~ Use native, naturalized or specialized drought-tolerant plant materials whenever possible.

i ~~j.~~ Plan irrigation patterns and/or program irrigation control systems to meet needs of plant materials in order to minimize overwatering and water at appropriate times to minimize evaporation.

j ~~k.~~ Properly store and dispose of solvents, herbicides, cleaning materials, paints, and other potentially hazardous substances.

k ~~l.~~ Use nutrient products and practices that reduce the potential for contamination of ground and surface water (slow-release fertilizers, organic products, and fertigation) and that meet, not exceed, the needs of turf grass.

l ~~m.~~ Test and monitor soil and groundwater and adjacent surface water conditions regularly using water quality sampling for chemical contamination.

n. Inform golfers and guest about golf course chemical applications. Common methods include permanent signs on tee boxes and/or notices posted in golf shops and locker rooms.

2. FROM C. ABOVE.

8. Other items

GOAL: Be creative and thorough in devising other ways to maintain and improve water quality.

Objectives:

a. **Public Access** In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake, for swimming, but not for ~~boating~~ WATERCRAFT, due to the risk of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species as transported by watercraft.

b. **Work with** and support non-profit conservation groups OR AGENCY PARTNERS such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.

c. **Fertilizers and pesticides** Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

d. **"Drains to river"** Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

e. **Aquatic invasive species** Continue to implement and monitor programs to ~~neutralize~~ REDUCE the threat of aquatic invasive species.

f. **Septic systems** Explore incentives to encourage properties on septic systems to connect to municipal sanitary sewer.

g. **Winter salt deicer** Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to winter salt deicer on City streets and sidewalks.

h. **Fireworks** Move all fireworks off Whitefish Lake due to the risk of perchlorates entering drinking water from Whitefish Lake.

i. ~~**Wildfire**~~ WATER SUPPLY. Evaluate and prepare for impacts to THE surface municipal water supply, in the event of wildfire.

Note; from the February , 2025 work session staff version;

a. Was moved to general goal # 2
b. Was amended
f. Was moved to a separate golf course section
k. Was changed.

ENVIRONMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Water Quality

~~General~~ Goal

1. Maintain and improve water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams.

~~2. General Goal~~

Objectives:

a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land maintenance or land disturbance, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, chemical contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the ~~target~~ goal for all development activity.

b. Continue to partner with Whitefish Lake Institute to address and monitor water quality and identify and address sources of contamination.

~~3. Sediments~~

~~No sediments, nutrients or other harmful pollutants shall enter Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River or related waters, from land development activities.~~

~~Objectives~~

~~a. The City of Whitefish shall obtain information on land development activities, for the purpose of meeting the above goals.~~

~~b. The City of Whitefish may perform scientific studies and data gathering, as authorized by City Council.~~

~~c. Sites and activities identified as threats to Whitefish Lake, or Whitefish River shall be monitored, and if violations are detected, enforcement actions shall take place.~~

~~d. A water quality information center shall be maintained through the city website, for organizing and posting all relevant information, for the benefit of public participation with links to appropriate sites. The website should link to partner agencies and organizations with applicable information. The city may rely on the Whitefish Lake Institute if the WLI performs functions 3d, 3d, and 3g.~~

Commented [AT1]: This is unnecessary. This is already captured in the objective above. If there is something else desired to be added, recommend adding to the above objective to reduce duplication.

Commented [AT2]: Unnecessary. We already do this with building permits, drainage and erosion control plans, subdivision plats, etc.

Commented [AT3]: Cities do not do this. This is the purview of WLI, as described in XXXX below

Commented [AT4]: This is the purview of DEQ , other State Agencies and the EPA.

Commented [AT5]: This is what WLI does. This is not within the purview of the City, the city does not have the personnel or resources to do this. If Council approves, the city COULD link WLI site but that does not need to be indicated in a community plan.

e. The city may request funds to perform studies in furtherance of the above goal. These objectives do not require the city to analyze water samples or conduct scientific studies.

Commented [AT6]: WLI does these studies, not the city.

f. The City of Whitefish shall track 303(d) compliance. As described in the background information, Whitefish Lake is not compliant for PCBs and mercury. Whitefish River is not compliant for PCBs and oil and grease. All available facts and data from others shall be gathered. A report on the facts leading to the listings, and probable sources, shall be prepared.

Commented [AT7]: This is the purview of the DEQ and EPA, not the city. 303 (d) is a federal EPA requirement.

4. Nutrients

Commented [AT8]: It is unnecessary to break out separate headings - sedimentation and nutrients . This is all addressed in Objective A.

Goal

No septic wastes shall enter Whitefish Lake or Whitefish River, or associated water tables.

Commented [AT9]: Already addressed in the objective below.

Objectives

c. The city shall support future efforts to Identify and describe and mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake. and Upper Whitefish River.

Commented [AT10]: WLI only looks at WF Lake in their studies. Anything else is the DEQ and Flathead Env Health.

d. The City Council is encouraged to enact a regulation requiring that at the time of sale or transfer of land, a septic inspection shall be required. Consider city policy which requires all properties on septic systems to be inspected prior to annexation.

Commented [AT11]: City is not involved with property sales.

e. The information from public records on septic systems within the city limits, which are over 40 years old, should be updated This information was intially gathered by the Whitefish Lake Institute in 2012.

Commented [AT12]: This information is collected by the DEQ, not the city.

f. As to any septic systems within the city limits, which are over 40 years old, the owner should be notified and given educational materials, along with a request that the septic system be inspected and brought up to current standards. If the septic system is not inspected and updated within six months of notice, the city should consider taking action.

Commented [AT13]: The County and DEQ collects and monitors septic permits, not the city.

g. The City Council should consider an ordinance to make it a misdemeanor to use a septic system over 40 years old, which after notice has not been inspected and brought to current standards within six months of notice.

Commented [AT14]: The County and DEQ collects and monitors septic permits, not the city. The city is not going to criminalize septic systems over 40 years old.

h. The City of Whitefish should consider incentives tTo mitigate impacts fromto neighborhoods with aging septic systems, provide incentives such as deferred

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annexation in exchange for waste water agreements for a period of ~~3~~20 years to match a rural special improvement district term length.

~~Periodic Reports~~

~~Goal: Each five years the city of Whitefish shall obtain or prepare reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake and in the Whitefish River.~~

~~Objectives~~

~~a. The section of the report on the condition of Whitefish Lake shall describe:~~

~~1. Scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the Lake.~~

~~2. The facts and data relating to each such benchmark.~~

~~3. Trends in the data, and,~~

~~4. Draw scientific conclusions on the condition of the Lake.~~

~~b. The section of the report on the condition of Upper Whitefish River shall describe:~~

~~1. Scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the Lake.~~

~~2. The facts and data relating to each such benchmark.~~

~~3. Trends in the data, and,~~

~~4. Draw scientific conclusions on the condition of the Whitefish River.~~

~~c. Report on BNSF activities, cleanup and monitoring activities during the past five years.~~

~~d. The city may rely on the Whitefish Lake Institute if the WLI performs said functions 4a, 4b, and 4c.~~

~~5. Storm drainage~~

~~Goal: No sediments, nutrients, or other harmful pollutants shall enter the Whitefish River from storm drainage.~~

Commented [AT15]: Already covered in the first objective.

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~~Objective:~~

~~a. Start planning for MS4 requirements applicable to cities over 10,000 population.~~

~~Golf Courses~~

~~Goal: Zero sediments, and zero nutrient loading from the golf courses into Whitefish Lake, Lost Loon Lake, and other water bodies and water tables, from human activities.~~

~~Objectives: Golf courses should~~

~~a. Adopt practices and technologies that conserve natural resources, including water and energy.~~

~~b. Join programs such as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program for Golf Courses, which is a network of golf courses dedicated to the goal of developing environmentally sound maintenance practices.~~

~~c. The City of Whitefish shall use future lease renewal language with the Whitefish Golf Courses on city property to require all practices in Section 7.~~

~~d. Develop a Site Assessment and Environmental Plan in order to develop and implement an overall environmental policy and long-range plan, maintaining ongoing records to document programs on the long range plan.~~

~~e. Maintain ongoing records to measure and document progress toward environmental improvement.~~

~~f. Assess and apply course best management practices and integrated pest management procedures. Any materials purchased should be of the kind less harmful to the environment and water resources.~~

~~g. Employ the principles of Integrated Plant Management (IPM) to prevent and control weeds, diseases and insects.~~

~~h. Use control measures that suppress pest populations with minimal environmental impact~~

~~i. Use native, naturalized or specialized drought tolerant plant materials wherever possible.~~

Commented [AT16]: This is being addressed in the public facilities element. There is a description of the issue and the following language:

"Begin preparations to become compliant with MPDES Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements for a MS4 community by ensuring accurate mapping of all public and private outfalls, stormwater facilities and green infrastructure. "

j. Plan irrigation patterns and/or program irrigation control systems to meet needs of plant materials in order minimize overwatering and water at appropriate times to minimize evaporation.

k. Properly store and dispose of solvents, herbicides, cleaning materials, paints, and other potentially hazardous substances.

l. Use nutrient products and practices that reduce the potential for contamination of ground and surface water (slow-release fertilizers, organic products, and fertigation) and that meet, not exceed, the needs of turfgrass.

m. Test and monitor soil and groundwater and adjacent surface water conditions regularly using water quality sampling for chemical contamination.

n. Inform golfers and guest about golf course chemical applications. Common methods include permanent signs on tee boxes and/or notices posted in golf shops and locker rooms.

6. Other Items

Goal: Be creative and thorough in devising other ways to maintain and improve water quality.

Objectives:

a. Public Access. In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the city, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake for swimming, but not for watercraft, due to the risk of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species as transported by watercraft.

b. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups or agency partners, such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, Whitefish Legacy Partners and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront, riparian and watershed lands as open space.

c. Fertilizers and Pesticides. Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

d. Drains to River. Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

Commented [AT17]: Staff does not believe golf courses should be specifically targeted as water quality issues can be related to many different recreational sports fields. Also, this language is much more specific and detailed than would typically be found in a community plan.

The draft already contains the language

"For recreational fields owned by the city but leased to another entity, the City of Whitefish should evaluate future lease renewal language to determine whether additional practices could be required to conserve natural resources, including water and energy."

Commented [AT18]: This "other item" heading would not be required if this section were organized as originally done as all the below objectives would fall under the only goal above.

Commented [AT19]: Underlining key words in the all the below objectives is unnecessary and not following the format of all the other sections.

e. ~~Aquatic Invasive Species.~~ Continue to implement and monitor programs and coordinate with other agencies to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

f. ~~Septic Systems.~~ Explore incentives to encourage properties on septic systems to connect to municipal sanitary sewer.

g. ~~Winter salt deicer.~~ Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to magnesium chloride deicer on City streets and sidewalks.

h. Continue to explore and implement more environmentally friendly fireworks alternatives. ~~Move all fireworks off Whitefish Lake due to the risk of perchlorates entering drinking water from Whitefish Lake.~~

i. ~~Water Supply.~~ Evaluate and prepare for impacts to surface municipal water supply in event of wildfire

~~j. For recreational fields owned by the city but leased to another entity, the City of Whitefish should evaluate future lease renewal language to determine whether additional practices could be required to conserve natural resources, including water and energy.~~

Commented [AT20]: Requiring moving fireworks off WF lake is a much bigger discussion appropriate for a Council Work Session

Commented [AT21]: Recommend retaining this rather than adding all the golf course language. This is much more typical of community plan language.

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SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON ENVIRONMENT SECTION	
DESCRIPTION OF COMMENTS	**STAFF RESPONSE**
General minor comments • More information regarding PCBs • Discuss train derailments in summary page • Add "reducing setbacks, revising zoning…" in objective that encourages density. • General editorial comments and wordsmithing • References to plans • Reference regarding Held v. Montana ruling • Comments about protecting floodplains, riparian habitat • Discuss designated wildlife crossings • Comments regarding wildfire • Comments regarding supporting solar. • Specifically mention deer management in objective for wildlife management plans. • Remove language regarding the communities' appreciation of the abundance of local wildlife.	All comments and revisions have been incorporated in the draft except as discussed below. Comments about floodplains and riparian areas already addressed by water quality and lakeshore regulations There is some reference to wildfire in this section, but wildfire is further discussed in the hazards section. Specific remedies will be discussed in the community wildfire protection plan. Designated wildlife corridors would be identified with wildlife management plan but land use section will consider where they have traditionally been.
Add "groundwater" to statement which says: "During the Visioning process, the community overwhelmingly responded the top three most important features to protect were the Whitefish River, Whitefish Lake, and overall water quality.	The community did not specifically mention groundwater. However, groundwater is part of "overall water quality"
Disagreement with Whitefish River being described as slow moving (low gradient) river.	This language was taken directly out of the WLI 2015 report, except the word "low gradient" is used. (Low gradients means "slow moving" or "low flow")
Comment to discuss "unintended consequences" of objective to increase access points to Lake. (such as more risk for aquatic invasive species or more erosion) Pg. 16, Objective c. Have these critical waterfront sites been identified and if so, where are they?	These objectives are retained from the existing growth policy, and public comment during the visioning was overwhelmingly for additional public access to the lake. No professional agencies consulted expressed concerns for unintended consequences of allowing more public access to the lake. Public access allows jurisdictions access for additional preventative or mitigation measures verses shoreline areas that are private property in which the city (or other agencies) have significantly less control.

	Specific sites have not been identified by this community plan update. Additional public access would require review and appropriate development of accesses and possibly additional aquatic invasive species monitoring.
Comment regarding removal of golf course fence	We cannot require removal but might have regulations that address the future. Also, the golf course may want this in place for safety reasons.
Add “All environmental laws shall be strictly enforced” as first objective in Air, Water, and Wildlife sections	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND this addition for several reasons: 1) The community plan is a policy document used for establishing city vision, the basis for writing regulations, establishing work programs, and setting goals, not as a reminder to follow laws. The Growth Policy is not a regulatory document. 2) Adding this suggests the city is not already enforcing its laws. 3) If someone (including the city) was not enforcing laws, adding this to the community plan does nothing. 4) The city has their own regulations. 5) Any enforcement of other environmental laws would be the State or the Federal government.
Add "city ordinances shall be enacted to effectuate this purpose" below objectives in wildlife, development of land, and climate change sections.	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding this. Any specific code change recommendations will be in the recommended actions/implementation portion. The community plan is a policy document. Implementation of this plan is the next step, and it would be determined at that time the best method and whether or not there would be regulations or other programs to implement items.
Add “Strictly enforce biannual inspections of septic systems over 25 years old…" Additional comments about septic regarding public records searches, notifying property owners, mapping, etc.	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding this. Flathead County Health is in charge of septic system review. Properties with septic systems are not typically in the city so we cannot enforce, except for the unusual arrangement in Rest

	Haven, in which we already have an arrangement to maintain their septic tank effluent pumping systems
Add “require” and “must” to golf course goals and objectives.	Staff DOES NOT RECOMMEND adding this. A community plan is not a regulatory document. We need to have all agencies and stakeholders on board, including the golf course, and help them understand all of what is involved. The first step is education.
Comment: “Can we incorporate something about the City removing non native fruit trees and where appropriate replace then with a flowering non-fruit bearing variety?”	Some language about this topic has been added at the end of the wildlife section, but DNRC and Fish and Wildlife did not identify this issue in discussions with staff. It is the Board’s decision whether we want to recommend a change in direction to the city council and no longer support the fruit gleaning program. Also, the city council recently discussed this issue and had no desire to regulate trees and vegetation on private residential properties. We can consider objectives supporting an education and outreach program outlining the impacts of fruit trees and feeding wildlife and providing best practices and alternatives.
Climate Change Comment on proposed objective relating to adopting a complete streets policy, allowing narrower streets, creation of protected pedestrian/bike-only streets, and other techniques to encourage walkability and whether it will create transit issues on narrower streets.	Complete streets (and safe streets for all) addresses multimodality (walkability). This was listed as a top priority of residents during visioning. Which streets and how wide is a design issue addressed in regulations and transportation plans. The Safe Streets for All plan was reviewed by the City Council on January 21st.
Climate Change 1.f. “What kind of density? Density for the sake of density will not do anything for affordability.”	Types and location of density will be discussed and determined during land use and housing element.
Comment: “The Plan must recognize the fact that the rail yard is a Superfund site and that monitoring and compliance with EPA and Montana DEQ standards for discharge into the Whitefish River must be addressed.”	BNSF permit requires meeting of regulations. This is monitored and enforced by EPA and DEQ, not the city.

Comment regarding “prevent” versus minimize chemical usage at golf courses, and “preventing” versus minimize impacts to terrestrial and aquatic life. Comment “No sediments, nutrients, or other harmful pollutants shall enter Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, or related waters.”	We will not be able to completely prevent as some fertilizers are needed to maintain the course and pollutants will still enter WF Lake. Language kept to “minimize” and using best practices.
Comment regarding the objective in climate change that recommends adding tree preservation requirements “for all areas of the city.”	We removed this entire objective because we recently adopted tree preservation requirements, and council has been clear they do not want to enforce tree preservation requirements on individual single family residential properties.
Add discussion regarding environmental impacts of fireworks	Staff added this in the “Other Significant Influences on Whitefish Water Quality” and added an objective in Water Quality, Goal 1, Objective k.
Additional comments regarding the CITY monitoring, performing annual reports and scientific testing and testing of septic or nutrients and maintaining a water quality website.	This is monitored by the State, the Fed, DEQ and WLI. The city does not do this.
Remove first sentence in the Wildlife and Habitat Section which says “The community and visitors appreciate the abundance of local wildlife and their habitat.”	Wildlife was in the Top 10 of ‘what makes Whitefish unique’ from the public outreach.
Add language regarding how we are preparing for state stormwater permits when our population reaches 10,000.	The process will be discussed in the Public Facilities Element regarding what public works needs to do to prepare.
Remove Water Quality Objective 1.b ~~In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake.~~	Staff is NEUTRAL regarding this comment This is a goal that was retained from the 2007 growth policy. Protecting lake quality was the highest ranking concern at visioning session. However, we did have several comments regarding increasing public access to the lake but no direct comments to reduce or minimize. There is recent correspondence from WLI supporting removal of this objective.

	Staff defers to the Board for a decision.
Revise Climate Change Mitigation Goal 1.c.iv Provide education and resources for students and community members on beneficial electrification **including rooftop and solar on city hall buildings**.	Staff has already addressed this in the same section as follows: "Transition public buildings to be all-electric." "Encourage new buildings to be EV and Solar Ready, especially if city funding is involved." "Reviewing zoning and other development regulations to ensure infrastructure associated with renewable energy such as solar panels are supported."
Comments asking why the below was deleted: ~~Adding tree preservation requirements for new residential subdivisions to reduce urban heat island effect while balancing fire concerns and recognizing the increasing need for defensible space.~~	Tree preservation requirements have recently been added to the landscape regulations. There is discussion of defensible space and Firewise principles in the hazards section.
Comment regarding Climate Change Objective F regarding reducing setbacks a. Encourage density to occur in locations which provide efficient use of infrastructure and are walkable to goods, services, and places of employment. Methods could include revising zoning to allow more types of attached housing by-right, reducing or eliminating setbacks and smaller lot sizes.	Staff added the second sentence regarding setbacks and revising zoning at the request of another community member that raised this at the previous meeting. Recent comment was that fire agencies recommend increasing setbacks to 30 ft. This could certainly by the case in a highly fire prone area, but does not justify increasing setbacks to 30' throughout the city. Zoning development restrictions, particularly relating to lot size and setbacks, have been recognized nationally as exacerbating the lack of housing construction. It is possible the legislature will pre-empt large setbacks.

“I did not see anything in the document about air quality issues regarding the Railway yard in the middle of Whitefish” by the Viaduct and Train station. There is a lot of airborne particulates coming out of the yard.	This was not listed as a principal contaminant by the DEQ and EPA. Either way, the city has no jurisdiction over BNSF, it is all monitored by the State and the Fed.

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March 5, 2025

Note: Materials from the Feb. 20, 2025, work session, staff version are underscored.

WATER

1. General goal

Maintain and improve water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams.

2. General goal

It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land maintenance or land disturbance, private or public, shall cause soil, erosion, chemical, contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or storm water discharge that adversely impacts any water body, wetlands, roads or other properties. Zero sedimentation, and zero nutrient loading shall be the ~~target~~ goal for all land development activity.

3. Sediments

Goal: No sediments, nutrients, or other harmful pollutants shall enter Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, or related waters, from land development activities.

Objectives

a. All environmental laws shall be strictly enforced.

b. The City of Whitefish shall obtain information on land development activities, for the purpose of meeting the above goals.

c. The City of Whitefish may perform scientific studies and data gathering, as authorized by the City Council.

d. Sites and activities identified as threats to Whitefish Lake, or Whitefish River shall be monitored, and if violations are detected, enforcement actions shall take place.

e. A water quality information center shall be maintained through the city website, for organizing and posting all relevant information, for the benefit of public participation with links to appropriate sites. The website should link to partner agencies and organizations with applicable information.

f. The City may request funds to perform studies in furtherance of the above goal. These objectives do not require the City to analyze water samples or conduct scientific studies.

g. The City of Whitefish shall track 303(d) compliance. As described in the background information, Whitefish Lake is not compliant for PCBs and mercury. Whitefish River is not compliant for PCBs and Oil and

Grease. All available facts and data from others shall be gathered. A report on the facts leading to the listings, and probable sources, shall be prepared.

4. Nutrients

Goal: No septic wastes shall enter Whitefish Lake or Whitefish River, or associated water tables.

Objectives

a. The City shall support future efforts to describe mitigate septic leachate contamination to Whitefish Lake and upper Whitefish River.
b. The City Council is encouraged to enact a regulation requiring that at the time of sale or transfer of land, a septic inspection shall be required.
c. The information from public records on septic fields within the City limits, which are over 30 years old, should be updated. This information was initially gathered by the Whitefish Lake Institute in 2012.
d. As to any septic fields within the City limits, which are over 30 years old, the owner should be notified and given educational materials, along with a request that the septic field be inspected and brought up to current standards. If the septic field is not

inspected and updated within six months of notice, the City should consider taking action.

e. The City Council should consider an ordinance to make it a misdemeanor to use a septic field over 30 years old, which after notice has not been inspected and brought to current standards within six months of notice.
f. The City of Whitefish should consider incentives to mitigate impacts from aging septic systems, such deferred annexation in exchange for waste water agreements for a period of 30 years to match a Rural Special Improvement District term length.

5. Periodic Reports

Goal: Each five years the City of Whitefish shall obtain or prepare reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake and in the Whitefish River.

Objectives

a. The section of the report on the condition of Whitefish Lake shall describe:

1. scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the lake.
2. the facts and data relating to each such benchmark.
3. trends in the data, and,
4. draw scientific conclusions on the condition of the lake.

b. The section of the report on the condition of upper Whitefish River shall describe:

1. scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the river,
2. the facts and data relating to each such benchmark,
3. the trends in the data, and
4. draw scientific conclusions on the conditions of the Whitefish River.

c. Report on BNSF activities, cleanup and monitoring activities during the past five years.

6. Storm drainage

Goal: No sediments, nutrients or other harmful pollutants shall enter the Whitefish River from storm drainage.

Objective: Start planning for MS4 requirements applicable to cities over 10,000 population.

7. Golf Courses

Goal: Zero sediments, and zero nutrient loading from the golf courses into Whitefish Lake, Lost Loon Lake, and other water bodies and water tables, from human activities.

Objectives: Golf courses ~~should~~ shall:

a. Adopt practices and technologies that conserve natural resources, including water and energy.

b. Join programs such as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program for golf Courses, which is a network of golf courses dedicated to the goal of developing environmentally sound maintenance practices.

c. The City of Whitefish shall use future lease renewal language with the Whitefish Golf Course on city property to require all practices in this section.

d. Develop a Site Assessment and Environmental Plan in order to develop and implement an overall environmental policy and long-range plan, maintaining ongoing records to document programs on the long range plan.

e. Maintain ongoing records to measure and document progress toward environmental improvement.

f. Assess and ~~update~~ apply course best management practices and integrated pest management procedures. Any materials purchased should be on the kind less harmful to the environment and water resources.

g. Employ the principles of Integrated Plant Management to prevent and control weeds, diseases and insects.

h. Use control measures that suppress pest populations with minimal environmental impact.

i. Use native, naturalized or specialized drought-tolerant plant materials whenever possible.

j. Plan irrigation patterns and/or program irrigation control systems to meet needs of plant materials in order to minimize overwatering and water at appropriate times to minimize evaporation.

k. Properly store and dispose of solvents, herbicides, cleaning materials, paints, and other potentially hazardous substances.

l. Use nutrient products and practices that reduce the potential for contamination of ground and surface water (slow-release fertilizers, organic products, and fertigation) and that meet, not exceed, the needs of turf grass.

m. Test and monitor soil and groundwater and adjacent surface water conditions regularly using water quality sampling for chemical contamination.

n. Inform golfers and guest about golf course chemical applications. Common methods include permanent signs on tee boxes and/or notices posted in golf shops and locker rooms.

8. Other items

GOAL: Be creative and thorough in devising other ways to maintain and improve water quality.

Objectives:

a. **Public Access** In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake, for swimming, but not for boating, due to the risk of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species as transported by watercraft.

b. **Work with** and support non-profit conservation groups such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.

c. **Fertilizers and pesticides** Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

d. **"Drains to river"** Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

e. **Aquatic invasive species** Continue to implement and monitor programs to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

f. **Septic systems** Explore incentives to encourage properties on septic systems to connect to municipal sanitary sewer.

g. **Winter salt deicer** Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to winter salt deicer on City streets and sidewalks.

h. Fireworks Move all fireworks off Whitefish Lake due to the risk of perchlorates entering drinking water from Whitefish Lake.

i.Wildfire Evaluate and prepare for impacts to surface municipal water supply, in the event of wildfire.

Note; from the February , 2025 work session staff version;

a. Was moved to general goal # 2
b. Was amended
f. Was moved to a separate golf course section
k. Was changed.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Mary Jane Barrett
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2025 3:09 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 February 24 2025 Update From Mary Jane in the Railway District 2/24/25

Thank you Alan. I appreciate the explanation and additional information. Bottom line is monitoring of BNSF would be driving out of your lane so to speak.
I think there is significant concern just based on my own knowledge. I know I have to power wash this house I use for my office every summer to get the black residue
off the siding as well as my white PVC fencing. As you likely know in about 2008 we did have the ground tested and monitored, etc. here in the Railway District in
conjunction with the EPA and it turned out fine…just one or two spots if I remember. Air is a different story. Anyway, I understand what you said and explained
so thank you again. Every one, all of you, do a really good job for everyone in Whitefish and for Whitefish. Always appreciated. Best Regards, Mary Jane 2/25/25

Mary Jane Barrett, MS, RN email:
Certified Case Manager [CCM]
Nurse Consultant

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From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 3:37 PM
To: Mary Jane Barrett
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 February 24 2025 Update From Mary Jane in the Railway District 2/24/25

Hi Mary Jane, thanks for your comment.

What we found as the most predominant air quality contaminants listed by EPA and Department of Environmental Quality in Whitefish were listed as dust from roads, open burning, wildfires and emissions.

I am certainly not contesting there could be airborne particulates coming from the railyard, but it was not listed by the EPA or DEQ as a principal air contaminant.

The State of Montana does not allow us to annex industrial uses. This means the BNSF railway is NOT within the city limits. BNSF is monitored and regulated by the County, State and Fed.

Although we cannot monitor or regulate BNSF, we CAN regulate paving roads, what deicer we use, burning, and look at measures to reduce automobile trips.

Remember this is a policy document used to set a general position of the city, determine our future regulations, work programs, city policy, etc. The background discussion of each topic just talks about the basics and some overall strategies we can use to address the issues. It is not a scientific document.

If you can provide a source that indicates airborne particulates from the Yard is a significant contributor to declining air quality, we may mention it briefly. But we lack jurisdiction so all we would be doing is mentioning it might be an issue that someone else monitors and regulates. The below policies would probably not change.

a. Continue to implement the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program.

b. Continue to monitor Whitefish air quality, and work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on a monitoring program.

c. Continue to identify additional sources of air pollution and explore programs and regulations that will improve Whitefish air quality. Examples could include measures the city could take to reduce automobile trips, championing for public transit and other alternatives to automobiles, encouraging electric versus fuel-powered equipment and promoting anti-engine idling policies.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Mary Jane Barrett
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 2:11 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 February 24 2025 Update From Mary Jane in the Railway District 2/24/25

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

2/24/25 Hello,
I read the Whitefish environmental report sent in last email. Covering all aspects…water, air, etc. I did not see anything in the document about air quality issues regarding the Railway yard in the middle of Whitefish
by the Viaduct and Train station. There is a lot of airborne particulates coming out of the yard. Why wouldn't this issue be included in the information, etc? Maybe I missed something and it is addressed somewhere else.
Thanks much. Mary Jane

Mary Jane Barrett, MS, RN

FN, Inc.

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From: Engage Whitefish <support@engagementhq.com>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 11:44 AM
To: Mary Jane Barrett
Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 February 24 2025 Update

Good afternoon, there are several recent updates regarding Vision Whitefish 2045.

NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION

Staff is completing the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element of the Plan. This is the first complete plan element chapter draft released for review! This plan element is expected to be rather detailed (40 pages +/-) and packed with information. To make it more digestible, staff is releasing it in three sections. The first section was the environment section, which has already been released and discussed at two separate community development board work sessions. The **NATURAL RESOURCES** section is the next section complete for review. This section is scheduled to be discussed at a March 19, 2025 work session. Please submit any comments you may have on this section by WEDNESDAY MARCH 5 AT 5PM. The section has been posted in the documents on the website and can also be accessed HERE.

FEBRUARY 19, 2025 WORK SESSION TIME CHANGE TO 6PM

The Community Development Board expressed concerns that a monthly one hour work session was an insufficient time allotment for the level of discussion necessary for Vision Whitefish 2045. Accordingly, the Board decided to add an extra work session intended solely for discussions regarding Vision Whitefish 2045. The Board has scheduled specific Vision Whitefish 2045 work sessions on every Wednesday the day before each regular Community Development Board meetings on the Third Thursday of every month. The first additional work session will be WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19 at **6PM**. Please note the work sessions time was initially stated to be 5PM.

In order to present a more informal method of discussion and encourage public participation, work sessions have now been scheduled in the City of Whitefish City Council Conference Room. You are welcome to attend in person, or participate remotely by attending via a MS Teams Link.

MICROSOFT TEAMS LINK

Meeting ID: 293 623 752 368

Passcode: RV6bG32W

Kind regards,

The Project Team

You're receiving this email because you are a registered participant on Engage Whitefish.
Powered by EngagementHQ
Unsubscribe

Good afternoon, there are several recent updates regarding Vision Whitefish 2045.

NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION

Staff is completing the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element of the Plan. This is the first complete plan element chapter draft released for review! This plan element is expected to be rather detailed (40 pages +/-) and packed with information. To make it more digestible, staff is releasing it in three sections. The first section was the environment section, which has already been released and discussed at two separate community development board work sessions. The **NATURAL RESOURCES** section is the next section complete for review. This section is scheduled to be discussed at a March 19, 2025 work session. Please submit any comments you may have on this section by WEDNESDAY MARCH 5 AT 5PM. The section has been posted in the documents on the website and can also be accessed HERE.

FEBRUARY 19, 2025 WORK SESSION TIME CHANGE TO 6PM

The Community Development Board expressed concerns that a monthly one hour work session was an insufficient time allotment for the level of discussion necessary for Vision Whitefish 2045. Accordingly, the Board decided to add an extra work session intended solely for discussions regarding Vision Whitefish 2045. The Board has scheduled specific Vision Whitefish 2045 work sessions on every Wednesday the day before each regular Community Development Board meetings on the Third Thursday of every month. The first additional work session will be WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19 at **6PM**. Please note the work sessions time was initially stated to be 5PM.

In order to present a more informal method of discussion and encourage public participation, work sessions have now been scheduled in the City of Whitefish City Council Conference Room. You are welcome to attend in person, or participate remotely by attending via a MS Teams Link.

MICROSOFT TEAMS LINK

Meeting ID: 293 623 752 368

Passcode: RV6bG32W

Kind regards,

The Project Team

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND NATURAL HAZARDS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

ENVIRONMENT

AIR

Goal

MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE

1. ~~Preserve~~ air quality for the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, through continued exploration of ways to further reduce air pollution. INCLUDING

Objectives:

a. ALL ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS SHALL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

a. Continue to implement the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program.

b. Continue to monitor Whitefish air quality, and work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on a monitoring program.

c. Continue to identify additional sources of air pollution and explore programs and regulations that will improve Whitefish air quality. Examples could include measures the city could take to reduce automobile trips, championing for public transit and other alternatives to automobiles, encouraging electric versus fuel-powered equipment and promoting anti-engine idling policies.

WATER

GENERAL Goal

MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE

1. ~~Protect and enhance~~ water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams.

Objectives:

LAND USE, LAND DISTURBANCE OR LAND

CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION,

GENERAL GOAL 2

a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no development activity, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the ~~target~~ for all development activity.

GOAL LAND USE, LAND DISTURBANCE OR LAND

~~b.~~ In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake."

8. OTHER: a

8 OTHER: 2 b

c. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.

8 OTHER 3 c

d. Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

MOVE TO SEPARATE SECTION 7.

e. Encourage local golf courses to join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program, develop a site assessment and environmental plan, minimize chemical contamination and water usage, and perform periodic testing of soil, groundwater and surface water for contamination.

8 OTHER 4 d

f. Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

8 OTHER 5 e

g. Continue to implement and monitor programs to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

8 OTHER 6. f

h. Explore incentives to encourage properties on septic systems to connect to municipal sanitary sewer.

8 OTHER 7 g

i. Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to winter salt deicer on City streets and sidewalks

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Goal

MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE WILDLIFE HABITAT.

1. Minimize and/or mitigate impacts to wildlife and their habitats as development occurs.

Objectives:

a. ALL ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS SHALL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

a. Work with partner organizations such as the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to develop guidelines or regulations for development proposals in proximity to wildlife habitats, ranges, and migration routes, ~~while not precluding development and still respecting individual property rights~~.
   i. Identify, prioritize, and preserve key wildlife habitat and corridors.
   ii. Develop a plan to mitigate conflicts between humans and wildlife.

b. Minimize the use of fencing that is exclusionary or dangerous to wildlife, except when required for human safety, for protection of at-risk crops, or for domestic animal containment. All ~~other~~ fencing in critical wildlife corridors and habitat should be wildlife friendly.

c. Continue to ~~support~~ ENFORCE streamside, wetland, river, and lake buffers and setbacks through both the Whitefish Water Quality Protection regulations and the Flathead Conservation District regulations. While ~~they~~ provide water quality protection, they also provide habitat for plants and animals. SUCH REGULATIONS

d. Develop trail design standards for public trails along the Whitefish River to be reviewed and approved by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Flathead Conservation District that protect water quality and habitat as much as practicable.

e. Support Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks *Living with Wildlife* program to reduce conflicts between wildlife and people. *Living with Wildlife* includes not feeding wildlife by promptly removing fruit from trees, securing bird feeders, pet food, and garbage, and installing wildlife friendly fencing. ENACT ORDINANCES TO EFFECTUATE THESE PURPOSES.

f. Continue to support the city fruit gleaning program for fruit trees on public land and within city parks to discourage aggressive human-wildlife interactions.

g. Continue to implement animal resistant solid waste containers throughout town and identify the next areas of town for animal resistant solid waste containers.

h. Coordinate with residents, community groups and non-profits to encourage use of animal resistant garbage cans within the unincorporated planning jurisdiction.

i. Continue to enforce noxious weed regulations and support noxious weed public education.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Goal:

1. Continue to fulfill the city's commitment to the implementation of the Climate Action Plan.

   Objectives:

   a. Continue to provide staff support to the Climate Action Plan Standing Committee.

   b. Create an implementation schedule which outlines the city's responsibility in implementation of the plan, the timeline for action, and the responsible department.

   c. Utilize the Electrification Recommendations from The Whitefish Climate Action Plan (3-7-2023) to lower greenhouse gas emissions within the city including:

i. Transition public buildings to be all-electric.
ii. Evaluate the feasibility of transitioning city landscape maintenance equipment from fuel-burning to battery-powered electric, where appropriate (e.g. lawn mowers, snow blowers, utility golf carts, sidewalk snowplows).
iii. Pursue an all-electric bus fleet at a scale that is economically feasible.
iv. Provide education and resources for students and community members on beneficial electrification.

d. Support local and valley wide commuter and visitor public transportation to and from downtown including the creation of a transit plan.

e. Review and revise regulations and engineering standards as necessary to provide incentives for climate-smart development practices. Examples include, but are not limited to:

i. Allowance for reductions in landscaping, open space, or stormwater requirements when buildings incorporate green roofs.[11]
ii. The use of above ground vegetated treatment for stormwater runoff rather than underground mechanical treatment and detention.
iii. Reduced or eliminated off-street parking standards to reduce impervious surfaces, surface heat, and stormwater requirements.
iv. Adopting a complete streets policy, allowing narrower streets, creation of protected pedestrian/bike-only streets, and other techniques to encourage walkability. ALL AREAS OF THE CITY, AND FOR
v. Adding tree preservation requirements for new residential subdivisions to reduce urban heat island effect while balancing fire concerns and recognizing the increasing need for defensible space.
vi. Encourage new buildings to be EV and Solar Ready, especially if city funding is involved.

ENACT ORDINANCES TO EFFECTUATE THE ABOVE PURPOSES.

f. Encourage density to occur in locations which provide efficient use of infrastructure and are walkable to goods, services, and places of employment.

g. Map green infrastructure assets and integrate them with the stormwater master plan update and proposed stormwater plans.

h. Explore the development of a heat island reduction plan with a strategy to introduce more shade structures and/or tree canopies in outdoor spaces such as above sidewalks, courtyards, pathways, and parking lots. ENACT ORDINANCES TO EFFECTUATE THESE PURPOSES.

i. Expand small neighborhood parks when appropriate.

[11] A "green roof" is a roof either fully or partially blanketed with vegetation. During Whitefish High School participation in the growth policy, 2024 Whitefish Senior Miki Flint wrote a senior paper and championed for green roofs at a Whitefish Community Development Board meeting.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling <jheberling@mcgarveylaw.com>
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2025 3:50 PM
To: Jon L. Heberling; Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: : Jon Heberling comments February 6, 2025 – revisions to environment – water section

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Al, Please post these comments and my comments of 2/10/25 on MLUPA to the Growth Policy Public Comments section. Also please deliver same with the packet to the CDB Board members for the 2/19/25 meeting. Thanks, Jon

WATER

1. General goal

Maintain and improve water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams. Whitefish Lake is entirely within the City limits. So, if anyone is the protector of Whitefish Lake, it is the City of Whitefish.

2. General goal

It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no land use, land disturbance, or land development, activity, private public, shall cause soil, erosion, chemical, contamination, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or storm water discharge that adversely impacts any water body, wetlands, roads or other properties. Zero sedimentation, and zero nutrient loading shall be the goal for all land use, land disturbance, or land development activity.

3. Sediments

Goal: No sediments, nutrients, or other harmful pollutants shall enter Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, or related waters.

Objectives

a. All environmental laws shall be strictly enforced.

b. The City of Whitefish shall conduct monitoring activities in support of the above goals.

c. All facts and data available from others shall be gathered. The City of Whitefish may perform scientific studies and data gathering, as authorized by the City Council.

d. Sites and activities identified as threats to Whitefish Lake, or Whitefish River shall be monitored.

e. A water quality website shall be maintained, for organizing and posting all relevant information, for the benefit of public participation.

f. The City may request funds to perform studies in furtherance of the above goal. These objectives do not require the City to analyse water samples or conduct scientific studies.

g. The City of Whitefish shall monitor for 303(d) compliance. As described in the background information, Whitefish Lake is not compliant for PCBs and mercury. Whitefish River is not compliant for temperature. All available facts and data shall be gathered. A report on the facts leading to the listings, and probable sources, shall be prepared.

4. Nutrients

Goal: No septic wastes shall enter Whitefish Lake or Whitefish River, or associated water tables.

Objectives

a. Perform a public records analysis on each tract on Lion Mountain, locating the septic permit for each such tract, and determine the year of each permit, to determine the age of each septic field.

b. For all septic fields over 30 years in age, notify the owner that the City of Whitefish would like to do an inspection or testing of such septic field, in terms of current standards.

c. Perform the inspection or testing, if the owner agrees.

d. Analyze and map the results.

e. If the septic field does not meet current standards, notify the owner that there is likely a harmful effect on Whitefish Lake, if true, and that the septic system will need to be made compliant with current standards.

f. If the septic field is not made compliant within one year of such notice, consider taking legal action for the benefit of Whitefish Lake, if there is expert opinion that such field is likely to have a harmful effect on Whitefish Lake.

g. If the owner does not agree to the testing or inspection, considering taking legal action for the benefit of Whitefish Lake, if there is expert opinion that such field is likely to have a harmful effect on Whitefish Lake.

h. For such legal action, the cumulative effect of all such systems over 30 years in age, or otherwise deficient, shall be considered.

i. Perform the same eight steps with regard to other septic systems over 30 years in age, which are close enough to Whitefish Lake to adversely affect Whitefish Lake.

j. Perform the same eight steps with regard to other septic systems over 30 years of age within the city limits, with action to be taken, where there is expert opinion that such septic system is likely to have harmful effects on the Whitefish River, any water body, or water table.

5. Annual Reports

Goal: The City of Whitefish shall do annual reports on water quality in Whitefish Lake and in Whitefish River.

Objectives

a. The City of Whitefish shall do an annual report, due each November 1, on the condition of Whitefish Lake, and the condition of Whitefish River, including all threats to Whitefish Lake and Whitefish River, real and potential.

b. The section of the report on the condition of Whitefish Lake shall describe:
1. standard scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the lake.
2. the facts and data relating to each such benchmark.
3. trends in the data, and,
4. draw scientific conclusions on the condition of the lake.

c. The section on threats to Whitefish Lake shall describe in detail: sources of sedimentation to the lake, with facts and data, if any, relating thereto. Such sources shall include: (a) land disturbance and road use in the Swift Creek drainage; (b) construction, land disturbance, and road use in areas of Big Mountain which drain into Whitefish Lake, and (c) construction, land use and road use in areas near Whitefish Lake.

d. Describe sources of nutrient loading to Whitefish Lake.

e. Describe all sources of harmful pollutants to Whitefish Lake, including boating and the golf course.

f. The section of the report on the condition of Whitefish River shall describe:
1. the standard scientific benchmarks for evaluation of the condition of the river,
2. the facts and data relating to each such benchmark,
3. the trends in the data, and
4. draw scientific conclusions on the conditions of the Whitefish River.

g. The section on threats to the Whitefish River shall describe in detail:
1. all sources of sediments, nutrients, and other harmful pollutants to the Whitefish River,
2. such sources shall include storm water, land use, land disturbance, and land development near the Whitefish River,
3. New developments related to water quality in the Whitefish River,
4. Report on BNSF cleanup and monitoring activities during the year.

6. Storm drainage

Goal: No sediments, nutrients or other harmful pollutants shall enter the Whitefish River from storm drainage.

Objective: Prepare a plan to accomplish this goal.

7. Golf Courses

Goal: Zero sediments, and zero nutrient loading from the golf courses into Whitefish Lake, Lost Loon Lake, and other water bodies and water tables.

Objectives: Golf courses shall:

a. Adopt practices and technologies that conserve natural resources, including water and energy.

b. Join programs such as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program for golf Courses, which is a network of golf courses dedicated to the goal of developing environmentally sound maintenance practices.

c. The City of Whitefish shall use future lease renewal language with the Whitefish Golf Course on city property to require all practices in this section.

d. Develop a Site Assessment and Environmental Plan in order to develop and implement an overall environmental policy and long-range plan.

e. Maintain ongoing records to measure and document progress toward environmental improvement.

f. Assess and update course best management practices and integrated pest management procedures.

g. Employ the principles of Integrated Plant Management to prevent and control weeds, diseases and insects.

h. Use control measures that suppress pest populations with minimal environmental impact.

i. Use native, naturalized or specialized drought-tolerant plant materials whenever possible.

j. Plan irrigation patterns and/or program irrigation control systems to meet needs of plant materials in order to minimize overwatering and water at appropriate times to minimize evaporation.

k. Properly store and dispose of solvents, herbicides, cleaning materials, paints, and other potentially hazardous substances.

l. Use nutrient products and practices that reduce the potential for contamination of ground and surface water (slow-release fertilizers, organic products, and fertigation) and that meet, not exceed, the needs of turf grass.

m. Test and monitor soil and groundwater and adjacent surface water conditions regularly using water quality sampling for chemical contamination.

n. Inform golfers and guest about golf course chemical applications. Common methods include permanent signs on tee boxes and/or notices posted in golf shops and locker rooms.

8. Other items

GOAL: Be creative and thorough in devising other ways to maintain and improve water quality.

Objectives:

a. **Public Access** In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake.

b. **Work with** and support non-profit conservation groups such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.

c. **Fertilizers and pesticides** Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

d. **"Drains to river"** Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

e. **Aquatic invasive species** Continue to implement and monitor programs to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

f. **Septic systems** Explore incentives to encourage properties on septic systems to connect to municipal sanitary sewer.

g. **Winter salt deicer** Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to winter salt deicer on City streets and sidewalks.

Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2025 3:27 PM
To: 'Jon L. Heberling'
Subject: RE: Jon Heberling comments February 10, 2025 on Growth Policy: water quality section, MLUPA, condition of and threats to Whitefish Lake

The water quality portion of the environment section mentions the condition of WF Lake as a 303(d)-water body for contaminants, particularly sedimentation from runoff, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs), petroleum hydrocarbon, perchlorate, and mercury. It also mentions the presence of septic leachate, particularly from on-site septic systems. The report discusses the work of WLI, such as the "Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline Area of Whitefish Lake" and Septic Leachate Risk Assessment. It discusses reports such as the Flathead-Stillwater Planning Area Nutrient, Sediment, and Temperate TMDLs and Water Quality Improvement Plan. Increasing temperatures are also mentioned.

WLI is indicated in this section as the agency that collects water data, authors water quality-related studies and promotes water quality protection policies. They said they do annual testing and they do the baselines.

The community plan defers to WLI because Vision Whitefish 2045 is a policy document and not a scientific report.

Real and perceived threats to WF Lake (and the River) discussed in the water quality section include:

- Spills from BNSF
- Septic Leachete
- Aquatic Invasive Species
- Fireworks
- Slurry and ash from fires
- PCBs and Mercury
- Effects of climate change (droughts, fires)
- Fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, particularly from golf courses
- Run off from storm events
- Sedimentation from runoff
- Nitrogen and ammonia

Agencies that have already reviewed the environment section include the following. All comments were incorporated, or I explain in a table, which will be provided the Board, why they were not.

- Flathead Conservation District
- Flathead County Environmental Health
- Glacier National Park Conservancy
- Haskill Creek Watershed Group
- Montana Dept of Environmental Quality
- Montana Dept of Natural Resources
- Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks

- US Forest Service
- Whitefish Lake Institute

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Jon L. Heberling <jheberling@mcgarveylaw.com>
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2025 2:51 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Jon Heberling comments February 10, 2025 on Growth Policy: water quality section, MLUPA, condition of and threats to Whitefish Lake

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MLUPA 76-25-209(1) states "the land use plan must: …(c) include… the conditions of real and potential threats to… surface water," to wit: Whitefish Lake and Whitefish River. Also, MLUPA 76-25-203(1) states: "the land use plan must include… descriptions of existing conditions of… natural resources, environment, and hazards."

1. So, what is the "condition" of Whitefish Lake?

2. What are the standard benchmarks for evaluation of the "condition" of a lake?

3. What is the data relating to each such benchmark?

4. Describe the "condition" of Whitefish Lake, using the above.

5. What are the threats to Whitefish Lake, "real and potential"?

Answer the questions above for Whitefish River. Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Engage Whitefish <support@engagementhq.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 2, 2025 7:43 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: A new question has been added to Have any questions or concerns about the Growth Policy Update? Contact us here!

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

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Hi there,

Just a quick heads up to let you know that a new question has been asked at VISION WHITEFISH 2045 by JanCan.

The question that was asked is:

Hi, I'm trying to find the environmental section that discusses the fireworks policy over Whitefish Lake. Perhaps it is not included. There has been a lot of discussion for many years of a non-toxic approach. I'd like to see this discussed during the growth policy review.

Please DO NOT reply to this email. If you want to provide an answer to this question, sign into your site and respond to the question from within the Q & A tool.

Regards

Bang The Table Team

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Richard Hildner
Sent: Friday, January 3, 2025 5:23 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Further comments on the Environment Draft
Attachments: further coments pages 11-18 draft environment.pdf

ATTENTION: External Email - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk<mailto:help@cityofwhitefish.gov> if in doubt.

Good morning Alan,
At least I hope you've gone home for the weekend by the time I hit send and you won't have to look at this until Monday.

I've gone through your work session slides and have a few comments/thoughts"
#1 Can we call out wildfire in this slide?
#3 Environment Section: Again, can we cal out wildfire?
#5 Air: Once again, I think this may be a place to call out wildfire
#6 Goals and Objectives: Add wildfire to the examples?
#14 This seems overly aspirational. How would that first bullet point be implemented?
#15 See my comment in the draft
#19 See my comment in the draft
#20 See my draft comments on density

Attached, as promised, are my comments on the draft Environment section, pages 10-18. I have converted this from Pages to a PDF so hopefully you can open it this time. Let me know if I need to do something different.

All the best,
Richard

Richard Hildner

Environment Draft Comments pp.11-18

The last paragraph on page 10, continued on page 11, mentions maintenance of wildlife corridors. Shouldn't the first step be to identify these corridors? Seems to me they have to be identified before they can be maintained.

Pg. 11, ¶ 2: maybe include developed and undeveloped residential in the list of native plant communities.

Pg. 12, ¶ 1: Can we incorporate something about the City removing non native fruit trees and where appropriate replace then with a flowering non-fruit bearing variety?

Pg. 13, ¶ 2: I suggest adding *and alpine* right after Nordic.

Pg.14, ¶ 3: The last sentence at the end of the paragraph could just say something to the effect, "The City will adhere to International Wildland Interface (WUI) standards and additional conditions for landscaping, setbacks, building materials, etc., as may be appropriate.

Pg. 15, Water, Objective a. It probably doesn't fit here but at some point the Plan must recognize the fact that the rail yard is a Superfund site and that monitoring and compliance with EPA and Montana DEQ standards for discharge into the Whitefish River must be addressed.

Objective b. Where are these potential additional public access points to the Lake. How does more access reduce impacts on bank erosion or reduce the likelihood of the introduction of AIS?

Pg. 16, Objective c. Have these critical waterfront sites been identified and if so, where are they?

Pg. 18, Climate Change Mitigation, continued:

c.v. Add something about consideration of rooftop solar on City buildings where appropriate and when roof replacements are being considered. The O'Shaughnessy is a good example of where this could occur.

e. iv Won't this create transit issues on narrow streets, particularly in the City core?

e. v This would be a good place to mention fire resistant landscaping plantings.

f. What kind of density? Density for the sake of density will not do anything for affordability.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, December 30, 2024 3:08 PM
To: Richard Hildner
Subject: responses

Richard, here are some responses to some of the comments:

"Is there any sand and gravel extraction occurring within the City of Whitefish planning jurisdiction? Is there any contemplated in the planning area? In the visioning sessions I don't recall anyone advocating for mineral extraction?"

This topic is discussed in the natural resources section, which you have not seen yet.

According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, there is an active permit for a gravel mine just outside the city limits near the west end of 18th. There are several remediated sites around the WF golf course, and a cluster of gravel pits near Hwy 40 and WF Stage Road. You will see a map with the natural resources section.

You are correct that no one has advocated for mineral extraction in Whitefish. MLUPA requires us to address extractive industries. The bigger issue is that extractive industries are allowed in all county SAG-5, SAG-10 and AG-20 zoning districts by conditional use. This zoning is adjacent to much of the city limits. State law says extractive industries can be "reasonably conditioned" but not completely prohibited in county residential zoning. The WF position has consistently been that mineral, gravel, and sand extraction is generally considered to be incompatible with the character, qualities, and environment of the Whitefish area, and is to be discouraged. This is not anticipated to change. What could be new is more policies addressing proactively working with the county (and property owners) to mitigate impacts of extractive industries that may happen adjacent to the city limits.

"Given the number of people who have reached out to me, the Hazards section regarding wildfire must be robust. Wildfire insurance protection is becoming increasingly difficult if it can be obtained at all."

I agree. The hazards section regarding wildfire is significantly more detailed than the present growth policy. Our present growth policy only has a few sentences about the topic. Understand though, this is a city comprehensive plan, and the community wildfire protection plan is where the details would arise.

"Is there any discussion about unintended consequences associated with increasing the number of access points on the Lake? I mentioned a couple during the Dec. 19 meeting.."

I received many comments during visioning regarding increasing access to the lake and retained this policy from the existing growth policy. If we increase public access to the lake, we will also increase AIS inspections. This section does not discuss "unintended consequences" of allowing more access to the lake as this is subjective and has not been publicly suggested by any professional agency we have consulted.

"I haven't seen the Whitefish Lake water temperature history but I assume it is increasing (I'll check with Mike K.). This would account for the increase in water temperature in the Whitefish River more than the reduction of stream side vegetation. I think it is important to firmly state that water temperatures in the Lake and River will continue to rise into the foreseeable future due to global warming."

What is in the growth policy comes from the 2014 Flathead Stillwater Planning Area Nutrient, Sediment and Temperature TMDLS and Water Quality Improvement Plan issued by the Montana Department Water Quality. Mike Koopal has seen the draft, and did not have comments on this section. The draft you have seen says "

Although shading from vegetation will help reduce water temperature, there could still be continued rising caused by the increasingly hotter temperatures associated with climate change." (Page 4, TMDL) I am not comfortable making a definitive statement about the future (i.e. it WILL).

Whitefish will become a Class 1 city in the near future so shouldn't we be addressing the discharge permits needs of a Class 1 city now?

I am discussing this with public works. If we discuss more details about this, it might be more appropriate in the public facilities section – stormwater.

Why can't the language be changed to golf courses MUST ...This is a discussion for the decision makers. When will that discussion take place?

You mentioned this in the work session. You can certainly bring it up again at the next one. Remember a community plan is a policy document, it is not regulatory.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

Citizens for a Better Flathead is submitting the following *revised* comments regarding the Environmental Chapter of the Whitefish Growth Policy update.

Comments on "Water Quality":

1. While we appreciate the inclusion of policy and scientific analyses, such as TMDL standards and 303(d) listed waters, we recommend elaborating on the environmentally damaging contributions to the waterways. For example, the "303(d) Listed Waters" section discusses Whitefish Lake's history of impairment and PCBs, generally. However, we believe it would be beneficial to the general public to explain how PCBs enter our waterways and why impairments occur. This would provide readers with a more rounded understanding of (a) how to approach these issues of 303(d) listed waters and (b) how to prevent future impairments. For more information, please review the EPA's brief on PCBs here.

2. The draft plan relies on the *Flathead-Stillwater Planning Area Nutrient, Sediment, and Temperate TMDLs and Water Quality Improvement Plan 2014*, which is a great foundation source. However, in 2017, the Flathead Conservation District released the *Flathead-Stillwater Watershed Restoration Plan*, which provides similar information at a less complex level. We recommend that the plan at least reference this work in conjunction with the former.

Comments on "Wildlife & Habitat":

3. We think it is important to retain much of the *scientific* detail from this section in the 2007 plan (i.e. Table 1.2). We do applaud the authors integration of the Paris Agreement and the Whitefish Climate Action Plan (CAP) in the 2024 draft

4. The Environmental chapter of the draft encompasses a wide range of important issues. However, in light of the 2023 *Sackett v. EPA*[1] decision, we recommend a more stringent approach to water conservation, regardless if said water is identified as a Water of the United States. While *Sackett*

[1] The *Sackett v. EPA* (2023) case questioned whether wetlands that do not have a continuous surface connection to an interstate water system (i.e.the Missouri River), can be considered Waters of the United States, and therefore, subject to the federal regulations of the Clean Water Act. The US Supreme Court decided that the Clean Water Act does not include wetlands that do not have this "continuous surface connection to traditional navigable waters"

regresses protections on water law, the Whitefish citizens have made it clear, as evidenced in this draft, that they'd like to safeguard the lake, rivers, streams and riparian environments. We believe that Whitefish could set an example for other Montana towns by prioritizing their wetlands and creating stringent regulations for protecting them as development inevitably occurs. The 2007 Natural Resource chapter takes pride in protecting such habitats and, we would like to see this mirrored in the current version. The draft plan should be more comprehensive in its riparian and wetland protection specific objectives. These critical habitats can not only be key indicators of climate change, but also integral to the economic and environmental well-being of the Whitefish area.

5. We'd like to suggest traffic infrastructure be put into place to help prevent incidents (i.e. wildlife warning signs, slower speed limits, speed bumps in appropriate areas). We recommend reading *Planning and prioritization strategies for phased highway mitigation using wildlife-vehicle collision data*, a study that used "moving fences" to mitigate wildlife-vehicle encounters in the Kootenay National Park area. While the FWP will be consulted with prior to wildlife mitigation,

Thank you for your time,

Cameron Dexter
Director of Policy & Planning
Citizens for a Better Flathead

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 3:50 PM
To: Richard Hildner
Subject: RE: Environment Draft comments

Richard, thank you for the heads up on your comments. My responses are in bold.

Cover Memo: p.1
PP.2 Of the 12 departments, agencies, etc. which ones responded to the request for review? Who were they and where can their comments be accessed?

With the preliminary draft, we received 11 different sets of comments. Nine were from city departments and two were from DCNP, and WLI. We incorporated all these comments into the final draft. Any sets of comments on the final draft are included (two).

Pg.1
PP.2 Delete any reference to mineral extraction. There has never been any mineral extraction in the Whitefish planning area or in Whitefish County. –

There is presently sand and gravel extraction occurring in Flathead County.

The final sentence is meaningless. There is no extractive resource and the timber industry would not likely consider itself to be extractive.

Resource extraction" refers to the process of removing natural resources like minerals, fossil fuels, water, and timber from the Earth's environment for human use, typically through activities like mining, drilling, logging, or fishing, essentially taking raw materials from their natural state to be used in various industries. I'm happy to use another term.

PP.3 add "and asphalt" after the word concrete. Delete the last sentence unless an example can be provided of what is proposed and for what events.

I don't understand this comment

PP.4 What is Whitefish doing now to demonstrate commitment to being a sustainability and resiliency leader? Whitefish is not currently a fire adapted community. We must become one.

We have a climate action plan committee and a Climate Action Plan. Fire adapted committee is being addressed in the hazards section. We have implemented (and are implementing) many of the objectives of this plan. The hazards section will discuss resiliency, particularly wildfires.

Pg.2
PP.3 I'm guessing the City uses magnesium chloride as deicer. Salt has a negative connotation and you might consider referring to deicer as magnesium chloride.

We use salt as a de-icer.

Pg.3
PP.4 Wildfire smoke will be a much bigger air quality problem in the future as fire seasons will continue to be longer, hotter, dryer, and more intense due to climate change.

Understood. This is mentioned in the summary, in the climate changes section, and will be in the hazards section

Pg.4
PP.3 River temp increase result of warmer lake temp? Water temp "will" not "could" continue to rise.

I don't understand this comment.

Pg.5
Top of page; when and where were the the water samples taken and by whom?

These were taken by WLI. They are discussed in the full WLI report.

Whitefish River clean up: has anyone done any grab samples from the BNSF surface runoff outfalls?

I will ask Engineering and WLI.

I take exception with the notion that nutrient or pollutant loading is because the river moves too slowly.

This language was taken directly out of the WLI 2015 report, except the word "low gradient" is used. (Low gradients means "slow moving" or "low flow")

Pg.6
PP.2 Elsewhere in the plan is a suggestion to increase the number of access points to decrease congestion. The unintended consequence is the increased likelihood of AIS introductions. Zebra and Quagga will have a serious impact on the City's lake intake ports.

This objective is retained from the existing growth policy, and public comment during the visioning is for additional public access to the lake, not reduction.

Pg.7
PP.1 Has the interceptor trench ben effective? Data?

Yes, based on WLI.

PP.2 Need to address the risk to water from wildfire and Whitefish river quality if there is urban fire damage and the resulting runoff.

This would be appropriate for the wildfire section.

Pg.8
PP.3 I'm pretty sure First Creek is off line. What happens if there is a fire in Haskell basin and a load of retardant is dumped in the 2nd and 3rd creeks?

This is appropriate for discussion in the hazards section.

Pg.9

PP.2 What is the current status of the City stormwater discharge permit? Are we currently meeting the standards for a Class I city?

You have to be at least 10,000 people to be a Class 1 city.

Pg.10
Why can't the language be changed to golf courses MUST ...

This is a discussion for the decision makers.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

-----Original Message-----
From: Richard Hildner <richardhildner@icloud.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 1:04 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Environment Draft comments

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Alan, attached are my general comments on the draft. I will be discussing these during public comment this evening. I'll no doubt have some embellishments when it comes time for me to speak.
Richard

TO DAVID:
YES, YOU SHOULD
REFER TO DIFF
STANDARDS

Re: Vision 2045, section on Environment and Hazard, draft reviewed is that provided to the public before the meeting on 12/19/24

Comments from Rachel Schmidt, 675 Woodside Ln 406·261·4039

Overall commentary:

Cover Page Why was Whitefish Legacy Partners not asked for commentary? This organization works on behalf of its residents to conserve open space, habitat protection, and watershed health.

Pg. 1 Paragraph 1, last sentence should state 'local and global effects'

*since this discusses the Montana Constitution perhaps some reference to the Held vs Montana ruling should be referenced, or in the section regarding climate change

Paragraph 2, Why is there no reference to the hazard of train derailment and hazardous spills in the opener and in an of the goal section?

Pg. 3 Water quality, paragraph 1 should reference groundwater as well

TMDL section, Whitefish Lake is listed as impaired but is on a wait list to have TMDLs established, there is a place the city can work to impact Lake water quality

Pg. 9 Water Quality, Stormwater, reference is made to 'when the population reaches 10,000', is there any thought given to our seasonal population balloons? We already see VRBO and residence hot tub drainage on to our streets and into our stormwater drains- this is only single example of population related issues that are here and not in the future

Pg. 15 Goal 1, Objective a. remove the word development from the first line, it should be all activity not just development activity

With regard to objective b.- consider adding an objective addressing recreation safety and experience, proactive action on these two topics- one of the designated beneficial uses of Whitefish Lake is recreation

Pg. 16 with regard to objective c. included in water, wildlife and habitat as well as climate change (terrestrial conservation) add an objective regarding work with Whitefish Legacy Partners (and other organizations) to conserve open space in the surrounding watershed for water quality protection, wildlife habitat and climate resilience

Also, include an objective that discusses proactively engaging county, state and federal resource management agencies to reduce and prevent water quality degradation...

Pg. 16 Goal 1 should read 'Prevent, minimize and/or mitigate impacts to both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and their habitats if and when development occurs.'

Objective a. and ii. are you referring to the 197 page 2012 documents in progress outlining best practices, no plan needs to be developed, tools already exist.

Objective b. if this is the case the golf course section to which a great deal of time is focused should include removal of the fence around the north course.

Also included under wildlife should be work with MDOT on wildlife crossings (possibly in discussion with WPD) as well as continued work with Whitefish Legacy Partners to continue work conserving open space at the urban interface.

LEADING IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY FROM HAZARDS.

Heberling

"We will respond and adapt to climate change and employ sustainability principles, practices, and education. We will demonstrate environmental stewardship and preserve and enhance our natural resources while managing, preventing, and mitigating impacts from natural hazards."

The 1972 Montana Constitution guarantees its citizens "the right to a clean and healthful environment." Whitefish is defined by its natural environment. At community visioning sessions, Whitefish residents repeatedly expressed their desire for clean air, clean water, scenic vistas, and protection of wildlife habitat, open space, and forest lands. The natural environment is comprised of a complex system of many components. Disruptions to any part of this system can result in permanent ecological impacts or reverberate for generations. One of the greatest environmental threats is climate change, which is already producing global effects.

Whitefish has an abundance of natural resources. Some of these resources have driven the early development and economy of Whitefish. Natural resources and associated activities specific to Whitefish include farming and ranching, abundant wildlife for fishing and hunting, healthy forests for logging, and mineral extraction. Responsible management of these resources is imperative to the health of the local economy and the availability of food and materials. It is incumbent upon Whitefish to recognize and encourage the historic contribution of resource extraction while managing our natural resources wisely to ensure they are available for our present and future residents.

There is potential for natural hazards in every community. Some of these hazards are unavoidable and are natural phenomena such as lightning-caused fires, earthquakes, and flood events. However, the magnitude and frequency of natural hazards can be reduced through thoughtful design and comprehensive planning. Forest fires and the resulting damage can be reduced through proper forest management and defensible space around properly constructed structures. Flood impacts can be reduced by avoiding development in or around floodplains, designing with green infrastructure such as absorbing, storing, and purifying rainwater, and using porous surfacing rather than concrete. Earthquake damage can be limited by building and engineering solutions. There is much that can be done to reduce the loss of life and property and to recover from hazardous events.

A sustainable community is a community that can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A resilient community is a community that can withstand, resist, absorb, accommodate, and recover quickly from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner. Through responsible stewardship of the land, thoughtful land use policy, regulatory updates, and citizen involvement, Whitefish will continue to demonstrate its commitment to being a sustainability and resiliency leader.

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND NATURAL HAZARDS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

ENVIRONMENT

AIR

Goal ~~AND ENHANCE~~ ~~ALL THEME~~ ~~AIR~~ Maintain and improve

1. ~~Preserve~~ air quality for the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, through continued exploration of ways to further reduce air pollution. includes

Objectives:

a. All environmental laws shall be strictly enforced.

a. Continue to implement the Flathead County Air Pollution Control Program. Continue to enforce air pollution laws.

b. Continue to monitor Whitefish air quality, and work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on a monitoring program.

c. Continue to identify additional sources of air pollution and explore programs and regulations that will improve Whitefish air quality. Examples could include measures the city could take to reduce automobile trips, championing for public transit and other alternatives to automobiles, encouraging electric versus fuel-powered equipment and promoting anti-engine idling policies.

WATER

Goal ~~MAINTAIN~~ Maintain and improve. all environmental laws shall be strictly enforced

1. ~~Protect and enhance~~ water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes, rivers, groundwater, and streams. chemical contamination

Objectives:

land maintenance or land disturbance

a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no ~~development~~ activity, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the target for all development activity. City ordinances shall be enacted to effectuate this purpose.

b. In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake."

c. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.

d. Initiate a public information campaign to engage community members and provide education on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

e. ~~Encourage~~ REQUIRE City ~~local~~ golf courses to join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program, develop a site assessment and environmental plan, minimize chemical USE AND contamination and water usage, and perform periodic testing of soil, groundwater and surface water for contamination.

prevent?

f. Continue to support and encourage "drains to river" labels and associated artwork from Whitefish youth programs on storm sewer inlets.

g. Continue to implement and monitor programs to neutralize the threat of aquatic invasive species.

we cannot enforce this does what county

h. Explore incentives to encourage properties on septic systems to connect to municipal sanitary sewer. Strictly enforce biannual inspection of septic systems over 25 years old, and to require

i. Explore, encourage, and implement more environmentally friendly alternatives to winter salt deicer on City streets and sidewalks

inadequate septic systems be replaced

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Goal

~~MAINTAIN~~ PRESERVE AND ENHANCE WILDLIFE HABITAT

1. ~~Minimize and/or mitigate impacts to wildlife and their habitats as development occurs.~~

Objectives:

a. all environmental laws shall be strictly enforced

a. Work with partner organizations such as the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to develop guidelines or regulations for development proposals in proximity to wildlife habitats, ranges, and migration routes, while ~~not precluding development and still~~ respecting individual property rights.
   i. Identify, prioritize, and preserve key wildlife habitat and corridors.
   ii. Develop a plan to mitigate conflicts between humans and wildlife.

WHOA, NETO!

b. Minimize the use of fencing that is exclusionary or dangerous to wildlife, except when required for human safety, for protection of at-risk crops, or for domestic animal containment. All ~~other~~ fencing in critical wildlife corridors and habitat should be wildlife friendly.

c. Continue to ~~support~~ enforce streamside, wetland, river, and lake buffers and setbacks through both the Whitefish Water Quality Protection regulations and the Flathead Conservation District regulations. While they provide water quality protection, they also provide habitat for plants and animals. such regulations

d. Develop trail design standards for public trails along the Whitefish River to be reviewed and approved by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Flathead Conservation District that protect water quality and habitat as much as practicable.

e. Support Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks *Living with Wildlife* program to reduce conflicts between wildlife and people. *Living with Wildlife* includes not feeding wildlife by promptly removing fruit from trees, securing bird feeders, pet food, and garbage, and installing wildlife friendly fencing. Enact ordinances to effectuate these purposes.

How do we require?

f. Continue to support the city fruit gleaning program for fruit trees on public land and within city parks to discourage aggressive human-wildlife interactions.

g. Continue to implement animal resistant solid waste containers throughout town and identify the next areas of town for animal resistant solid waste containers.

h. Coordinate with residents, community groups and non-profits to encourage use of animal resistant garbage cans within the unincorporated planning jurisdiction.

i. Continue to enforce noxious weed regulations and support noxious weed public education.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Goal:

1. Continue to fulfill the city's commitment to the implementation of the Climate Action Plan.

   Objectives:

   a. Continue to provide staff support to the Climate Action Plan Standing Committee.

   b. Create an implementation schedule which outlines the city's responsibility in implementation of the plan, the timeline for action, and the responsible department.

   c. Utilize the Electrification Recommendations from The Whitefish Climate Action Plan (3-7-2023) to lower greenhouse gas emissions within the city including:

i. Transition public buildings to be all-electric.
ii. Evaluate the feasibility of transitioning city landscape maintenance equipment from fuel-burning to battery-powered electric, where appropriate (e.g. lawn mowers, snow blowers, utility golf carts, sidewalk snowplows).
iii. Pursue an all-electric bus fleet at a scale that is economically feasible.
iv. Provide education and resources for students and community members on beneficial electrification.

d. Support local and valley wide commuter and visitor public transportation to and from downtown including the creation of a transit plan.

e. Review and revise regulations and engineering standards as necessary to provide incentives for climate-smart development practices. Examples include, but are not limited to:

i. Allowance for reductions in ~~landscaping~~, open space, or stormwater requirements when buildings incorporate green roofs.[11]
ii. The use of above ground vegetated treatment for stormwater runoff rather than underground mechanical treatment and detention.
iii. Reduced or eliminated off-street parking standards to reduce impervious surfaces, surface heat, and stormwater requirements.
iv. Adopting a complete streets policy, allowing narrower streets, creation of protected pedestrian/bike-only streets, and other techniques to encourage walkability.
v. Adding tree preservation requirements for new residential subdivisions to reduce urban heat island effect while balancing fire concerns and recognizing the increasing need for defensible space.
vi. ~~Encourage~~ new buildings to be EV and Solar Ready, ~~especially~~ if city funding is involved.

f. Encourage density to occur in locations which provide efficient use of infrastructure and are walkable to goods, services, and places of employment.

g. Map green infrastructure assets and integrate them with the stormwater master plan update and proposed stormwater plans.

h. Explore the development of a heat island reduction plan with a strategy to introduce more shade structures and/or tree canopies in outdoor spaces such as above sidewalks, courtyards, pathways, and parking lots.

i. Expand small neighborhood parks when appropriate.

[11] A "green roof" is a roof either fully or partially blanketed with vegetation. During Whitefish High School participation in the growth policy, 2024 Whitefish Senior Miki Flint wrote a senior paper and championed for green roofs at a Whitefish Community Development Board meeting.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Marti Brandt
Sent: Wednesday, September 17, 2025 8:45 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Letter Regarding Hazards Element

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Alan,

Could you please forward the following message to the Community Development Board (Planning Board) for their meeting 9/18? Please also add this message to the public comments for the Hazards growth policy element.

During the August 27 Hazards growth policy discussion, a member of the public sat alongside the Community Development Board and offered new edits to the element draft. This person was also called upon during the board's discussion to make additional changes. I emailed Michelle to clarify that this was not a special appointment.

For transparency and equal opportunity, the Community Development Board should address the following questions:

- How is a member of the public chosen to sit with the board and give suggestions in real time? For equal opportunity, who will be invited to the table for transportation? Land use?
- Why could this person's suggestions not be reviewed following the normal process? We've been reviewing Hazards since July. There was ample time to submit comments to be viewed by the public beforehand.
- If this situation resulted from low attendance, should the public nominate representatives to sit at the table and share our ideas? This would keep meeting numbers low and allow our representatives the ability to make in-person changes.
- If it's a matter of low attendance, please be aware that the last-minute reschedule from 8/20 to 8/27 affected attendance and enabled this unusual situation. How can the public know beforehand that there will be attendance-based privileges?
- If it's a matter of topic importance, transportation will also address high-risk issues. Who will be nominated to make in-person transportation edits?
- I have nothing against the person who sat at the table during this meeting. However, our city staff has a professional commitment to neutrality and proper conduct. Appointed board members have agreed to the city's ethics policy. What enforceable ethics standards apply to members of the public who sit at the table and edit drafts?

Thank you for addressing these questions and for giving other community members the opportunity to fill this role for future discussions.

Best,
Marti Brandt
[redacted] Armory Road

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Marti Brandt
Sent: Friday, September 12, 2025 5:24 PM
To: Michelle Howke
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Question About Board Procedures

Hi Michelle and Alan,

Yes, if you could please include my letter in the public comment record—and distribute it to the board—that would be great.

I'll try to attend the meeting, as well, but in case I can't make it, but the letter can be backup.

Thank you both.

Best,
Marti

On Fri, Sep 12, 2025 at 3:47 PM Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:

> Hi Marti,
>
> Thank you for your comments. I would like to clarify, that member of the public is not a board member. Would you like Alan to distribute your letter to the Community Development Board as part of the public comment record?
>
> You are also welcome to attend the next CDB meeting on September 18th to share your concerns directly with the board.
>
> Please let us know how you would prefer to proceed.
>
> Michelle Howke
>
> Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
>
> PO Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

(406)863-2402

mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Marti Brandt > **Sent:** Thursday, September 11, 2025 5:10 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Question About Board Procedures

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Michelle,

I have a question and am not sure you're the right person to ask. You seem to know quite a bit about procedures, different departments, and board appointments so maybe you can forward me to the correct person.

I was watching the August 27 Community Development Board meeting for the Hazards growth policy chapter. During this meeting, a member of the public is sitting at the board's table during public comment, and offering suggestions that are approved in real time.

This person is also called upon during the board's discussion—when the public can no longer offer input—to make additional changes.

Do you know if this is some kind of honorary appointment to the board? Do you know how others might apply for a similar role?

I also don't understand why this person's comments weren't submitted and reviewed in the usual manner—comments made, changes made available to the public, board discusses and approves.

This chapter was first reviewed in July so there was plenty of time to follow the normal procedure. This is why I'm thinking maybe this is some kind of special role.

Thanks for any info and for all that you do!

Best,

Marti Brandt

MOTIONS RE HAZARDS.

OBJTV 2B PREPARE, OR CAUSE OTHERS TO PREPARE A FULL FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS OF THE HASKILL CREEK ROAD ALTERNATIVE FOR BIG MTN EGRESS, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING Q's. WHAT IS THE HISTORY? WHY HAS A GOOD 2 LANE ROAD NOT YET BEEN BUILT? WHAT IS THE LENGTH? WHAT ARE THE OWNERSHIPS? THE CONDEMNATION COST? THE FULL COST? WHO PAYS FOR IT?

2C ADD: GIVEN A ONE HOUR WARNING FOR AN INCOMING FIRE, ANALYSE WHETHER WISCONSIN CAN HANDLE ALL VEHICLES FROM E. LAKESHORE AND BIG MTN, AND HOW.

1L. ~~2F~~ MAP AREAS OF INSUFFICIENT WATER PRESSURE.

2G MAP ROAD CLOSURES NECESSARY IN DRY TIMES. WORK WITH AGENCIES ON THIS.

2a. ADD: ENSURE A FEASIBILITY STUDY IS DONE, ANSWERING THE SAME QUESTIONS AS REGARDS THE HASKILL CREEK ROAD.

Whitefish Fire Department thoughts on the Hazards Section of the Whitefish Vision 2045

First, I'd like to extend my apologies for not being able to attend in person. I had prior commitments that could not be rescheduled. I appreciate the opportunity to provide input and remain fully engaged in supporting the goals outlined in the Hazards section of the Long Range Plan.

The Whitefish Fire Department (WFD) appreciates the comprehensive analysis of natural and human-caused hazards presented in the City's Long Range Plan. We support the Plan's proactive approach to increasing community resilience and commend the emphasis placed on wildfire risk, evacuation infrastructure, and the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). As the primary agency responsible for fire protection and emergency response within the planning boundary, WFD offers the following responses and recommendations:

Wildfire Preparedness and the WUI

We strongly support the continued recognition of wildfire as a top-tier hazard in Whitefish. With the entire city located within the WUI and fire seasons growing longer and more intense, WFD reiterates the urgent need for an **updated Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)**. The current plan, last adopted in 2009, does not reflect today's development patterns, fuel loads, or climate conditions. An updated CWPP will allow us to more effectively target mitigation efforts, prioritize hazardous fuels treatments, and advocate for federal and state funding under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

We also support:

- **Further implementation of WUI Codes**, particularly in building and zoning, including defensible space and fire-resistant materials.
- **Expansion of public outreach and Firewise programs** in partnership with HOAs and Firesafe Flathead to encourage voluntary neighborhood-level engagement.
- **Mapping and tracking of fuel mitigation efforts** in partnership with DNRC, USFS, and local landowners to identify treatment gaps and evaluate progress over time.

Emergency Response and Infrastructure

WFD affirms the Plan's identification of response time challenges, particularly in the northern planning area around East Lakeshore Drive and Big Mountain Road. The department has long advocated for the establishment of a **northern fire station** to improve coverage in this high-risk area. We encourage the City to formally prioritize this capital investment and explore land acquisition and funding opportunities as part of the Plan's implementation.

We also support:

- **Efforts to improve evacuation routes**, especially for neighborhoods with single points of access such as Birch Point and Big Mountain. As these areas grow, secondary access routes or shelter-in-place zones are vital.
- **A grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street** to enhance north-south emergency access during evacuations or blocked crossings.
- **Evaluation of fire flow infrastructure** to ensure all areas meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for water supply during fire events.

Community Education and Engagement

WFD continues to participate in Firesafe Flathead and supports expanding these efforts to include annual community risk awareness campaigns. We recommend:

- **Wildfire preparedness brochures** included with building permits.
- **Buyer awareness disclosures** for properties in high-risk areas.
- Continued support for the **Firewise USA™ recognition program** to promote neighborhood-level preparedness.

Interagency Coordination

We support continued coordination with the **Flathead Fire Service Area**, **Whitefish Fire Service Area**, **DNRC**, **Flathead Conservation District**, and **Big Mountain Fire District**. WFD stands ready to assist in:

- Updating the CWPP and fire risk assessments.
- Cross-training and joint planning for evacuation and mutual aid scenarios.
- Ensuring consistency between local development regulations and mitigation goals.

Conclusion

The Whitefish Fire Department is committed to protecting lives, property, and natural resources in our community. We applaud the City's efforts in developing a thoughtful, hazard-conscious **Vision Whitefish 2045** and look forward to playing a key role in its implementation. We urge the City to prioritize risk reduction through infrastructure improvements, strategic planning, and community education.

Respectfully,

CHIEF COLE HADLEY
WHITEFISH FIRE DEPARTMENT
275 FLATHEAD AVE
P.O. BOX 158
WHITEFISH, MT 59937
(406) 863-2491 - DIRECT
(406) 863-2499 - FAX
CHADLEY@CITYOFWHITEFISH.GOV

FFRG Comments on Draft

GROWTH POLICY HAZARDS COMMENTS:

In the first paragraph when speaking of wildfire it is important to take care in using the term *risk.* Risk is a measure of the probability and consequence of uncertain future events. In other words, "Wildfire risk is the likelihood of a wildfire occurring and the potential effects it would have on things we care about." (Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, *Wildfire Risk 101, 2024)*

Please consider the following rewrite of the first paragraph:

.

Risks, whether natural or human-made, pose varying levels of impact to communities and environments, highlighting the need for awareness, preparedness, and appropriate mitigation. There is potential for risks in every community. Some of these risks are unavoidable and are natural phenomena such as lightning-caused fires, earthquakes, and flooding events. There are also risks that can be avoided such as human caused fires and chemical spills. Risk management can reduce the impact and consequence of unplanned events, both natural and human-caused. The damage from forest fires can be mitigated to a greater or lesser extent, depending upon a number of variables such as weather at the time of ignition, building construction design and materials, and community preparedness, and forest management. Flood impacts can be reduced by avoiding development in or around floodplains, designing with green infrastructure such as absorbing, storing, and purifying storm water, and using, where possible, porous surfacing rather than concrete or asphalt. Earthquake damage can be limited by utilizing appropriate building and engineering solutions and codes. Risks associated with train derailments and/or chemical spills can be reduced by regular maintenance, adequate infrastructure, proper communication and personnel training. It should be noted that the elementary, middle, and high school are all within five blocks of the rail yard.

P.1, ¶ 2: Last sentence, it should be noted that Whitefish, is one of eight cities in Montana having shared characteristics with recent urban wildfires in other US communities. (see Headwaters Economics Analysis) Whitefish is in the 90th percentile of communities at risk from wildfire.

P1, ¶3: Include fireworks and unsecured trailer safety chains in the list of human activities that are responsible for wildfires.

P2, ¶1: Change Excessive to Aggressive at the beginning of the third sentence. This has led to an unnatural accumulation of … . Consider a wording change in the description of the forest cover to include ladder fuels and uniform canopy structure. There has been a reduction of logging *activity* but not a reduction in logging *practices*. Logging activity is currently reduced do to market pressures and cost of transporting logs to mills.

P2, ¶2: Change second sentence to read: Some of the most desirable locations to live in Whitefish are also some of the most fire prone. (Actually, some of us believe the most desirable location to live is closer to town in our neighborhoods.) These lands are particularly vulnerable to wildfire due to steep topography, southerly aspect, and west to east drainage orientation, lack of water supply, inadequate egress, ample forest fuels, extended response times, and inadequate preparation of defensible space surrounding homes and construction that is not fire wise.

PP 3&4: Evacuation Routes:
This is an area of major concern for members of the public. It must be noted that the majority of the suggested evacuation routes do not permit two lanes out and one lane in for emergency vehicles and fire suppression crews. The efficacy of these routes has never been tested. The viaduct exit is constricted to approximately 25 feet near its southern terminus, as is Veteran's Memorial Bridge, Baker Ave. Bridge over the Whitefish River, the lower section of the Big Mountain Road and the exit from Iron Horse subdivision. I'm sure there are others similarly restricted but I just haven't measured them. Egress from the upper reaches of Grouse Mountain (Chicken Ridge) and Lion Mountain is also limited.

In my view, there should be NO discussion of an evacuation route through Haskell Basin until it is built and deemed suitable as an egress route. For reasons I am happy to explain, this is a fire trap. I suggest removing it from the map.

P5, ¶2: It isn’t difficult to map the areas that have been treated for fire resiliency. The Forest Service, DNRC, and private holdings should have all of this information. The important issue is maintenance of treated properties. Fuels treatment isn’t a one and done proposition. Any plan must provide for the routine and periodic maintenance of treated lands in the WUI. The City should create and maintain a record of the type and timing of fuels mitigation treatment within the planning jurisdiction.

P5, ¶1: The completion of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is of critical importance and should be of the highest priority. It must be detailed and implementable.

P5, ¶3: I feel compelled to point out Whitefish is NOT a fire-adapted community and is at extreme risk in the event of an ember storm originating from a wildfire on the City’s perimeter. Ashland, OR is sometimes referred to as the gold standard for creating a fire-adapted community and could serve as model for Whitefish.

There is agreement among wildland fire managers in our area that it is not a question of IF we will have a significant wildfire event but rather WHEN, particularly the Big Mountain face.

References:

America’s urban wildfire crisis: Headwater’s Economics
USFS Wildfire Risk 101, Science You Can Use: USDA FS Rocky Mountain Research Station
Fast Fires: Science, October 2024
When fire goes feral; A conversation with John Vaillant: High Country News, June 2023
Meetings in ‘High Hazard’Communities Prepare Oregonians for Revised Wildfire Map: Jefferson Journal, July/August 2024
Wildfire Risk to Communities: USDA Forest Service

Reading:

Fire Weather; On the Front Lines of a Burning World, John Vaillant, Vintage Books, 2024

Under a Flaming Sky; The Great Hinckley Firestorm of 1894, Daniel James Brown, Lyons Press, 2009

Firestorm at Peshtigo; A Town, Its People, and the Deadliest Fire in American History, Denise Gess and William Lutz, Henry Holt and Co. 2003

FFRG comments on hazards draft

Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards
HAZARDS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
Wildfire
Goal
1. Minimize wildfire risk to the Whitefish community, infrastructure, and amenities.

Objectives
a. Continue active participation in Firesafe Flathead.

b. Complete an updated community fire risk assessment in coordination with DNRC and USFS fire specialists.

c. Prepare an updated community wildfire protection plan (CWPP). The plan should include a delineation of the Wildland Urban Interface, high risk areas, wildfire response times, community preparedness, firefighting capability, feasible evacuation routes, how emergency notification would occur and areas for most effective hazardous fuel treatments.

d. Develop regulations for future subdivision development in areas identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan as being “high” to “very high” wildfire risk in order to protect life and property. (Regulations lead to restrictions.)

e. Adopt requirements for Wildfire Defensible Space standards in Subdivision regulations.

f. Include Firewise construction standards, mitigation of fire hazards, reduction of fuel loads, fire resistant landscaping materials and design, and adherence to defensible space requirements in City zoning regulations to supplement gaps in state building code WUI standards.

g. Compile a list of active local homeowner’s associations and neighborhood associations and encourage their working together to become fire adapted or Firewise communities.

h. Promote wildfire education, prevention, and preparedness. This may include, but is not limited to, “buyer beware” plat notes in areas identified as high fire risk and Firewise handouts with the issuance of building permits.

i. Work with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the US Forest Service, Firesafe Flathead, Stoltze Land and Lumber Company, homeowner’s associations, fire districts and individual property owners to compile a map of mitigated areas and areas proposed for future mitigation. Note that fire mitigation measures once completed must be maintained by the responsible parties.

j. Support commercial harvest and thinning of timber on public and private lands to reduce wildfire risks.

Goal

2. Upgrade infrastructure to increase safety before fire events occur.

Objectives:

a. Pursue opportunities for a grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street.

b. Begin negotiations with BNSF for alternative accesses into Birch Point and across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish in case of a fire emergency.

c. Assess and evaluate existing and potential evacuation routes prior to the issuance of building permits in high-risk areas.

d. Coordinate with utility providers such as Flathead Electric to seek funding opportunities to identify and underground high risk utility lines.

SHELTER WF

Subject: Draft Hazards Section of the Environmental, Natural Resources, and Hazards Chapter

Dear Members of the Whitefish Community Development Board,

We find the draft report written by staff to be thorough and informative, with reasonable goals and objectives. We encourage the Community Development Board to adopt the draft as-is, with the following considerations:

1) The correction of spelling errors (not an all-inclusive list)
    a) Page 2, under section The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), first sentence - "Wildlife" should be corrected to "Wildland."
2) We question the example provided on page 2 under section Whitefish and Fire Risk that reads, "...and overhead utility lines exist over forested areas such as at the East Lakeshore Drive / Big Mountain Road intersection."
    a) This is the specific location of a high-profile development proposal (Mountain Gateway), and feels targeted at limiting housing in this specific area.
    b) **Instead, this list should either be all-inclusive or should not name specific examples.** Considering that some of these areas may change to underground cables at some point in the future, it may be best to not name specific examples. This is the same rationale that the CDB used when removing the name of the current Executive Director of Housing Whitefish from the board's recently adopted version of the Economic Development chapter.
3) Similarly, on page 3, second paragraph, the last sentence reads, "single family residences and duplexes are exempted from the landscaping regulations."
    a) These specific examples or exemptions may not be true in the future, so it is perhaps more appropriate to be general here by stating instead that, **"certain building types are exempted from the landscape regulations [by ordinance]."**

Beyond these minor changes, we believe that the draft should be adopted in full as written by staff. We are unable to comment on edits made by a board member on the water quality section that you will also be discussing on June 18th, as these have not been made publicly available at this time. Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Nathan Dugan, President

Greetings, I've made comments to the HAZARDS section of the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element document using track changes in the accompanying document. I hope that is satisfactory.

My overall impression of this section is there is not much planning discussed. Maybe I've missed the intent of the document but a better discussion of how to plan for growth over the next 20 years should be included.

Vehicular transportation in and around Whitefish has become somewhat slow and inefficient during visitor seasons and a general "plan" to better move traffic is needed. Our existing road system will be a major restriction when an emergency happens and there should be better consideration of how to handle different scenarios for notifying and moving many people quickly away from a hazard.

I know we can't predict exactly what will happen under what conditions, but we can make some educated guesses. Maybe the easiest is wildfire because, using daily fire danger (including "red flag" days) and historical weather, we can guess the fire locations and burning conditions that will require evacuations. All the forests around Whiteish have burned in the past and they will burn again in a way we can't stop – we'll need to just get out of the way. As a start, the US Forest Service, Fire Sciences Laboratory in Missoula would be a great resource to help model fire spread from probable ignition points. Combine that with maps of road capacity and housing and you would have good information to begin fire evacuation plans.

In 1961, fire swept through areas near where the 2025 Eaton and Palisades fires burned in California. The communities planned to build smarter in the future (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxnC1WW95XE). In 2019, the community of Pacific Palisades said they would do a better job of protecting homes against wildfire (latimes fire inconvenient truths.docx). In January 2025, the Palisades and Eaton fires burned over 16,000 structures and killed over 25 people. Whitefish seems to be as complacent as Pacific Palisades and Altadena when it comes to wildfire– it won't happen to us. Except it is not unlikely. We have or own fires to look back on in Montana 1910 and 1929 (https://www.frames.gov/documents/catalog/alexander_and_cruz_2014a.pdf) and we are nearing the end of typical fire cycles in the forests around Whitefish.

Railroad accidents may not be as easy to predict but can be dangerous too, as they found out in Alberton in 1997 and Helena in 1989.

Thank you for considering these comments and those I've added the accompanying draft document.

Duncan Lutes

HAZARDS

Hazards, whether natural or human-made, pose varying levels of risk to communities and environments, highlighting the need for awareness, preparedness, and mitigation efforts. There is potential for hazards in every community. Some of these hazards are unavoidable and are natural phenomena such as lightning-caused fires, earthquakes, and flood events. There are also hazards that could have been avoided such as human-caused fires and chemical spills. The magnitude and frequency of hazards can be lessened, avoided, or mitigated. Forest fires and the resulting damage can be reduced through proper forest management, design practices that reduce or eliminate the threat and defensible space around properly constructed structures, improved transportation systems, better notification of emergencies (e.g., geofencing) and improved messaging and signage of what to do in an emergency. Flood impacts can be reduced by avoiding development in or around floodplains, designing with green infrastructure such as absorbing, storing, and purifying rainwater, and using porous surfacing rather than concrete or asphalt. Earthquake damage can be limited by building and engineering solutions. Train derailments and / or chemical spills can be avoided by regular maintenance, adequate infrastructure, proper communication and personnel training. There is much that can be done to reduce the loss of life and property and to recover from hazardous events.

Commented [DL1]: Define Hazard and Risk.

WILDFIRE

Background

Fire has always been an important part of the landscape in Montana, but there is consensus in the scientific community that extreme fire weather will occur more frequently as the climate warms. Wildfires are getting bigger, starting earlier, lasting longer, and causing more damage to property. Wildfire season in Montana historically began in May and ended in October but is now trending from March to November. The USDA Forest Service indicates Montana's populated areas face greater wildfire risk than 42 of the 50 states in the country[1].

Commented [DL2]: For context of where we are in the natural cycle of fire, include the fire return interval for forests around Whitefish (30-200 years. (https://montanaforestcollaboration.org/app/home/principles/forest-types-and-fire/) and the last substantial fire near Whitefish (Lion Mountain in 1907 ?).

Wildfire is defined as the uncontrolled burning of trees, grass and brush with a spread or movement that is unchecked. Wildfires can be ignited by lightning or by human activity such as smoking, campfires, fireworks, sparks from overhead utility lines, equipment use, and arson. Wildfires are a natural part of ecosystems that clear dead and diseased plants, stimulate new growth, improve habitat for wildlife, and reduce insect infestations. While fire is a natural part of Montana, 3 out of 4 wildfires in Montana are ignited by humans[2].

Historic Fire Suppression Practices

[1] *Community Wildfire Protection Plan Guidebook,* Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, 2024
[2] *Fire Prevention and Preparedness,* Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

As development has moved into forestland areas, this has led to more aggressive fire suppression. While originally intended to protect human settlement and forest resources, the practice of fire suppression proved to be short-sighted. ~~Excessive fire~~ Fire suppression has led to an accumulation of increasing woody biomass in forested areas not being actively managed and ~~thickening~~ greater cover and density of vegetation from the forest floor to the upper forest canopy (ladder fuels). This, coupled with hotter and longer summers, a reduction in logging ~~practices~~activity, drought, and various forest insect and disease infestations, has resulted in increasingly destructive fires. The consequences of these fires are numerous – loss of life and property, affected wildlife, impacts to air and water quality, overburdened fire departments, and higher homeowner's insurance costs (or inability to obtain homeowner's insurance, which is becoming increasingly more common).

Commented [DL3]: Evidence from catastrophic fires show that some of these consequences are also a function of poor planning. E.g., poor ingress/egress, lack of interest or enforcement in Firewise activities (in cities, by associations and by homeowners themselves). This is especially true in places like Whitefish with many second homes that have owners who are less in tune with the Firewise mindset. Whitefish should be sure to include all property owners in messaging about Firewise initiatives.

Whitefish and Fire Risk

The City of Whitefish is surrounded by forestland and mountains. Some ~~of the most desirable~~ locations ~~to live~~ in Whitefish are ~~also some of the most~~ especially ~~susceptible locations in terms of~~ to fire and have poor accessibility. ~~This is~~ due to steep terrain, ample ~~fire~~ forest fuels ~~(forest)~~, lack of water supply, winding roads, long cul-de-sacs, extended driveways, and delayed response times. ~~Recent catastrophic national fires (such as the Camp Fire that destroyed Paradise, California in 2018) have been determined to have been ignited by downed overhead utility lines during wind events, and overhead utility lines exist over forested areas such as at the East Lakeshore Drive / Big Mountain Road intersection.~~Catastrophic fires (high intensity wildfires that cause widespread destruction and harm) are started by natural events (lightning), human causes (arson, unattended fires, escaped prescribed fires) or a combination (uprooted or broken trees hitting powerlines in a poorly maintained powerline right-of-way). The *Wildfire Risk to Communities Model*[3] produced by the USDA Forest Service is a tool to help communities identity their level of wildfire risk (see Wildfire Risks to Whitefish Map). According to this model, the risk of wildfire in Whitefish is 90% higher than other communities in the US. Even areas of the city that are not directly in forested or mountain areas are highly susceptible to wildfire, particularly ember showers - wind-borne embers carried by winds for miles from active fires. It is estimated that 90% of the homes destroyed by wildfires are a result of ember fires[4].

Commented [DL4]: If there is a glossary for the vision document, include the definition there rather than in the text. "Wildfire" and "Ember shower" are examples.

Commented [DL5]: Additionally, Headwaters Economics rated Whitefish as one of the 1100 most at risk cities in the U.S. https://headwaterseconomics.org/wildfire/more-than-1100-communities-urban-wildfire-risk/

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

The US Forest Service defines the Wildlife Urban Interface (WUI) as the zone where structures and other human development meet and intermingle with undeveloped wildland or forests (where fire can spread from forest to structure). The US Fire Administration indicates Montana is one of the eight states in which 60% to 80% of the houses statewide are within the WUI.[5] According to the Montana Department of Natural

Commented [DL6]: Note that the WUI is important for managing where fire enters communities but home hardening away from the WUI may help control house-to-house spread. https://ibhs.org/wildfire/wind-driven-building-to-building-fire-spread/

[3] *Wildfire Risks to Communities*, https://wildfirerisk.org/explore, USDA 2024
[4] National Fire Protection Association, *How Do Homes Burn in a Wildfire?*,https://www.nfpa.org/videos/how-do-homes-burn-in-a-wildfire
[5] US Fire Administration, *What is the WUI?* https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-

wui.html#:~:text=While%20the%20wildland%20urban%20interface,unoccupied%20land%20and%20human%20development.

Resources and Conservation (DNRC) the entire City of Whitefish has been determined to be within the WUI (see the Whitefish Wildland Urban Interface Map). Within a WUI zone, "WUI Codes" are recommended. WUI codes are typically adopted with zoning or as part of building codes. Examples of WUI codes include fire-resistant materials for structures, locational restrictions, vegetation management, and emergency access standards (such as road widths and turn-arounds).

The City of Whitefish has adopted the 2021 International WUI Code and created WUI Subdivision Regulations. These regulations include building materials requirements, defensible space, vegetation management plans, restrictions on building on greater than 30 percent slopes, and access requirements (such as the requirement for at least two access points). The building standards are applied at time of building permit or building construction, but the State of Montana prohibits the city from further enforcement of WUI building code maintenance, including defensible space requirements[6]. These preemptions do not appear to apply to the WUI subdivision regulations. In 2022, the City of Whitefish updated its landscaping regulations to include integration of fire-resistant plants and fire adapted landscaping techniques into landscape plans. Single family residences and duplexes are exempted from the landscape regulations.

Commented [DL7]: The "plan" should include working with the state to change this.

Fire Service

The Whitefish Fire Department provides fire service to the entire planning boundary with the exception of Big Mountain Fire District, which provides service to Whitefish Mountain Resort and its immediate communities. Outside of the planning boundary, Whitefish Fire Department coordinates with the Flathead Fire Service Area and the Whitefish Fire Service Area for primary fire service based on availability and fire location (see Fire Districts Map). Whitefish Fire Department has noted there is a need for a northern fire station in the vicinity of East Lakeshore Drive and Big Mountain Road to decrease response time. It is possible there are areas in the planning boundary in which there is not sufficient water pressure to maintain fire flow capacities to comply with the Uniform Fire Code. (Please refer to the Public Facilities Element for a full description of fire service capabilities.)

Commented [DL8]: The plan should include tasks to identify these areas and steps to mitigate or resolve issues.

Evacuation Routes

If there is an emergency event necessitating evacuation, there are at least 5 different through-roads which provide public egress out of the city (see Fire Evacuation Routes Map). South of the railroad tracks, evacuation is possible by US Highway 93 South, Karrow Avenue, US Highway 93 West, or East 2nd Street which crosses the railroad tracks at grade and connects to East Edgewood Drive. North of the railroad tracks, evacuation is possible through at least three routes – Wisconsin Avenue crossing the grade-

Commented [DL9]: This is more inventory than plan. I know we can't foresee every emergency but we can pick likely ones. We know where the people live (and work and go to school). What will the egress route(s) be? How many vehicles will need to travel it/them? How much time will it take to evacuate a neighborhood? (How will the public be notified of the emergency?) How will additional homes/vehicles impact these routes in the future? E.g., given a one hour evacuation warning for an incoming fire, could Wisconsin handle all the vehicles traveling south from the head of the lake, Big Mountain, Iron Horse, Reservoir Rd, etc. (as well as accommodating emergency vehicles heading to the fire? How will added home development impact these estimates (including homes built outside the city limits but requiring roads within the city limits to evacuate)? Where do vehicles go when they get south of the tracks? Use this information to look at traffic needs now and in the future. Work with the county to limit subdivisions in areas where the only egress is through Whitefish and advocate building new roads and improving the ones we have to accommodate growth in the city and county. Work with the State to improve (widen) Wisconsin Ave. (if possible) Transportation (including outside of emergencies) needs to be a priority for the city. It is disappointing there are still only two ways to travel north and south of the railroad tracks within the city and one of those is at grade. If the city has a transportation plan that addresses these issues, cite it in the vision document.

[6] Section 24-301-181 of the Administrative Rules of Montana

separated viaduct (bridge) and leaving to the south, by traveling east out of the city along East Edgewood Drive, or by leaving at the north side of Whitefish Lake using Lower and Upper Whitefish Roads (unpaved forest roads). Wisconsin Avenue / East Lakeshore Drive is the only continuous road north of the viaduct which provides direct egress out of the city at the northernmost city limits (although there are some shorter alternate roads parallelling Wisconsin Avenue for some distance, but they begin and end at Wisconsin Avenue.) In the event of evacuation events not related to trains, emergency responders can communicate with BNSF to ensure trains do not impede at grade-accesses. There are ongoing communications with BNSF regarding the possibility of another grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street. Any route in the city can be directed to be one-way as necessary.

There is a neighborhood (Birch Point) along the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake with only one vehicular access in and out. This access requires crossing the railroad tracks and is occasionally blocked by trains. In the event a train is disabled and blocking this access, there is no other vehicular access, but there is a pedestrian method of egress via the Skye Park Bridge across Whitefish River to Edgewood Place (as well the possibility of escape by boat). There have been discussions regarding the possibility of alternative accesses to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish.

Commented [DL10]: The Whitefish Lake State Park neighborhood has only one vehicular access point with no official pedestrian egress. The city needs to work with BNSF to get an easement and complete the proposed Whitefish trail between the end of Birch Point Dr. and West Lakeshore Dr. that will accommodate, at least, a UTV/side-by-side. Currently, emergency response to any properties east of the tracks via State Park Rd. must be by boat if a train is blocking the crossing.

Big Mountain Fire District has reported Big Mountain Road is the only feasible access in or out of the resort and the Big Mountain community. Although Haskill Creek Road does provide secondary access from Whitefish Mountain Resort to East Edgewood Drive, it is Big Mountain Fire District's opinion this is not a reliable secondary route for emergency evacuation. According to the District, this route is a difficult unpaved forest road that requires high clearance vehicles and familiarity with the surroundings. Also, Haskill Creek Road is on the same southern side of the mountain as Big Mountain Road and travels through fire-prone chimneys and Haskill Basin. As such, a fire obstructing Big Mountain Road would likely threaten Haskill Creek Road and Haskill Basin. Big Mountain Fire District has worked extensively with the resort and its communities on an emergency plan which includes evacuating to parking lots at the resort as safe zones. The District has mentioned notifications and communications are a shortcoming in their evacuation plans, due primarily to intermittent and inadequate cellular service.

Commented [DL11]: In its current condition.

Commented [DL12]: This should be considered the option of last resort. There are three parking lots ~400ft-500ft wide at their narrowest. Firefighter safety zone guidelines (for radiant heat only) are 4 times the flame length and 50ft flame lengths are not unusual in crown fires, so a safety zone must be at least 200ft from a approaching fire. Mix in embers and, likely, burning vehicles and it is clear the option to shelter in the parking lots as a fire passes over is not desirable. In all cases, focus on a plan that allows fast notification and evacuation of the most people at the earliest opportunity.

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) passed by Congress in 2003 gives communities who have prepared a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) the ability to influence where and how federal agencies implement forest management practices to reduce wildfire hazards. Communities with CWPPs are given priority for funding wildfire mitigation projects that are undertaken as outlined in the CWPP. A Community Wildfire

Protection Plan (CWPP) typically addresses wildfire response, community preparedness, firefighting capability, and identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel treatments.

The City of Whitefish last adopted a community wildfire protection plan in 2009. This Plan identifies areas of high priority for fire fuel mitigation based on a 1993 risk assessment conducted by the Department of Natural Resources (DNRC). It also identifies measures homeowners can do to reduce the risk of losing homes to wildfire. The CWPP mentions many subdivisions and neighborhoods had been built since the 1993 risk assessment and recommends a new assessment. There has not been an updated assessment as of the time of adoption of this community plan.

Commented [DL13]: An updated plan is needed now and updates should continue every 5 to 10 years based on community growth.

Flathead County has a CWPP which was adopted in 2021. This CWPP divides the county into 6 different fire areas. In each area it gives very general information, mitigation strategies and discusses some of the more at-risk elements. It does not assess risk nor have specific study areas regarding Whitefish. The DNRC presently performs fire mitigation as is outlined by this CWPP. DNRC has reported there are discussions to create a map indicating areas which have been mitigated or are planned for mitigation.

Commented [DL14]: The city should plan to work with the county, FS, DNRC, Stoltze, private landowners, etc. to build a system of record for location, date and type of hazard treatments linked to a GIS. Consider contracting to acquire airborne lidar data to map forest/vegetation cover and structure in important areas. These data are getting cheaper to acquire and are easily repeatable for mapping accomplishments and identifying areas that need to be retreated.

Fire Adapted and Firewise Communities

Fire Adapted Community is a term for a general framework for community wildfire preparedness and resilience. This framework typically involves individuals, neighborhoods, jurisdictions and organizations collaboratively educating, sharing information, and working together to reduce and mitigate fire risk and impacts. Fire Adapted Communities rely on an assortment of tools, programs and strategies. One local organization cooperating to create fire adapted communities is *Firesafe Flathead.* The Whitefish Fire Department is a regular participant in Firesafe Flathead.

A common strategy of fire adapted community frameworks is encouraging and assisting with the organization of Firewise Communities. "Firewise" is a trademarked designation given by the National Fire Protection Association for individual neighborhoods or communities meeting minimum guidelines or best practices for wildfire preparation. Being designated as a Firewise Community is voluntary but includes benefits such as access to grants and funding, the possibility of fire insurance reductions, and greatly reduced risk for homes or neighborhoods being lost to wildfire.

The Big Mountain Fire District has coordinated extensively with Whitefish Mountain Resort, Homeowners Associations and individual property owners to become a Fire Adapted Community and to obtain Firewise Community Designation. The community engages in information sharing, HOA and citizen training, education, and evacuation drills. Many of its individual homeowner's associations work together and have adopted Firewise standards into their covenants. Another example of a Firewise community is the Elkhorn community, which is located approximately 3 miles west of Whitefish (not within

the planning boundary). Elkhorn adopted their own CWPP in 2004. Strategies of this CWPP include cooperating with the forest service and DNRC for fuel mitigation projects, upgraded signage, creation of fuel breaks, designation of firefighter "safe zones" and continuing homeowner education.

The city should provide focused efforts around public safety, risk prevention and early intervention for wildfires. Working with the community, the city should strive to prepare all segments of the community for such disruptions by encouraging community and individual preparedness through risk awareness. The city should prepare for, respond to and manage wildfire hazards by implementing additional wildland-urban interface regulations and developing, updating and implementing multi-hazard mitigation programs and plans.

Commented [DL15]: Include "messaging" for homeowners and associations etc. and "enforcement as the state allows".

FLOODPLAINS

Introduction

A floodplain is an often flat area of land adjacent to a lake, river or stream that periodically experiences flooding. These areas provide significant environmental benefits by providing soil for agriculture, offering habitat for various wildlife species, and acting as natural buffers by absorbing excess water, filtering pollutants and reducing the impact of floods downstream. Floodplains, while vital to ecosystems, also come with inherent downsides. These include potentially significant property damage, high insurance costs for properties in proximity to them, loss of crops, and displacement of communities (see the floodplain schematic).

Human activities such as development further exacerbate the risks of flooding and environmental degradation. Constructing buildings, roads and other impervious surfaces in floodplains prevents water from being absorbed into the ground and increases runoff. Development and loss of floodplains reduces the natural buffering that absorbs excess water, making these areas more susceptible to flooding. Development in or near floodplains destroys critical habitat. It also increases the potential for sediment or contaminants being introduced into water bodies.

As climate change leads to more frequent and intense weather events[7], the hazards associated with floodplains are likely to increase, making it crucial to implement effective flood management and mitigation strategies. Proper planning and sustainable

[7] According to Tamsin Edwards in *"What happens at 1.5, 2 and 4°C of global warming?"* from Greta Thunberg's 2024 *The Climate Book*, the changes our planet will experience will increase with each half a degree of heating. Heavy rain events will be 50% more likely if we reach 1.5°C/ 2.7°F warmer than pre-industrial levels, 70% more likely at 2°C/ 3.6°F, and 3 times more likely at 4°C/ 7.2°F.

development practices are essential to minimize the adverse impacts of living and working in floodplain areas.

Whitefish Flood Prone Areas

Several areas in the Whitefish planning area lay within areas prone to flooding, including Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, Cow Creek, Lazy Creek, Swift Creek, and Haskill Creek. Typically, the most severe flooding occurs in the spring or early summer months because of snowmelt and/or rainfall runoff. On rare occasions, ice jams cause overbank flooding. All the above listed watersheds have been mapped to locate flood prone areas.

The National Flood Insurance Program

The City of Whitefish participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), enacted by the Federal Government in 1968. Participation in the NFIP is based on an agreement between local communities and the federal government. If a community adopts and enforces a local floodplain management ordinance to reduce future flood risks to new construction in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), the federal government makes flood insurance available within the community as financial protection against flood losses. With assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Flood Insurance Studies (FIS) were completed which mapped out base flood elevations for flood prone areas in 1978, later updated in 2007 and 2015. Scientists and engineers use statistical analysis of streamflow data to determine the likelihood and extent of flood areas based on elevations.

The 100-Year Flood

A 100-year flood, which is considered a base flood, theoretically has a 1% chance of flooding in any given year. Areas within that 100-year base flood elevation have special restrictions on development found in Title 14, Flood Control, of the city code of ordinances. Floodplains are split into two categories:

1. The Floodway is the flood area most effective in carrying flow and where water depths and velocities are greatest.

2. The flood fringe is the portions of the floodplain outside of the floodway.

Development is not permitted in the floodway but can be allowed in the flood fringe with a floodplain permit and an engineer's "no-rise" certificate. The no-rise certificate must demonstrate that any fill or structures added will not cause the floodplain to unduly affect adjacent properties by raising the base flood elevation. Typically, any residential structure in the flood fringe must have its lowest floor elevated at least two feet above the 100-year

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flood elevation, and the building must be designed to withstand hydrostatic pressure from floods.

The Whitefish River originates at the south end of Whitefish Lake and flows 24 miles before joining the Stillwater River near Kalispell. The annual precipitation of the watershed is 37 inches per year. The largest flood on record was June of 1974, when it had a flow of 1580 cubic feet/second with a 3.33 percent flood event. Floods on the Whitefish River, which is slow moving, often last for several weeks as it rises and recedes gradually due to the effects of Whitefish Lake. Other recorded floods on the Whitefish River occurred in 1932, 1948, 1950, and 1964.

Whitefish Lake, which is fed from Swift Creek at the north end, has a surface area of approximately five square miles and a shoreline length of approximately 15 miles. The normal Whitefish Lake water level elevation (pool level) is considered 2,996.4 feet, with a base flood elevation of 3004 feet[8]. The historic peak elevation occurred in 1974, when the pool was at 3003.4 feet.

Whitefish's floodplain regulations were last updated in 2015. The State of Montana DNRC established new model regulations in 2022. Whitefish's floodplain regulations are not consistent with the most recent State of Montana Model Floodplain Regulations and will require a revision of the whole chapter with a review by DRNC prior to adoption by the City Council.

The Community Rating System

The Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages community floodplain management practices that go above and beyond the minimum requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program. In participating CRS communities, flood insurance premium rates are discounted to reflect the reduced flood risk from the community's efforts to reducing and avoiding flood damage to insurable property, strengthening and supporting the insurance aspects of the program, and fostering better floodplain management. It is a tiered program based on credit points and calculations for things like extra public outreach, mapping and regulations, flood damage reduction, and warning and response. Whitefish does not presently participate in the CRS system, but if it did, flood insurance rates for residents could be reduced.

Several past city infrastructure projects such as the West 6th Street reconstruction and the East 2nd Street reconstruction have altered floodplains due to changes in drainage, stormwater conveyances, or resizing of culverts for creeks. While the floodplain in those areas likely changed, no changes were made to the maps, which affected neighboring

[8]Base Flood Elevation (BFE) is a term used in floodplain management and refers to the computed elevation to which floodwater is anticipated to rise during a base flood. A base flood is often described as having a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year, also known as the "100-year flood."

properties within a 100-year floodplain designation that might have been removed by a revision to the mapping. That put the burden on the property owners to pay for map amendments. For future infrastructure projects in or near floodplains, it is recommended that the floodplain mapping revisions be rolled into the contract with the engineering firm selected.

Several recent private projects added fill or docks in the Whitefish River with approval from the Flathead Conservation District without approval or necessary floodplain and water quality permits from the City of Whitefish. While the FCD was contacted and verbal agreements made to better communicate, it should be an objective going forward to have better coordination and information sharing between the two agencies.

HIGH GROUNDWATER

Most areas of Whitefish are characterized by high seasonal groundwater. This groundwater can interfere with construction of infrastructure, homes and other structures. High groundwater, also known as shallow depth to groundwater, is more of a development constraint than a hazard, although it can cause flood damage in high water years.

In 2008, the City Council adopted the Water Quality Protection regulations in part to address issues with high groundwater. With the adoption of these regulations, standards for monitoring high groundwater were established along with a map indicating areas with the potential for high groundwater.

Currently the City's Engineering Standards require all properties proposed for development located in areas of potential shallow groundwater to monitor groundwater during the seasonal high groundwater conditions – typically March 15th through June 30th. This timeframe coincides with the Spring snow melt and seasonally higher precipitation coupled with the low transmissivity of the lacustrine soils. This information is then used to develop plans for infrastructure installation. Concurrent with this standard, both the engineering standards and the subdivision regulations require a note on the face of the plat indicating when groundwater is at depths of 6-feet or less and recommending no crawl spaces or basements be installed.

SEISMIC ACTIVITY

Montana is in earthquake country, especially areas around Yellowstone National Park. The Flathead Valley is located in a north-northwest trending earthquake zone known as the Intermountain Seismic Belt. Within Flathead Valley there are several fault lines. In addition to many small earthquakes, there have been two significant earthquakes in the Valley, one in 1945 (a 5.5 quake west of Flathead Lake) and in 1952 (a 5.7 quake in the Swan Range). The largest quake in Montana history was magnitude 7.3 near West Yellowstone in 1959. The Whitefish area is in a seismic zone and the International

Building Codes provide for specific measures to be taken for building structures in each designated zone including, but not limited to seismic strapping, foundation anchorage and foundation steel reinforcement.

STEEP SLOPES

Whitefish is characterized by steep mountainous terrain. This geography is highly desirable for building homes due to the scenic views, forested areas, privacy, surrounding wildlife, cooler summertime temperatures and accessibility to outdoor recreation. As already mentioned, some ~~of the most desirable~~ locations ~~to live~~ in Whitefish are ~~also some of the most~~ susceptible locations to hazards. Although wildfire is one significant risk in these environments, building on steep slopes also comes with a myriad of other risks and issues. Steep slopes are prone to erosion, landslides and avalanches. Construction on steep slopes often requires expensive and complex foundation designs and can require additional engineering for drainage. Buildings on steep slopes can increase access difficulty for emergency responses and driveway maintenance. These constraints tend to increase exponentially after slopes are greater than 30 percent. Accordingly, many local building and zoning regulations restrict construction beyond this threshold. The City of Whitefish requires additional geotechnical reports for any properties within a subdivision with slopes greater than 10 percent. The City of Whitefish's Subdivision Design Standards discourage (but allow) building residential on greater than 30 percent unless the hazard is eliminated or overcome by approved design or construction methods The City of Whitefish's Subdivision WUI standards prohibit building on greater than 30 percent slopes.

DRAFT

HAZARDS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Wildfire

Goal

1. Minimize wildfire risk to the Whitefish community, infrastructure, and amenities.

   Objectives

   a. Continue active participation in Firesafe Flathead.

   b. Coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to complete an updated community fire risk assessment.

   c. Prepare an updated community wildfire protection plan. The plan should consider a delineation of the Wildland Urban Interface, high risk areas, wildfire response, community preparedness, firefighting capability, feasible evacuation routes, how emergency notification would occur and areas for most effective hazardous fuel treatments.

   d. Consider restrictions on future subdivision development in areas identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan as having “very high” wildfire hazard to protect life and property.

   e. Review and update requirements for Wildfire Defensible Space standards in Subdivision regulations.

   f. Evaluate and consider Firewise construction standards, mitigation of fire hazards, reduction of fuel loads, and adherence to defensible space requirements in City zoning regulations to supplement gaps in state building code WUI standards.

   g. Compile a list of active local homeowner’s associations and neighborhood associations and encourage their working together to become fire adapted or Firewise communities.

   h. Promote and educate wildfire prevention and preparedness, such as producing handouts to be included with building permits, or plat notes for properties in high-risk areas with “buyer beware” notices and Firewise principles outlined.

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i. Work with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the US Forest Service, Firesafe Flathead, Stoltze Land and Lumber Company, homeowner's associations, fire districts and individual property owners to compile a map of mitigated areas and areas proposed for future mitigation. Include a system of record for location, date and type of hazard treatments/mitigation linked to a GIS.

j. Support commercial harvest and thinning of timber on public and private lands to reduce wildfire risks.

Goal

2. Assess or upgrade infrastructure to increase safety during fire events.

Objectives:

a. Pursue opportunities for a grade-separated railroad crossing at East 2nd Street.

b. Pursue opportunities for alternative accesses into Birch Point and State Park Rd neighborhoods and across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish.

~~Assess existing and potential evacuation routes, particularly those on unpaved forest roads, to determine improvements or strategies that could improve egress and provide directional information.~~

c. Encourage the city, county and State to add new and/or improve existing roads to improve traffic flow.

~~c.~~ Encourage and engage in studies to simulate likely emergency scenarios and develop evacuation plans that estimate vehicle count and travel time.

d. Coordinate with utility providers such as Flathead Electric to seek funding opportunities to identify and underground high risk utility lines.

Emergency Notification

a. In conjunction with the county, develop a community wide notification system to communicate evacuation notifications including preferred routes to safety to the public (including visitors).

Floodplains

Goal:

1. Continue to fulfill the city's commitment to the National Flood Insurance Program.

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Objectives:

a. Periodically update floodplain regulations to be consistent with State model ordinance.

b. Work toward participation in the Community Rating System Program with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reduce insurance rates for city residents.

c. Ensure any future city road reconstruction projects that affect floodplains or culverts provide revised floodplain mapping analysis and updated maps.

d. Seek better coordination on projects with the Flathead Conservation District on projects near rivers and streams that require floodplain permits.

Shallow Groundwater

Goal:

1. Continue to require groundwater monitoring in areas with known or suspected high groundwater.

    Objectives:

    a. Continue to support proper construction methods in areas with the potential for high groundwater.

    b. Continue to require plat notes regarding high groundwater.

    c. As groundwater data is submitted to the city, catalogue this information for further refinement of areas with high groundwater.

DRAFT

latimes.com

https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-01-11/fire-experts-asses-los-angeles-blazes-amid-changing-times

Inconvenient truths about the fires burning in Los Angeles from two fire experts

By Thomas Curwen
Staff Writer
Jan. 11th, 2025

Not quite six years ago, wildfire expert Jack Cohen, who lives in Missoula, Mont., visited Pacific Palisades to instruct firefighters and property owners on how to protect homes against wildfires.

Three days of training, including a tour of the community, left Cohen hopeful, but the feeling faded when it became clear that his lessons were not going to be fully implemented. This week's tragedy has left him with a deep sadness.

From his home outside Phoenix, fire historian Stephen Pyne sees history unfolding in this week's destruction in Los Angeles.

"It may be the fire equivalent of a Category 5 hurricane," said Pyne, a professor emeritus at Arizona State University.

With 11 dead, more than 12,000 structures destroyed or damaged and 150,000 residents under evacuation order, the siege has the potential of being the costliest wildfire disaster in American history, according to UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain.

Respected by fire agencies across the country, Cohen and Pyne have found their straight-talk admonitions often disregarded or dismissed. Sensitive to losses and suffering, both said they are motivated by the belief that magnitude of destruction this week in Los Angeles and Altadena is not a foregone conclusion.

"I'm compelled to continue pursuing this issue because it is so solvable if we determine to do it," Cohen said.

The two experts spoke to The Times in 2017 when wildfires ravaged Northern California and again this week amid the unfolding calamity. They have long argued that our understanding and relationship to fire has to change if conflagrations are to be prevented.

While Pyne focuses on our cultural relationship with fire, Cohen looks at fire from a scientific perspective. Both suggest that we have more control over fire disasters than we think, and both begin by redefining the problem.

Forget "wildland-urban interface"

When catastrophic fires occur, experts often blame the so-called wildland-urban interface, the vulnerable region on the perimeter of cities and suburbs where an abundance of vegetation in rugged terrain is susceptible to burning.

Yet the fire disasters that we're seeing today are less wildland fires than urban fires, Cohen said. Shifting this understanding could lead to more effective prevention strategies.

"The assumption is continually made that it's the big flames" that cause widespread community destruction, he said, "and yet the wildfire actually only initiates community ignitions largely with lofted burning embers."

Experts attribute widespread devastation to wind-driven embers igniting spot fires two to three miles ahead of the established fire. Maps of the Eaton fire show seemingly random ignitions across Altadena.

"When you study the destruction in Pacific Palisades and Altadena, note what didn't burn — unconsumed tree canopies adjacent to totally destroyed homes," he said. "The sequence of destruction is commonly assumed to occur in some kind of organized spreading flame front — a tsunami of super-heated gases — but it doesn't happen that way.

A home is fully engulfed in flames the Eaton fire in Altadena on Wednesday.

“In high-density development, scattered burning homes spread to their neighbors and so on. Ignitions downwind and across streets are typically from showers of burning embers from burning structures.”

This fundamental misunderstanding has likewise led to a misunderstanding of prevention. No longer is it a matter of preventing wildfires but instead preventing points of ignition within communities by employing “home-hardening” strategies — proper landscaping, fire-resistant siding — and enjoining neighbors in collective efforts such as brush clearing.

“If we think it’s wildfire, then we tend to maintain wildfire as the principal problem — with wildfire control as the solution,” Cohen said. “However, there is no evidence to suggest wildfire control is a reliable approach during the extreme wildfire conditions when community disasters occur.”

Remember Chicago

In the aftermath of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 — 17,000 structures destroyed and more than 100,000 residents left homeless — city planners and local governments began to focus on fire protection engineering as a way of keeping cities safe.

“The idea was not to catch the arsonist or the mythical cow that kicked over the lantern in Chicago,” Cohen said. “Experts began to consider the role that our buildings played in creating the problem.”

As a result, Pyne said, “cities began to harden themselves against these terrible conflagrations and were successful. Arguably the last major urban fire in the U.S. was San Francisco in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake.”

Yet those defenses lapsed as the cities grew. Building codes failed to address the requirements of specific environments, and infrastructure was laid out without attending to potential hazard.

Pyne, who has written more than 30 books on the cultural and social effects of wildland and rural fires around the world, argues that many of the most disastrous fires of the last 30 years have been urban fires.

The belief was that urban fires no longer exist, but they’ve come back. “It’s like watching polio return,” he said. “It’s happening repeatedly.”

While the Bel-Air fire in 1961, which destroyed 484 homes, and the Mandeville Canyon fire in 1978, which destroyed 230 homes, are often cited for the scale of their destruction, the 1991 Tunnel fire in the Oakland and Berkeley Hills marked the start of the modern era of urban fires, destroying 2,843 homes.

More recently, fires devastated Gatlinburg, Tenn., in 2016, the towns of Superior and Louisville in Colorado in 2021 and Lahaina, Hawaii, two years ago.

“It’s not just a California quirk,” Pyne said. “California, I think, gets there first in exaggerated forms, but this is a national issue. And, in fact, it’s becoming an international issue.”

Think beyond popular wisdom

Southern California has always been subject to drought and Santa Ana winds, primary factors for today’s fires. And while climate change is increasing their frequency and severity, Pyne argues that a society dependent on fossil fuels plays a significant role as well.

“A fossil-fuel society remakes landscapes as well by affecting how humans organize agriculture, urban development, the placement of roads and power lines,” he said.

Popular wisdom, Pyne said, holds that “fire is something that happens once in a while. It’s seasonal. It’s nothing we really have to invest in systematically. It’s just an emergency that we need to be prepared for and then respond to.”

“I think we’re beyond that,” he said.

While most everyone is aware of fire, said Pyne, few think of it as a year-round phenomenon. “We need to reorganize our lives to this fact,” he said. “It’s more than just having a go-bag, but instead being aware that this is the world today, and these flare-ups are just part of something much bigger.”

For Cohen, shifting the conversation away from climate change is important because it gives us more control over our fire environment and will ultimately make us less vulnerable to these disasters.

“We don’t have to solve climate change in order to solve our community wildfire risk problem,” he said.

Be realistic

The most uncomfortable truth of the last four days has been how quickly firefighting efforts were overwhelmed and outmatched by the extreme fire conditions, Cohen said. L.A. County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone acknowledged there was simply not enough manpower for this emergency.

But, Cohen said, the problem extends beyond staffing.

“We have fire departments that are continually telling us that they’re going to protect us,” he said, “when they can’t during the extreme wildfire conditions. It’s time to recognize the reality and start asking questions about how it is that we’re failing to prevent this disaster.”

Cohen calls it a sense of entitlement that we will be protected, a feeling that is reinforced by fire protection agencies, even when it’s unrealistic.

The National Fire Prevention Assn., a national nonprofit that provides standards for fire suppression operations, calls for a minimum of three engines or 15 firefighters for a single-residence fire, a number that is impossible to attain when fighting a fire on the scale of the Palisades or Eaton fires.

“We’re not recognizing, analyzing, questioning how we’re failing,” Cohen said. “We just think we need more airplanes and more helicopters flying 24 hours a day.”

More CL-415 super-scoopers or Firehawk helicopters will not help when water is being dropped into 60 mph wind gusts.

“We don’t necessarily need a trillion-dollar program and a fire czar to get control of the fire problem,” Pyne said. “What we need are a thousand things that tweak the environment in favorable ways such that we can prevent these eruptions.”

For example, municipal and fire prevention agencies must give property owners advance — and continual — warnings to clear dead vegetation and to wet dry brush within 10 feet of the house with periodic, prolonged sprinklings.

“We’ve always had fire as a companion, and it’s been our best friend,” Pyne said. And now, because we’re not minding that relationship, it’s become our worst enemy.”

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 3:55 PM
To: kellie.kulsethbarker@mt.gov
Cc: Cole Hadley
Subject: FW: 2045 hazards

Hi Kellie, I answered your questions as best as I could, but I might need some additional help.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 3:55 PM
To: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: 2045 hazards

Hey Cole, responses below in red.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 2:07 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: 2045 hazards

Alan,

I had a nmeeting with some folks from the DNRC last week and we discussed some of the Hazard secetion and the forworded email from Kallie was a result of those concerns.

CHIEF COLE HADLEY
WHITEFISH FIRE DEPARTMENT
275 FLATHEAD AVE
P.O. BOX 158
WHITEFISH, MT 59937
(406) 863-2491 - DIRECT
(406) 863-2499 - FAX
CHADLEY@CITYOFWHITEFISH.ORG

From: Kulseth Barker, Kellie <Kellie.KulsethBarker@mt.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 1:44 PM
To: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Re: Facebook share

Sure...
These were my biggest take aways.

Notes on WF Hazards

- Page 2 – no citation for stats attributing destroyed homes to embers.

Added a footnote with reference to National Fire Protection Association

- Page 3 – because single family residences and duplexes are exempted from landscape regulations there is a large aspect of homeowners who will remain at risk without city council placing suggestions or recommendations within this plan.

Understood. The council has been clear they do not want to regulate SFR.

- Page 4 – evacuation routes – specific reasons why Haskill creek road is not an option as a route

This is discussed on Page 4, paragraph 2. Is there something more you are looking for?

  - There needs to be an identified source to fund maintenance of this road system to the standard of an evacuation route.

I understand, but this level of specificity would not be determined with a community plan.

Page 5 – Grouse Mountain HOA is not a Firewise Community.

Weird. The Firewise Site initially showed it was. Perhaps it was removed? I will update to remove this statement.

Listing some recommendations or sources would be helpful and lastly there is confusion in referencing 'Firewise' as a concept versus the trademarked approach to community planning. This distinction should be noted or changed to fire adapted.

I don't understand this statement. Page 5, paragraph 1 and 2 say:

Fire Adapted Community is a term for a general framework for community wildfire preparedness and resilience. This framework typically involves individuals, neighborhoods, jurisdictions and organizations collaboratively educating, sharing information, and working together to reduce and mitigate fire risk and impacts. Fire Adapted Communities rely on an assortment of tools, programs and strategies. One local organization cooperating to create fire adapted communities is Firesafe Flathead. The Whitefish Fire Department is a regular participant in Firesafe Flathead.

A common strategy of fire adapted community frameworks is encouraging and assisting with the organization of Firewise Communities. "Firewise" is a designation given by the National Fire Protection Association for individual neighborhoods or communities meeting minimum guidelines or best practices for wildfire preparation. Being designated as a Firewise Community is voluntary but includes benefits such as access to grants and funding, the possibility of fire insurance reductions, and greatly reduced risk for homes or neighborhoods being lost to wildfire.

Did I miss something?

Hope that helps,
Kellie

Kellie Kulseth | Fire Adapted Communities Coordinator

Kalispell Unit

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

655 Timberwolf Parkway Suite 2

Kalispell, MT 59901

DESK: 406-751-2270 **MOBILE:** 605-641-4261 **EMAIL**: kellie.kulsethbarker@mt.gov

Website | **Facebook** | **X (Twitter)** | **Instagram**

How did we do? Let us know here: Feedback Survey

From: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 11:50 AM
To: Kulseth Barker, Kellie <Kellie.KulsethBarker@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Facebook share

Can you send me you notes on the City's Vision Whitefish 2045 hazards section we talked about at our meeting please.

CHIEF COLE HADLEY
WHITEFISH FIRE DEPARTMENT
275 FLATHEAD AVE
P.O. BOX 158
WHITEFISH, MT 59937
(406) 863-2491 - DIRECT
(406) 863-2499 - FAX
CHADLEY@CITYOFWHITEFISH.ORG

From: Kulseth Barker, Kellie <Kellie.KulsethBarker@mt.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 9:54 AM
To: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Re: Facebook share

Yes on the facebook page… here is the link.
(12) Burning Issues: Unpacking the Impact of Wildfires on Our Communities | Facebook [facebook.com]

Kellie Kulseth | Fire Adapted Communities Coordinator

Kalispell Unit

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

655 Timberwolf Parkway Suite 2

Kalispell, MT 59901

DESK: 406-751-2270 **MOBILE:** 605-641-4261 **EMAIL:** kellie.kulsethbarker@mt.gov

Website | **Facebook** [facebook.com] [facebook.com]| [twitter.com]**X** [twitter.com]**(T** [twitter.com]**witter** [twitter.com]) | **Instagram** [instagram.com]

How did we do? Let us know here: [forms.office.com]**Feedback Survey** [forms.office.com]

From: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 9:52 AM
To: Kulseth Barker, Kellie <Kellie.KulsethBarker@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Facebook share

Where can I find it? Social media?

CHIEF COLE HADLEY
WHITEFISH FIRE DEPARTMENT
275 FLATHEAD AVE
P.O. BOX 158
WHITEFISH, MT 59937
(406) 863-2491 - DIRECT
(406) 863-2499 - FAX
CHADLEY@CITYOFWHITEFISH.ORG

From: Kulseth Barker, Kellie <Kellie.KulsethBarker@mt.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 9:51 AM
To: Cole Hadley <chadley@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Facebook share

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hey Cole…

FireSafe just posted an event about our upcoming lecture on thursday. Would you be willing to share it to the whitefish fire page as well?

Thanks
Kellie

Kellie Kulseth | Fire Adapted Communities Coordinator

Kalispell Unit

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

655 Timberwolf Parkway Suite 2

Kalispell, MT 59901

DESK: 406-751-2270 **MOBILE:** 605-641-4261 **EMAIL**: kellie.kulsethbarker@mt.gov

Website | **Facebook [facebook.com]** [facebook.com]| [twitter.com]**X [twitter.com](T [twitter.com]witter [twitter.com])** | **Instagram [instagram.com]**

How did we do? Let us know here: [forms.office.com]Feedback Survey [forms.office.com]

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2025 9:32 AM
To: Brad Bulkley
Subject: RE: CWPP Need to be a Priority

Good morning, Brad.

The growth policy (community plan, master plan, comprehensive plan, etc) is the overarching document that drives all other city documents. It is a policy document and sets the vision for how the city sees itself and how it wants to be some time in the future. Based on the vision and the goals of the growth policy, subsequent documents, regulations, capital improvement plans and work programs are developed. We have a statutory deadline of May 2026 to have this Plan adopted, so we have to keep moving it forward.

In the context of this email, Vision Whitefish 2045 gives the background of the fire scenario, discusses the opportunities and challenges, and proposes a community wildfire protection plan (CWPP) be developed. As the draft currently reads, it recommends what should be considered as part of the CWPP. This draft is mostly complete and has begun department view. I am unsure when it will come in front of the public and community development board as our schedule has recently been deviated from several times by other direction from the Board.

At the same time as Vision Whitefish 2045 is developing, the process for the CWPP has begun as a separate project. It appears we now have the funding. It is my understanding that a consultant with expertise in this field would be hired to draft this plan, with the fire chief and myself involved. My concern is that Vision Whitefish 2045 and the CWPP work in tandem and are complementary with each, regardless of which plan gets completed first. The process of the CWPP will be discussed as the scope of work with the consultant. I do believe this is a high priority for the Council, but the timing and process is under their purview and not mine. Perhaps Dana Smith, the City Manager, could provide more information on the project.

The last risk analysis was completed in 1993. A risk analysis is typically completed before a CWPP. I communicated with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) as I was working on the wildfire section of the plan proposing objectives, and they agreed an updated risk analysis could happen in 2025. The DNRC are experts in forest and fire mitigation and are an appropriate agency for this.

A community plan (growth policy) addresses all the topics of the city – land use, housing, transportation, parks and recreation, economic development, environment, natural resources and hazards, etc. I very much understand the urgency to complete a CWPP. I think it is important to note however, that I have heard many different highest priorities as I have moved forward with visioning. Opinions of the highest priority have varied widely depending on demographics and where people live within the city. For example, affordability, housing and walkability were listed as the greatest concerns for the most residents that participated in visioning. I am not downplaying your issues, but I do want to emphasize I am piloting a ship down a channel with competing interests without hitting an iceberg. We are trying to write a plan that represents all interests equally.

The CWPP is a high priority. The funding is in place and the council has made it a priority. As of yet, the timing and process is not in my purview.

Regards,

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Brad Bulkley <>
Sent: Thursday, January 16, 2025 4:18 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: CWPP Need to be a Priority

Alan:

Thank you for your prompt response to my op-ed. I certainly appreciate the fact you are moving ahead diligently and addressing many of issues I raised. That said, I wish to underscore a sense of urgency and address the process being followed.

It is my belief that the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is currently a higher priority than the Growth Policy. It can even be stated that an updated CWPP should precede the Growth Policy. Or said another way, the Growth Plan should be an outgrowth of the CWPP. If the other way around, our infrastructure could be overwhelmed by what's in the Growth Policy and the CWPP completely ineffective.

If that's not the case, help me understand how these two documents work together to ensure that future development—and the resulting increase in density—doesn't outpace our infrastructure to create the gridlock I described in the op-ed.

It strikes me that the CWPP should, to the extent possible, describe what infrastructure is necessary to ensure the safe—meaning speedy and no gridlock—passage of people in the event of a fire. Otherwise, the CWPP will always be behind, and gridlock and loss of life will be an inevitability.

A catastrophic fire is not waiting for our completion of the Growth Policy. Until a current CWPP is in place, the city is at risk. If the City burns down and countless residents are lost because there were failures in the City's response, what good is a twenty-year vision? The focus should be preservation first, growth second.

You indicate that you give a detailed background on the wildfire risks and constraints to the city and have listed detailed recommendations on how to move forward with a CWPP and what should be considered. But have we considered the following?

- Has a formal risk assessment been conducted? What factors were considered? City population centers and available infrastructure (or, where do most people live and how do they get around)? Meteorological? Responder resources?
- What expertise went into developing the risk assessment?
- What expertise is going into developing the broader CWPP? Does the city have that expertise?
- To what extent will residents be educated on the egress plan for their area/neighborhood? People shouldn't learn about egress after a fire starts.
- What are the warning mechanisms for evacuation/egress? Do you plan to hold a public session specifically for the purpose of reviewing the CWPP?
- Is the city adequately staffed to conduct a fast and effective egress effort? How do we know?

I know these are challenging questions. However, if we answer them now, we can avoid the toughest questions – *What happened? Why didn't you plan better?* – after a catastrophic fire hits Whitefish. We want to help. But first, I want you to feel the sense of urgency my organization and I feel for these issues to be addressed in the short term.

Thank you.

With best regards,

G. Bradford Bulkley

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From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 11:46 AM
To: Brad Bulkley **Subject:** RE: CWPP Need to be a Priority

***CAUTION**: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.*

Brad,

I have completed the draft of the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards (ENRH) Element of Vision Whitefish 2045. This is the first plan element being released for review.

This is a very detailed plan element (40 pages +/-). Accordingly, we are releasing it in three sections. The first section on the environment went to the Community Development Board in December. There was a pause at this work session because the Board expressed concerns that a monthly one-hour work session

was an insufficient time allotment for the level of discussion necessary to review drafts of Vision Whitefish 2045. The Board delayed discussion of the plan and directed staff to offer some alternative solutions at the January work session regarding how more robust Community Development Board discussion and public feedback could occur. I anticipate more discussion on the environment section in February.

The hazards section of the ENRH element has a very robust discussion regarding wildfire. In comparison, the existing growth policy has less than a paragraph. I give a detailed background on the wildfire risks and constraints to the city and have listed detailed recommendations on how to move forward with a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and what should be considered.

Several weeks ago, we received word from the State of Montana Department of Commerce Community Technical Assistance Program that they were going to assist in the preparation of a CWPP and we had been given $25,000 toward this goal. Our City Manager announced this recently at a City Council meeting. As it looks, we might be developing Vision Whitefish 2045 and the CWPP concurrently.

If you have any questions about where we are with this process contact me or David directly.

Sincerely,

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Brad Bulkley **Sent:** Tuesday, January 14, 2025 10:17 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: CWPP Need to be a Priority

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Alan:

I want you to be one of the first to see this piece.

We respectfully call your attention to the need for a current CWPP as we continue to add density to our community. Additionally, it should be folded into the drafting of the new Growth Policy. The answers we have heard from some of "it all depends on the emergency" is not rationale and will result in a catastrophe. In Whitefish, wildfire is not a matter of "if" but "when".

Don't let Whitefish become Pacific Palisades | Daily Inter Lake

Thank you what you do.

With best regards,

G. Bradford Bulkley

Co-Founder and President • O 214.692.5476 M 214.675.9964

This e-mail may contain confidential and privileged information and is for the sole use of the intended recipient. Any review or distribution by others is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender and delete all copies.

G. Bradford Bulkley

This e-mail may contain confidential and privileged information and is for the sole use of the intended recipient. Any review or distribution by others is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender and delete all copies.

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 11:46 AM
To: Brad Bulkley <bbulkley@bulkleycapital.com>
Subject: RE: CWPP Need to be a Priority

***CAUTION**: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.*

Brad,

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Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish

Public Comment for Inclusion in Vision Whitefish 2045

Flathead Families for Responsible Growth (FFRG) has compiled a list of key issues, topics, and suggestions for consideration in the upcoming section Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element of Vision Whitefish 2045. Our comments focus on wildfire preparedness, community safety, infrastructure resilience and the growing impact of climate change on wildfire risks, especially in the Whitefish area. Below are the primary concerns and recommendations:

Main Issues:

1. **Outdated Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP):**

- The CWPP has not been updated since 2009. This document is critical to wildfire preparedness and needs to reflect current risks, mitigation efforts, and community development trends.

2. **Inadequate Egress for Emergency Evacuation:**

- Whitefish faces a significant challenge with insufficient egress routes, lack of established evacuation zones and the evaluation of potential safety zones, especially for the north side of town. This could severely hamper evacuation efforts during a wildfire emergency.

3. **Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Building Standards:**

- The entire city of Whitefish is located within the WUI, but current building codes lack sufficient focus on fire-wise construction.
- To protect the community, these codes must be updated to require fire-wise practices, such as using fire-resistant materials and implementing landscaping designs that minimize fire hazards. Creating fire-wise communities and encouraging existing neighborhoods to be more fire-adapted is essential to ensuring the long-term safety and resilience of Whitefish.

4. **Climate Change and Its Impact on Wildfire Risk:**

- Climate change is increasingly contributing to longer, more intense fire seasons, with drier conditions and higher temperatures exacerbating wildfire risks. The Growth Policy must incorporate climate adaptation strategies, including fire mitigation, to address these accelerating threats. Planning for hotter, drier summers, unpredictable fire behavior, and longer fire seasons must be prioritized to protect the community.

Main Topics to Address:

1. **WUI and Its Implications for Whitefish:**

- A detailed analysis of what it means for Whitefish to be entirely within the WUI and how this should inform planning and development.

2. **Building a Fire-Wise and Fire-Adapted Community:**

- Promote fire-adapted and fire-wise construction and retrofitting of existing buildings. This includes the use of fire-resistant materials and landscaping strategies that reduce fire risk in the event of a wildfire. Additionally, enforce and review building setbacks, particularly in side yards, to prevent fire spreading between homes and reduce vulnerability to wildfires.

3. **Building Standards to Prevent Fire Spread:**

- Building setbacks, such as side yards, front yards, and rear yards, must be enforced and regularly reviewed to mitigate the risk of fire spreading between homes, especially in densely built neighborhoods and comport with International WUI standards.

4. **Insurance Costs and Fire Risks:**

- The increasing cost of insurance will become a barrier for people living in high-risk wildfire areas, such as Whitefish, if proactive steps aren't taken. If we do not improve our building codes and adopt industry standards, like those already being implemented in high-risk areas such as California, this barrier will only grow. More stringent building codes and fire safety measures are essential to reduce these financial burdens and ensure long-term livability.

5. **Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Planning:**

- Comprehensive planning and public education on wildfire evacuation procedures and routes.

6. **Adaptation to Climate Change in Wildfire Management:**

- The Growth Policy must include specific climate change adaptation measures, such as improving firebreaks, increasing vegetation management, and creating drought-resistant landscapes to better protect the community from the effects of more frequent and intense wildfires.

Concerns and Suggestions:

1. **Egress Issues on the North Side of Town:**

- Continued development in the northern part of Whitefish could worsen evacuation challenges. It is crucial to assess the number of housing units, traffic capacity, and evacuation times.
- No further development should be allowed in this area until a comprehensive evacuation plan is in place to ensure resident safety.

2. **Updating the CWPP:**

- The CWPP must be brought up to date to incorporate changes since 2009, including development growth, changes in wildfire behavior, and new mitigation efforts.
- The updated CWPP should set clear goals for community resilience and direct resources toward the highest-priority areas for fire mitigation.
- It is equally important to ensure that emergency preparedness and response plans, including emergency notification systems, evacuation zones, egress routes, are clearly communicated to the public.
- Effective communication, along with regular updates and public awareness campaigns, will be essential to ensure that the community knows how to respond in the event of a wildfire or related emergency such as a toxic chemical spill or fire in the rail yard.

3. **Infrastructure Vulnerabilities and Safety Zones:**

- As highlighted in the Fire Master Plan, Whitefish lacks a fire disaster response plan, designated safety zones, and proper transportation infrastructure for mass evacuation. This becomes critical with high traffic volumes over the viaduct and limited escape options during a fire.

4. **Drinking Water Supply During a Major Fire:**

- In the event of a major wildfire, the city's primary water supply could be compromised. Whitefish may have to rely on the lake exclusively as a backup drinking water source, but surface water is highly susceptible to contamination, including from invasive species.
- To protect our lake and secondary water supply, it is crucial that we have effective mechanisms in place to enforce our environmental regulations. Without proper enforcement, contamination risks increase significantly, endangering both the quality of the water and the ecosystem.
- Additionally, an alternative underground water source should be explored, and resources should be allocated to develop this plan to safeguard the city's water supply in the event of emergencies.

5. **Fire-Resistant Building Codes:**

- Building codes should require not only sprinkling systems but also exterior fire resistance measures. Given Whitefish's location in the WUI, structures are at elevated risk of burning from the outside in. Codes need to be updated to mandate fire-wise construction and landscaping for both new and existing structures.

6. **Preparing for the Impact of Climate Change on Fire Risk:**

- As climate change drives hotter, drier conditions and longer fire seasons, it is crucial that Whitefish plan for these changing conditions. Increased investment in fire-resistant infrastructure, enhanced vegetation management, and community-wide fire education programs will help mitigate the rising fire risks.

In summary, we strongly recommend that these concerns be addressed within the Growth Policy to ensure Whitefish is prepared for future wildfire risks and has the infrastructure to protect its residents and resources.

Additional Materials List:

- NYTimes: By Burning Down Buildings, Insurers Want to Change How They're Built (https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/15/business/wildfires-home-insurance-building-standards.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare&sgrp=c-cb)
- Wind-Driven fire Spread to a Structure from Fences and Mulch. NIST Technical Note, NIST TN 2228. US Department of Commerce.
- WUI Structure/Parcel/Community Fire Hazard Methodology. NIST Technical Note, NIST TN 2205. US Department of Commerce.
- Wind-driven fire Spread to a Structure from Firewood Piles. NIST Technical Note, NISTTN 2251
- Wildfire Risk to Communities. USDA US Forest Service www.wildfirerisk.org https://wildfirerisk.org/explore/overview/30/30029/3000079825/

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 10:44 AM
To:
Subject: FW: Vision 2045- Natural Resource section

Hi Rachel, thanks for reaching out.

As you correctly stated, there will be a discussion regarding the role outdoor recreation plays (and has played) in the Whitefish economy in the economic development element. We are still outlining that section and are beginning to work on the narratives, but it appears there could be upcoming direction from the Board regarding the overall goals for economic development. As a result of your email, we're presently working on adding an objective directly addressing working with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Whitefish Legacy Partners, and other public and private agencies to support, protect, and maintain outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities such as the Whitefish Trail, Smith Lake Disc Golf Course, and other public recreation facilities.

Although there is a brief sentence regarding the importance of natural resources to outdoor recreation in the natural resources section, to keep a clear connection with MLUPA requirements, the section is mostly directed toward inventorying and identifying the natural resources in the jurisdiction, the historical utilization and the projected future trends and the role they have played in the economy.

The comments and resources you sent about Whitefish Legacy Partners, and the trail in particular, is resulting in us looking at adding additional language in the forest management section of the natural resources section, particularly about identifying the impacts forest management can have on outdoor recreation, particularly the Trail.

You had a great point about water, but changing it to "drinking water" isn't entirely accurate because the water quantity section also discusses irrigation and conservation, etc. Your point is well taken though, so I will retitle it to just "water." There will be more of a discussion directly related to drinking water in the "municipal water" section of the public facilities element that is in process.

I wouldn't get too caught up in text size or underlining at this point, because what you are seeing is text only and the final layout and production will be more design oriented and look very different.

As I have been working through the plan, I have been introduced to a fair amount of people who possess levels of expertise or institutional knowledge in specific topics. As a recent example, Carolyn Pittman offered feedback about including language about the role citizen organization and philanthropy has played throughout the years in the Whitefish Community. We discussed it a bit and since she had more direct knowledge about this than me, I offered (and she agreed) to write a paragraph. I edited it slightly to weave it in better, but you can see this language mostly as she wrote it red-marked into Page 5 in the revised history section here:

https://engagewhitefish.com/20108/widgets/66501/documents/62423

I think it would be splendid for us to meet and discuss your ideas. Direct citizen contribution results in a more inclusive plan and gives the community more of a sense of ownership.

PLEASE understand that as I am working through this plan by synthesizing numerous plans and studies, visioning input, citizen and agency input, and the direction of the Board, it can be many months before final drafts make it out into the public. For the sake of efficiency (and my sanity) I think some of your direct input into outdoor recreation would be amazing, but I would hope we can do it within the format of the existing drafts as there are multiple portions that have been all designed to fit together at the end.

I'm looking forward to meeting with you personally and hearing your ideas.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

Happy Thursday!
I hope your meeting did not last too long last night. I am sorry I had to leave for a dinner reservation- I did not anticipate the meeting lasting so long, or I had anticipated being able to provide comments before I needed to leave.
Based on the conversation that I tried to follow for the first 45 minutes or so I believe that by emailing these comments now I may be too late, but I feel it is important enough to make an attempt to get these to you. I was going to submit email comments before the meeting similar to city council sessions but I saw the deadline was the 5th, therefore I was relying on speaking last night.

Comments:
preface- I do understand I do not have a complete picture of what the whole plan will look like, so perhaps my comments fit somewhere else or have been addressed somewhere else; even if this is the case, with regard to my comments I do believe that some changes should be considered

1) Under natural resources, within the background paragraph, you clearly state the predominant importance of outdoor recreation. You also highlight the shifting forms of 'extraction' or 'use' of our natural resources.

Listed are the sections of:
-water quality (which is the state of a naturally occuring resource),

-agriculture (the economic sector that relies on soil fertility and climate contribution),
-timber (the economic sector that relies on the health of forests),
-mineral extraction (the economy that relies on the composition of regional geology)

The problem with the current section structure is- if you want to continue with the themes of economic sectors that rely on a specific resource you should change water quality to drinking water or something similar.

Additionally, a glaring economic sector that is missing from this list is **outdoor recreation**. This is the economy that relies on water, forests, open space, land access, wildlife health, etc.. The section should be structured exactly like the others with positive and negative impacts along with goals. As I am the former director of the Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation under the Bullock administration I do have the knowledge and network to help you compile a strong section here.

***IT IS IMPERATIVE that outdoor recreation be discussed and considered in this manner because it is a competing and often complementary use of the region's natural resources for economic health and is considered as such in the eyes of private economics and public sector land use.

There are countless reasons to add this section, to include:
-The BEA counts this a separate sector of Us GDP Outdoor Recreation | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)
-The city and its residents value and prioritize outdoor recreation as seen in data collected for this plan.
-The city has a formal partner in the Whitefish Legacy Partners that works to secure open space for watershed health and recreation.
-The Whitefish Legacy Partners and Headwater Economics produced a groundbreaking report on the direct economic impacts on the city of Whitefish. Measuring Whitefish Trail Use - Headwaters Economics
-Outdoor recreation does not belong as a subset of Tourism, tourism is a subcategory of Outdoor Recreation as over 52% of economic impacts come from residents. Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research | University of Montana Faculty Publications | ScholarWorks@UM | Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research | University of Montana
-The city of Whitefish actively works with the MT DNRC to secure permits, licenses and development rights to provide for recreation for its residents and visitors, and open space for watershed conservation.

2) I have a hard time following the formatting. There is too much use of underlined titles and not enough of a difference in text sizing. This causes confusion on what falls within certain sections etc.

Please reach out by phone or email if you would like to discuss more on this topic.
Thank you for your time!
Rachel

Rachel Schmidt
Be-OTB, LLC.

be-otb.com

Citizens for a Better Flathead is submitting the following comments for Whitefish City Council to review:

CBF recommends changing the language in the first sentence of "Climate Change Impacts on Water Supply" to read "Climate change *will* have impacts on water quality…" instead of using the less assertive "could." Climate change is real and Montana has experienced multiple climate change related events. We've seen rising temperatures, less snowpack and more droughts – leading to a slew of impacts

CBF is in support of integrating the "transfer of development rights" program (or, TDR) to keep development from sprawling and injuring farmlands. The TDR method allows:

> "owners of open, undevelopment land in "sending" areas to package and sell the development potential of their lands as a commodity to someone else who might want to build a denser development in a designated "receiving area" (near transit, an old town center or elsewhere)." – Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

In implementing this process, Whitefish is essentially keeping growth to an infill and allowing farmlands to prosper via conservation easement or through "funding" farmers by allowing them to sell their development rights. However, a TDR must be codified by the community and the rules of the program must be written into the zoning law. Montana does not have an express TDR clause in its statutes, according to MDT. However, communities have succeeded in implementing TDR rules under the Zoning Act's (MCA 76, Chapter 2) Parts 1 through 3. This has been exercised by Gallatin County's Bozeman. The area's Zoning Regulations (Section 22) state the policy and procedures of its TDR program. We understand that a growth policy is not a regulatory document and thus, cannot explicitly codify or integrate regulations. We believe this is the right option for the Whitefish community, however it is not clear if a growth policy can include a policy that needs codification. The 2007 Growth Policy sought to "actively" pursue TDR, but it seems no codified authority has been implemented into Whitefish's regulations. CBF supports the actual implementation of this policy.

Similar to the passive use of "could" noted above, we believe this section needs to integrate a more definitive stance on sustainable wildfire management. It has been noted that the "Hazards" section of the growth policy will discuss wildfire in more detail. *See Environment section with comments, p. 40.* And, we understand that much of wildland fire policy falls under the umbrella of State and Federal jurisdiction. However, the City of Whitefish should have an emergency-response plan for wildfires. Firewise practices were included in the 2007 Growth Policy and should be reiterated in this version

We agree with Richard Hildner, who has commented on the need for more discussion on wildfires and echo his suggestion to add:

> "The City will adhere to International Wildland Interface (WUI) standards and additional conditions for landscaping, setbacks, building materials, etc., as may be appropriate." – Richard Hildner, submitted January 3, 2025 regarding the Environment section of the Whitefish Growth Policy.

Additionally, in-city water conservation should become mandatory. The 19-12 Ordinance encourages but does not require conservation, thus the growth policy should strongly encourage the need for stricter water conservation. Bozeman's water conservation plan is a good example.

CBF also supports collaboration amongst the city and landowners. Therefore, we recommend including this statement from the 2007 Growth Policy regarding timber management, with the addition that proper management include sustainable, protective solutions:

> "Encourage land owners to consult with professional foresters on the proper silvicultural and forest management techniques for hillsides and environmentally sensitive areas." - p. 70

Our natural resources are critical to the sustainability of the City of Whitefish, the State and the general health of the global environment. The growth policy will lay out the future plan for the foreseeable future and it needs to address development and mitigation to prevent negative environmental impacts.

Respectfully,
Cameron Dexter
Citizens for a Better Flathead
Director of Policy & Planning

Whitefish Growth Plan Comments
Natural Resources Draft
2/25/2025

Alan Tiefenbach and Community Development Board:

I have reviewed the Natural Resources Draft and offer the following comments:

1. Pg. 1, ¶ 2: Consider changing 'limiting' to 'reducing' in the next to last sentence. Consider changing the last sentence to read, "The Department continues to evaluate the feasibility of future wells and river and lake water rights for (delete 'the use of') irrigation use."

2. Pg.1. ¶3: Consider the following wording: Climate change could have impacts on water quality in the Haskill Basin watershed. Reduced snowpack and increasing flash droughts would likely reduce ground water replenishment. An increase in the number and severity of wildfires and the associated potential for landslides and erosion plus the potential for contamination from fire retardant could adversely affect the reliability of the Haskill Basin water supply. Continuing forest management is key for preserving water quality in Haskill Basin but it is possible Whitefish Lake will need to serve a larger role in the City's water supply in the future. With that in mind, it is imperative that water quality in Whitefish Lake must be protected for potability.

3. Pg.2.¶2: Consider adding "sod" to the list of crops grown in the planning area.

4. Pg.2.¶4: "… combined with the difficulty…" It is unclear as to the difficulty of what.

5. Pg.4.¶4: Semantics I know, but you might consider changing lumber to timber. Timber is harvested to produce lumber.

6. Pg.5.¶1: Consider inserting, 'part of' before "Whitefish Mountain Resort." end the sentence and begin the next with "All of…"

7. Pg.5.¶1: I don't understand what "…thinning trees from below…" means. Is this referring to understory removal and/or pre-commercial thinning?

8. Pg.7. Timber Resources, Goal 1.b: This is seems overly broad and I think it should be limited to the planning area.

9. Pg.8. Goal d.: Consider deleting this goal. Within the planning area, given the shrinkage of milling operations valley and state wide, the likelihood of a new mill is essentially nill.

10. Pg.8. Goal e.: Consider rewrite as follows: Ensure that Best Management Practices (BMPs) are followed for forest management practices and activities within the planning area, to include Haskill Basin.

11. Pg.8 Mineral Extraction, Goal,1,c: Consider adding “hours of operation to the performance standards.

Comments from Casey Lewis, Executive Director of the Western Montana Conservation Commission of Montana DNRC.

NATURAL RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

Whitefish has an abundance of natural resources. From Whitefish Lake, the Whitefish River, the area's many streams, its abundant wildlife, its mountain backdrop, and its forests, the natural resources of the North Flathead Valley help make Whitefish a world class destination as well as a great place to live and work. Natural resources have also driven the early development and economy of Whitefish - including farming and ranching, abundant wildlife for fishing and hunting, healthy forests for logging, and mineral extraction. While timber and mineral extraction no longer provide the jobs and economic boom they once did, the enjoyment of our outdoor amenities as well as clean air, local farms, and the vast local trail network is a huge part of what draws both residents and visitors to our community. A community that protects and manages its natural resources for the benefit of future generations is a sustainable community; one that will enjoy economic success and a high quality of life for generations to come. Natural resources specifically addressed by this section include water, agriculture, timber resources, and mineral extraction.

WATER QUANTITY

Water Supply

The City of Whitefish relies entirely on surface water for its domestic supply, as do many residents around the shoreline of Whitefish Lake. There are two primary sources: Second and Third Creek in the Haskill Basin, and Whitefish Lake. The Haskill Basin water source is the main source of water. In times of low flow (such as in the summer), the city augments the water system by intaking water from Whitefish Lake from a pipe located approximately 1,200 feet out into the lake. The city has water rights to First Creek in the Haskill Basin, but this source was abandoned in the 1980s following E. Coli contamination from the former sewage system for the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Water quality in the Haskill Basin is protected by conservation easements which limit development in the area to timber management. (Please see the Public Facilities elements for additional details regarding water availability and infrastructure.) The city is also studying the feasibility of groundwater wells to supplement the water supply. The Parks and Recreation Department has installed a well at Armory Park for irrigation of a portion of the park, thereby conserving water by limiting the use of treated water for irrigation purposes. The department continues to evaluate the feasibility of future wells and river and lake water rights for the use of irrigation.

Climate Change Impacts on Water Supply

Climate change could have impacts ~~to~~ on water quality and quantity in the Haskill Basin watershed. Less snowpack and increasing flash droughts would reduce replenishment. Acceleration in wildfires and associated increases in landslides and erosion would introduce slurry and other ~~contaminates~~contaminants. Continuing forest management is key for preservation of water quality, but it is possible Whitefish Lake would need to serve

a larger role in the city water supply in the future. With that in mind, it is imperative that the water quality of Whitefish Lake be protected for potability, especially from threats like wildfire and aquatic invasive species.

Agricultural Water User Facilities

There are no known agricultural water user facilities, such as ditches, within the city limits, although GIS data obtained from the State of Montana indicates irrigation-equipped agricultural fields in the planning area. (See the Agricultural and Prime Farmland Map.)

Commented [CL1]: Irrigation ditches?

Commented [CL2]: Might want to explain more. If they are using water, what are the possible sources.

AGRICULTURE

Introduction

"Agriculture" is the cultivation of the soil, production of crops, raising of livestock and the preparation and sales of resulting products. Although the agricultural sector, including ranching, is no longer a major industry in the planning area, it has historic importance to the Flathead County and Montana culture. Crops grown in the planning area include barley, hay, alfalfa, oats, potatoes, and peas. In addition to food production, farmland provides open space, wildlife habitat, ground water recharge, and reduces the urban heat island effect caused by increasing amounts of impervious surfacing and development. Agricultural lands are an integral part of Whitefish's aesthetics and quality of life.

Agricultural Land in the Planning Area

The majority of land within the city limits has been developed for urban and suburban uses. There are no major farming or ranching operations within the planning area, although there are smaller-scale operations targeted to farmer's markets and community gardens. According to Land to Hand, a community organization founded by farmers, business leaders, and food system planners from around the Flathead Valley, there are at least 7 small farms, cattle ranches, or community gardens within the Whitefish Planning Area as of 2024. Recent demand has increased for mini farms where people buy small acreages for a rural residence, hobby farms, tax shelters, and/or land speculation. Additionally, a local non-profit, Save Farmland, has been securing permanent farming conservation easements on many acres of agricultural land around Whitefish to protect it from future development while also offering flexible land, equipment, and resources to the farming community.

Importance of Farmland to the Community

During visioning sessions for this community plan, participants noted their fondness for the rural land and farms surrounding the city limits, particularly along the southeastern portion of the planning area. These lands are a finite natural resource of local, state, and national importance. Agriculture produces food, meeting a basic need. As farmland nationwide is being lost to development, ~~and~~ combined with the difficulty and low wages, ~~of farming is resulting in~~ many farmers are selling their properties and leaving the industry altogether. This scenario leads to the~~, it is becoming~~ increasing~~ly~~ importance for local jurisdictions to preserve prime farmland and support local farms, including sustainable practices such as regenerative agriculture.

Types of Farmland

The United States Department of Agriculture partners with various federal, state, and local agencies in an effort called the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS)[1]. Among the duties of the NCSS, the partnership inventories, documents, and publishes information about soils. For the purpose of this element, the survey identifies two soil types of particular importance:

1. *Prime Farmland.*

   Prime farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Soil properties are only one of several criteria that are necessary. Other considerations include land use, frequency of flooding, irrigation, water table, and wind erodibility. Prime farmland is of major importance in meeting the Nation's short- and long-range needs for food and fiber. Because the supply of high-quality farmland is limited, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognizes that responsible levels of government, as well as individuals, should encourage and facilitate the wise use of prime farmland.

2. *Farmland of Statewide Importance*

   In some areas, land that does not meet the criteria for prime or unique farmland is considered to be farmland of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Generally, this land includes areas of soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmland if conditions are favorable.

Geographic Information System (GIS) data obtained from the Montana State Library and developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service indicates significant acreages of prime farmland at the eastern and southern planning area boundary in the areas surrounding Monegan Road and Voerman Road (see Prime Agricultural and Farmlands Map.). Nearly all of this land is zoned AG-20 Agricultural or SAG-10 Suburban Agricultural with the majority of it already being used for agricultural uses[2] or ~~low density single family~~low-density single-family residential. Most of this land is either wooded or ~~is~~ pastureland for horses or cattle and is important for the production of high-quality hay that is very much in demand both in and out of the Whitefish area.

[1] Obtained from the US Department of Agriculture; nrcs.usda.gov

[2] Existing agricultural uses determined by aerial map analysis, site visits and records from the Montana State Library's Cadastral Data.

DRAFT

Preserving Prime Agricultural Land Versus Development Pressure

A dilemma is presented between balancing the desire of the city to preserve prime agricultural land just outside the city limits~~,~~ when these same lands have the greatest pressures for annexation and rezoning. These lands tend to have lower land costs, larger vacant parcels for development, and high incentives for landowners to sell because of the low profitability of farming. There are numerous approaches to encouraging the preservation of agricultural land while still allowing adequate land for future development and respecting private property rights. Infrastructure improvements can be used to steer where future growth occurs. Conservation easements on agricultural lands can set aside portions of a subdivision for community gardens or leased for farming purposes. Subdivision designs could allow for development, even development of various residential product types at high densities, or clustered designs, provided some significant portion of the land is kept in open space or agriculture. Another popular approach is the transfer of development rights (TDRs) or the outright purchase of development rights through open space bonds or other means, in order to establish conservation easements.

TIMBER RESOURCES

Introduction

Logging was the earliest industry in Whitefish, as the city is surrounded by forests of larch, spruce, Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, white pine, and alpine fir. In 1881, the Baker Brothers constructed the first mill near the head of the Whitefish River. This required the construction of a dam to raise water levels high enough to float logs down the river to Kalispell for transport. The Baker Mill was later sold to the O'Brien Lumber Company~~,~~ and ~~then~~ later to the Somers Lumber Company. Somers Lumber Company operated in this location until the mill was disassembled and relocated to the north side of Flathead Lake in 1924.

The introduction of the Great Northern Railway into Whitefish created a tremendous demand for lumber, particularly railroad ties. Timber was also used locally for bridges, sidewalks, fences, tunnels, buildings, and telegraph poles. After a 1907 fire ~~which~~ that nearly destroyed the town and the “Big Burn” of 1910 which devastated three million acres in North Idaho and Western Montana, Whitefish buildings and sidewalks were built of less flammable materials such as brick and concrete. The timber industry began a decline after World War Two, and the last mill in town, owned by Idaho Timber, closed in 2009. As of 2024, the former Idaho Timber Millsite is being redeveloped as a mixed-use development.

Logging Operations in the Planning Area

Although no sawmills remain in Whitefish, logging still occurs in the planning area. The largest landowner is F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company (Stoltze), ~~who~~ which owns approximately 3,020 acres of forest land in the northeast quadrant (see Stoltze and State Forestland Map). Stoltze has been logging and operating a mill for more than a century off Half Moon Rd, west of Columbia Falls. Lumber is obtained from private property as well as through agreements with the State of Montana and the US Forest Service. There

is another timber mill in the Columbia Falls area operated by Weyerhaeuser, but they do not log in the planning area.

Stolze Land Management and Conversation Easements

Stoltze has a long history of good stewardship of the land and cooperation with adjacent municipalities. In the past, Stoltze sold land for private development; some of the land is now used as Whitefish Mountain Resort and all the Iron Horse development was originally Stoltze land. Nearly all the remaining Stoltze land in the planning area is protected by conservation easements held by the Trust for Public Land (TPL). These conservation easements allow continued logging by Stoltze, ~~protects~~ protect the city water source in Haskill Basin, and ~~allows~~ allow for public recreation. Public recreation is subject to Stoltze's "open lands" policy which allows recreational use of their forests with restrictions as a "neighborly accommodation" subject to termination. Stoltze utilizes sustainable forestry practices such as distributing their logging between private and state land to limit impacts, thinning trees from below to leave the healthiest trees to benefit from the increased sunlight, water, and nutrients, and reforestation to establish the next generation of trees.

Careful forest management creates healthy forest ecosystems and promotes the health and safety of residents by reducing the risk of wildfires. It is important to ensure future land development and associated land restrictions do not create unintended consequences limiting forest management and local mill operations.

MINERAL EXTRACTION

State Statute (76-35-209, MCA) requires a community plan to include an inventory and maps of minerals (including sand and gravel resources) and describe the natural resource characteristics including historic and existing utilization.

Although there has been minimal mining for precious metals and coal in the Flathead Valley, sand and gravel are important mineral resources extracted in the area. These materials are used in nearly all infrastructure and construction projects. Permits for opencut mining for mineral extraction are issued by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Negative Impacts from Mineral Extraction

Mineral extraction (also known as extractive industries) can have severe impacts on groundwater quality and quantity. Dewatering of groundwater in open pits can lower the water level on nearby properties and affect the production of existing wells. However, e~~E~~qually as serious ~~however~~, is any opening in the earth can act as a conduit for the entry of contaminants into groundwater supplies. Depending on where the extraction is occurring, gravel extraction can have severe impacts on wildlife habitat as well. Sand and gravel extraction can present severe impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, including increased noise, dust and vibrations, increased truck traffic, damage to roads, and a decline in visual quality relating to disturbed landscapes.

DRAFT

Mineral Extraction in the Planning Area

Data provided by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) indicates one permitted gravel pit near the southwest quadrant of W. 18th Street and Flathead Avenue, not within the city but completely surrounded by the city limits (see Mine Sites and Zoning Allowing Mining by Conditional Use map). That is adjacent to an abandoned and reclaimed sand and gravel pit where The Wave Aquatic and Fitness Center is now located. There are three other abandoned mine sites within and one directly adjacent to the city limits ~~and one directly adjacent~~ which have been deemed completely remediated by MDEQ. There are no other active or inactive opencut mining sites indicated ~~with~~ within the planning area. There is a cluster of mines approximately one-and-a-half miles from the southeast corner of the planning area.

There are no zoning districts in either the City of Whitefish or Flathead County that presently allow extractive industries as a by-right-use. This use is only allowed by conditional use in the Whitefish WA Agricultural District and Flathead County SAG-5, SAG-10, and AG-20 zoning districts. There ~~is~~ are approximately 397 acres of land within the city limits zoned WA, but 137 acres of ~~it~~ this zone is currently parks and the sewer treatment facility owned by the city. There is a significant amount of county-zoned SAG-5, SAG-10, and AG-20 land within the planning area and adjacent to the city limits.

MCA 76-2-209, a new law passed in 2021, states a county can reasonably condition but cannot prevent the complete use, development, or recovery of sand and gravel operations on a site located within a geographic area zoned as residential. The State Statute does not extend this same preemption to city zoning. Flathead County does have minimal conditional use standards for extractive industries, but this use could still significantly impact neighboring properties. The City of Whitefish has consistently held~~ad~~ the position that mineral, gravel, and sand extraction is generally considered to be incompatible with the character, qualities, and environment of the Whitefish area, and is to be discouraged. Strict development standards for such activities should be developed.

DRAFT

AGRICULTURE

Goal:

1. Encourage the preservation of prime farmland and productive agricultural lands.

   Objectives

   a. The City of Whitefish shall give priority to infill development and established urban areas over plan amendments redesignating prime agricultural land for development.

   b. Extending municipal services and roads into areas ~~which~~ that would result in premature development of prime agricultural land should be avoided.

   c. Support annexation of prime agricultural land for development purposes when it can be demonstrated it is needed for proper urban expansion, or the land is not productive.

   d. Encourage the preservation of prime agricultural land through such mechanisms as conservation easements, clustering development to retain the most agriculturally productive areas, establishing community gardens, or exploring the possibly of transfer of development rights.

   e. Allow development in a way to make the most of the agricultural potential. Ensure land development, future regulations, easements or other restrictions do not unintentionally impact agricultural lands.

   f. Review whether regulatory updates can be created ~~which~~ that result in regulations or incentives to preserve or retain agricultural potential on productive and/or prime farmland.

TIMBER RESOURCES

Goal

1. Encourage future timber operations for forest management and fuels reduction.

   Objectives

   a. Ensure land development, future regulations, easements, or other restrictions do not unintentionally impact forest management or logging operations.

   b. Encourage selective thinning over clearcut operations for forest management.

   c. Continue to support ~~Stoltze~~ Stoltze's sustainable logging operations, particularly within the Haskill Basin conservation easement.

DRAFT

d. Support local milling operations including providing adequate zoning and land for these types of uses.

e. Ensure adequate tree and water quality buffers are maintained during forest management adjacent to rivers, streams, wetlands, and other sensitive resources.

Commented [CL3]: What is considered adequate?

MINERAL EXTRACTION

Goal

1. Mineral, gravel, and sand extraction is generally considered to be incompatible with the character, qualities, and environment of the Whitefish area, and is to be discouraged.

Objectives

a. Continue to coordinate with Flathead County on proposed opencut mining sites ~~on~~ in unincorporated areas near existing Whitefish residential areas to ensure impacts are mitigated or eliminated.

b. When residential development is proposed within the city in areas adjacent to or in near proximity to unincorporated land with a reasonable probability of mineral extraction, ensure site design accounts for potential impacts from adjacent properties and encourage "buyer beware" statements of mineral extraction to be indicated through such means as a plat note.

c. Develop zoning performance standards for mineral and gravel extraction, including fencing and screening, noise and dust abatement, surface and groundwater quality monitoring, and reclamation plans.

DRAFT

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Lula, Ethan <Ethan.Lula@mt.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 8:53 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Natural Resources Section of Vision Whitefish 2045 for Review

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Alan,
Thanks for forwarding this on to me. I do not have any comments at this time. Has a subsequent work session been scheduled yet?

Best,

Ethan Lula
Wildlife Biologist
Wildlife Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 1
Trego, MT 59934
Office: (406)-882-4109 Cell: (406)-210-4677

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org>
Sent: Monday, December 30, 2024 12:41 PM
Cc: Wendy Compton-Ring <wcompton-ring@cityofwhitefish.org>; David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Natural Resources Section of Vision Whitefish 2045 for Review

My apologies, the title on the previous email should have said **"NATURAL RESOURCES"**

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, December 30, 2024 12:39 PM
Cc: Wendy Compton-Ring <wcompton-ring@cityofwhitefish.org>; David Taylor <dtaylor@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Hazards Section of Vision Whitefish 2045 for Review

Good afternoon!

The City of Whitefish is updating our growth policy, known as Vision Whitefish 2045. We have created a website as an all-in-one resource for information and communications regarding this process. I urge you to subscribe to the website if you have an interest in being updated on what is happening with the project.

https://engagewhitefish.com/vision-whitefish-2045 [engagewhitefish.com]

We last comprehensively updated our growth policy in 2007. In May of 2023, the Montana Legislature passed the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) which requires growth policies for qualifying cities and lists specific requirements regarding what needs to be addressed.

We are presently working on the Environment, Natural Resources and Hazards Element of Vision Whitefish 2045. Due to the complexity of this Plan Element, we are releasing it in individual sections.

The Environment Section has been completed, underwent agency review and is presently under consideration by the Community Development Board. Preliminary discussions regarding this section occurred at a December 19th, 2024 work session. It is anticipated this section will be discussed again at a February 20, 2025 work session.

ATTACHED IS THE NEXT COMPLETED SECTION - NATURAL RESOURCES. You have been identified as an agency that may have an interest in its contents. After outside agency review, we plan to release this section to the public for review and comment and schedule a work session with the Whitefish Community Development Board.

If you have any comments or revisions, please submit them by **January 10, 2025**. It would be the most helpful to red mark any comments or revisions directly in the document rather than providing general ideas or feedback.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Ron <ron@flatheadamb.org>
Sent: Thursday, November 6, 2025 9:23 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Maria Butts
Subject: Vision WF 2045: FAMB comment on Public Facilites
Attachments: FAMB Public Facilities Comment.pdf

You don't often get email from ron@flatheadamb.org. Learn why this is important

ATTENTION: *External Email* - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hello Alan,

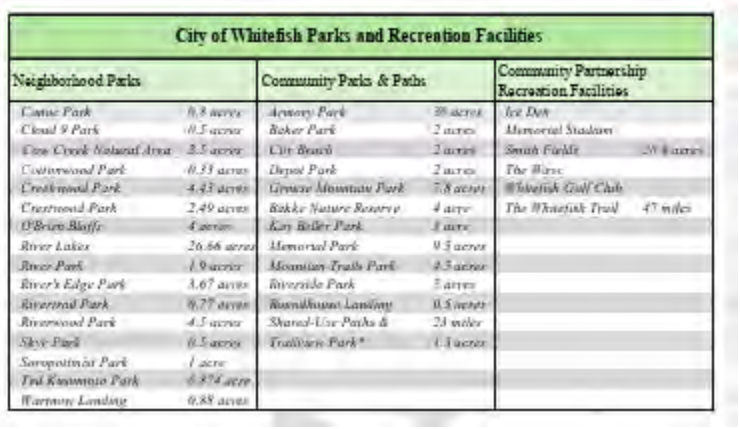
This is a follow-up to the discussion we have been having over a couple of email chains. I've attached my feedback for review.

Thank you both for your work on this.

Ron Brandt | Executive Director

Flathead Area Mountain Bikers
Phone: 406.579.3450
www.FlatheadAMB.org

I would like to see Spencer Trails added to the City of Whitefish Parks and Recreation Facilities Table under the Community Partnership Recreation Facilities column (pg. 12).



City of Whitefish Parks and Recreation Facilities					
Neighborhood Parks		Community Parks & Paths		Community Partnership Recreation Facilities	
Canoe Park	0.8 acres	Armory Park	20 acres	Ice Den	
Cloud 9 Park	0.5 acres	Baker Park	2 acres	Memorial Stadium	
Cow Creek Natural Area	3.5 acres	City Beach	2 acres	Smith Fields	20.8 acres
Cottonwood Park	0.33 acres	Depot Park	2 acres	The Wave	
Creekwood Park	4.43 acres	Grouse Mountain Park	7.8 acres	Whitefish Golf Club	
Crestwood Park	2.49 acres	Rikke Nature Reserve	4 acre	The Whitefish Trail	47 miles
O'Brien Bluffs	4 acres	Kay Beller Park	8 acre		
River Lakes	26.66 acres	Memorial Park	9.5 acres		
River Park	1.9 acres	Mountain Trails Park	4.5 acres		
River's Edge Park	3.67 acres	Riverside Park	5 acres		
Riverstrand Park	0.77 acres	Roundhouse Landing	0.5 acres		
Riverwood Park	4.5 acres	Shared-Use Paths &	28 miles		
Skyle Park	0.5 acres	Trailheads Park*	1.3 acres		
Saraspatinkit Park	1 acre				
Tid Kummoju Park	0.874 acre				
Wayman Landing	0.88 acres				

Spencer Trails: The Spencer Freeride Trail system comprises approximately 6.68 miles of downhill and technical mountain bike trails. It was established through a 2013 agreement between the City of Whitefish, the Montana DNRC, and Flathead Fat Tires (now known as Flathead Area Mountain Bikers, or FAMB). Under that agreement, FAMB, a local nonprofit, constructs, inspects, and improves the freeride trails and technical trail features, providing labor, materials, and financial support, and ensuring the trails meet design and safety guidelines. FAMB works closely with Whitefish Legacy Partners and participates in Whitefish Trail operations, although the Spencer Freeride Trails are managed independently from the Whitefish Trail system. This collaborative stewardship makes the Spencer Trails a unique offering, providing a high-quality addition to the broader Whitefish Trail network.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Ron <ron@flatheadamb.org>
Sent: Friday, October 10, 2025 2:40 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

You don't often get email from ron@flatheadamb.org. Learn why this is important

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hello Alan,

I'm circling back on the Transportation chapter after a Legacy Lands Advisory Committee meeting, which included Andy Fury, Steve Qunell, Parks and Rec, and Angie Jacobs. During that meeting, Heidi Van Everen (Whitefish Legacy Partners Executive Director) and I shared with the committee that we didn't feel like Flathead Area Mountain Bikers (FAMB) or Whitefish Legacy Partners (WLP) really fit into the existing Transportation section. We also didn't realize we could submit a new paragraph or section to be included.

Maria Butts noted at that time that Whitefish Legacy Partners was mentioned in the Facilities section. What was missing in Facilities was a recognition of the Land Use Licenses and Easements that the City holds with the Montana DNRC for recreation assets on State Trust lands. This is where both FAMB and WLP fit in.

For example, FAMB manages the Spencer Mountain Freeride Trails through an MOU with the City of Whitefish.

I think there's an important gap that should be addressed, since these licenses and easements are a key part of how the City supports recreation on State Trust lands in partnership with nonprofits like FAMB and WLP.

I'm not sure if this mention would fit best in Transportation, Public Facilities, or Land Use. I'm not sure if any of the people involved have reached out to you on this yet: city council, WLP, or Parks and Rec. If so, could we add to the paragraph that they'll be writing on Land Use Licenses and Easements? We would like to make sure that FAMB is included in that and would be happy to provide any details you might need.

I appreciate all the work you've done on this project. Thank you for your time.

Best,

Ron Brandt

Executive Director

Flathead Area Mountain Bikers

On Tue, Aug 12, 2025 at 2:54 PM FAMB Info <info@flatheadamb.org> wrote:

> Ron Brandt, Executive Director Flathead Area Mountain Bikers
>
> ---------- Forwarded message ---------
> From: **Alan Tiefenbach** <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
> Date: Tue, Aug 12, 2025 at 2:52 PM
> Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element
> To:
>
> Good afternoon,
>
> You have received this email because you have been identified as an agency associated with transportation in Flathead County.
>
> Attached is the draft transportation element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's growth policy update (community plan).

Following agency review and comment, we will make any necessary revisions and post for public comment.

This plan element is scheduled for review with the Whitefish Community Development Board on September 18, 2025 at 6PM.

Please submit any comments you have by August 22, 2025.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner

City of Whitefish

418 E. 2nd Street

P.O. Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Rebecca Norton
Sent: Tuesday, November 4, 2025 8:39 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; Craig Workman
Subject: Water chapter

Could we consider a grant or low interest loan program set up through city utility billing to enable residents to change out old cast iron piping before a leakage occurs? And mention implementing that low cost pipe insurance program as goals?

Get Outlook for iOS

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Cameron Dexter <cameron@flatheadcitizens.org>
Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2025 5:31 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Michelle Howke; Mayre Flowers
Subject: Re: CBF Comments for Growth Policy Sections

Alan,
Yes, we have reviewed these. I know that some of this is included in previous elements, however, the language from the 2007 growth policies is clear, concise and targeted which I think will help people to better understand the importance of these sections and their relation to the community.

Thank you

Cameron Dexter, J.D.
Director of Planning and Policy
Citizens for a Better Flathead
137 South Main Street
Kalispell, MT. 59901

Flatheadcitizens.org

> On Sep 24, 2025, at 4:50 PM, Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:
>
> Thank you.
>
> Did you review the environment, natural resources and hazards element, and the rest of the public facilities elements in relation to this? Much of what this suggests, particularly pertaining to water quality, nutrients and septic systems, is already in there, just in other places. I've sent these comments to Public Works so they can compare.
>
> **Alan Tiefenbach**
> Long Range Planner
> City of Whitefish
> 418 E. 2nd Street
> P.O. Box 158
> Whitefish, MT 59937
> Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Cameron Dexter <cameron@flatheadcitizens.org>
Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2025 4:00 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Mayre Flowers <Mayre@Flatheadcitizens.org>
Subject: CBF Comments for Growth Policy Sections

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Whitefish team,

Here are CBF's comments on the Public Water Section & Wastewater/Stormwater Section of the growth policy update. Thanks for your hard work on this.

Cameron Dexter, J.D.
Director of Planning and Policy
Citizens for a Better Flathead
137 South Main Street
Kalispell, MT. 59901

Flatheadcitizens.org

CBF Comments for Draft Whitefish Growth Policy Public Water Section

*The blue text represents CBF comments for this section. The comments are largely pulled from the adopted 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy and should be included in the updated version as well.

PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

The Whitefish freshwater treatment facility provides clean, safe and dependable and waterborne disease free drinking water for daily needs like cooking, bathing, and sanitation, and serves industries and agriculture which rely on dependable water supplies for production and growth. The freshwater system also plays a critical role in city needs such as fire protection, emergency preparedness, and maintaining parks. Effective management of this system helps reduce the risk of shortages during droughts and ensures long-term access to a critical natural resource.

Existing Conditions

The city operates a surface water system serving residential, commercial, and industrial customers. The freshwater system consists of approximately 73 miles of pipes and three booster pumps that deliver water to homes, businesses and fire hydrants. Municipal water is primarily sourced from 2nd Creek and 3rd Creek of Haskill Creek[1] which is then conveyed by gravity to a reservoir at the Whitefish Water Treatment Plant. Water is also pumped from Whitefish Lake, primarily during the summer months, due to higher demand and to maintain downstream flows in Haskill Creek. There are three ground storage reservoirs providing approximately 1.85 million gallons of storage (see Public Water Facilities Map). Haskill Creek yields approximately 2.32 million gallons per day (MGD). Haskill Creek is generally preferred over Whitefish Lake as a source of drinking water. This is due to the cost of obtaining and treating water from the lake, with the primary expense being the need to pump lake water to the treatment plant, whereas

Haskill Creek runs downhill to the plant. Haskill Creek is also higher water quality than that of Whitefish Lake, so additional treatment of lake water is required.

Haskill Basin is susceptible to pollution, sedimentation and erosion. TMDLs authorized by the Department of Environmental Quality shall be met. However, the city should strive to implement measures that provide for even more reduction in pollutants and other impairing conditions, when scientifically-backed solutions arise. This should be a goal for Whitefish Lake water quality as well. (referencing 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 82).

Big Mountain Water Company (BMWC) supplies water to the Big Mountain Resort Base Area as well as the Sunrise Ridge subdivision. BMWC operates six groundwater wells which are all more than 400 ft deep and produce between 105 gallons per minute (GMP) and 300 GPM. At this time, no connection exists between the city's water system and the Big Mountain Water Company's system. The Big Mountain area is within the city's planning boundary and is slated for future annexation. BMWC's stream management plan should be updated in collaboration with city efforts. (referencing 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 82).

The city's water treatment plant was initially constructed in 2001 and designed to treat up to four million gallons per day (MGD). The facility was upgraded in 2021 to provide an additional two MGD of treated water to handle the city's growing demand. The city uses approximately 1.3 MGD, with average per person daily water use being 156 gallons, a decrease from 203 gallons per day in 2017. Total city water usage peaks between June to August to approximately 2.7 MGD. This peak accounts for full-time and seasonal residents as well as visitors. There is a myriad of reasons why per capita water usage is declining as compared to population growth, but a large contributor is likely the city's water main replacement program. This program began in 2020, aggressively targeting old leaking cast iron pipes, and per capita water use has been on the decline since.

The Water Utility Plan discusses the threat to the quality of surface water from septic tanks or other sources. As this plan was last updated in the early 2000s a goal should be established to update this plan.

Septic tanks, especially those located near water shores and banks remain an active threat to water quality as documented in detail in the Whitefish Lake Institute report ***The Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline Area of Whitefish Lake, MT (2012)*** of which the City was a supporting partner. It is time for this report to be revisited

and a workgroup established to look at current and on-going opportunities to address water quality issues raised in this report.Additionally, Whitefish Lake continues to face water quality issues from, urban drainage, lakefront development, land clearing, golf courses, logging and two-stroke internal combustion engines in water crafts. Run-off from fertilized and pesticide-sprayed lawns eventually makes it to these water bodies, adding to the water quality issues.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

Whitefish's Water System Master Plan was last updated in 2006, just prior to the adoption of the 2007 growth policy. As part of Vision Whitefish 2045, the city hired Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services (AE2S) for an update. The updated plan uses the projected 1.5% growth rate as discussed in the demographics chapter as the baseline for determining future capacities.

The city's existing water supply sources and treatment plant can meet the future population projection demand of approximately 4.4 MGD through the 20-year planning horizon. However, the city may need to adjust water sources to account for limited water in Haskill Creek from drought or water contamination associated with wildfires. Whitefish Lake as a source could also be impacted for the same reasons as Haskill Creek, with an additional risk being invasive species impacting infrastructure. Also, the water reservoir at the water treatment plant is open to the air and thus vulnerable to evaporation. Evaporation could be mitigated by placing floating covers over the water surface. Such covers have the potential to not only mitigate evaporation losses, but to assist in the prevention of algae growth and reduce bird activity at the reservoir. Due to the vulnerability of surface water sources, the city should consider establishing groundwater sources for additional supply. ~~Groundwater sources also require less treatment.~~

In considering if the city should establish groundwater sources for additional water supply, emphasis should be placed on protecting all groundwater sources from contamination. In fact, the 2007 Municipal Water portion of the growth policy, discusses development in areas of high groundwater and the need to prevent stormwater from interacting with the former. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 83). The section goes on to illustrate the connectivity of the shallow and deeper aquifers within the Whitefish area, penning:

> "Test wells in the Whitefish area have indicated that some shallow aquifers interconnect with deeper aquifers. This causes a greater concern for the quality of deep aquifers as the shallow aquifers are

> more easily contaminated through chemical land treatments, improper drainage practices, excavations of any kind, seepage from surface water bodies, and activities such as gravel extraction." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 83).

The amount of water storage available in the main reservoir and three above-ground tanks is less than sufficient to meet future needs, but a fourth water tower planned to begin construction in 2026 at the city public works yard would add an additional one million gallons of water storage. There are also planned improvements to the three booster pumps to improve water pressure and fire flow with upgrades to a pump in the Suncrest area being first. These improvements would help the city continue to provide adequate water supply and sufficient water pressure into the foreseeable future.

In 2021, the Parks and Recreation Department adopted an irrigation and landscape plan which indicated improvements that can be made to city irrigation systems and landscaping for more efficient water use. The department has started implementing recommendations of this plan, such as retrofitting existing irrigation with new controller monitoring systems. Additionally, the city plans to abandon the antiquated irrigation systems along US Highway 93 South and allow adjacent property owners to install new irrigation systems in front of their properties. The Parks Department has also drilled two wells in Armory Park to remove irrigation systems from city water and transition to well water. The city continues to look into the feasibility of using water rights from Whitefish Lake and the Whitefish River to pull irrigation for river parks and other irrigated areas.

Climate change is impacting Whitefish, MT, by affecting its winters, water resources, and ecosystems, leading the city to adopt a Climate Action Plan to increase resilience and transition to a clean energy economy. Projected impacts include reduced snowpack, increased wildfire frequency and intensity, stressed trout streams, and declines in keystone species like the whitebark pine, threatening the town's tourism and way of life. In response, Whitefish is implementing strategies such as promoting fire-adapted communities, developing green infrastructure, reducing emissions, and partnering with organizations to address climate change. The Climate Action Plan, adopted by the City in 2018 establishes a foundation for Whitefish to strengthen local resilience to future climate change impacts and to make the transition to a clean energy economy.

Goal:

Provide a clean, safe, healthy, and sustainable water supply for all residents, free from the threat of degradation or depletion.

Objectives

a. Investigate potential groundwater or other water supply sources that are less affected by climate factors and require less treatment.

B. Look into the feasibility of using water rights from Whitefish Lake and the Whitefish River to pull irrigation for applicable city facilities.

C. Investigate the feasibility of a floating cover or other ecologically sound and sustainable methods for the raw water reservoir to reduce evaporation and reduce water treatment requirements.

D. Continue the annual pipe replacement program to proactively replace pipes before a failure occurs.

E. Review, prioritize and implement the recommendations of the city irrigation and landscape master plan.

F. Continue to utilize the water conservation program for the City of Whitefish. Update conservation protocols and education as new scientifically-backed evidence of solutions and/or impairing conditions comes to light.

G. Continue communication and cooperation with the Whitefish Lake Institute, the Whitefish Water & Sewer District, Big Mountain Water Company and other agencies to monitor and protect the quality of Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, Haskill Creek and all other local lakes and streams so that point and non-point source pollution can be effectively targeted in regulations and programs. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 83).

H. Continue to study and investigate pollution from septic systems and implement regulatory and/or programmatic measures to curtail eutrophication of Whitefish Lake and other impacted water bodies. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 83).

I. Educate the public on the use of lawn and garden fertilizers and pesticides, and how nutrients from lawn chemicals impact the area's lakes and streams. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 83).

J. For subdivisions and other developments within the Whitefish Planning Jurisdictional Area that propose individual and/or private water systems, require contingency plans to connect to the municipal system at some future time. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 83).

K. Continue to update and formulate comprehensive hillside development and critical areas ordinances to directly address the causes and sources of water pollution and sedimentation, integrating and balancing economic, environmental, and social goals. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 84).

L. Closely monitor all impaired waterbodies, research, advocate and implement ecologically-friendly and sustainable solutions to protect the City's domestic water supply sources.

M. Give priority to working with DEQ to resolve the pollution from septic systems documented in studies by the WLI.

[1]The City has a right to take water from 1st Creek but has not since the 1980s due to natural contamination.

CBF Comments for Draft Whitefish Growth Policy Wastewater and Stormwater Section

*The blue text represents CBF comments for this section. The comments are largely pulled from the adopted 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy and should be included in the updated version as well.

WASTEWATER AND STORMWATER

A city's wastewater treatment system is a vital component of urban infrastructure, ensuring public health and environmental protection. It manages the complex process of collecting, treating, and safely discharging or repurposing wastewater from homes, businesses, and industries. Through multiple treatment stages- including filtration, biological processing, and disinfection—contaminants are removed, safeguarding waterways from overwhelming pollution.

A city's stormwater facilities play a crucial role in managing runoff from rain and snowmelt, preventing flooding, erosion, and water pollution. These systems typically include a network of storm drains, retention ponds, permeable surfaces, and underground storage tanks. These facilities facilitate proper drainage throughout the city and contaminants like oil, heavy metals, and debris do not flow unchecked into rivers and lakes.

Wastewater treatment systems must now also proactively address issues with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), microplastics, and pharmaceuticals, as these emerging contaminants evade conventional treatment methods and are not necessarily adequately regulated by state and federal regulations. The main challenges involve the persistence of these substances, their ability to accumulate in the environment, and the inadequacy of existing technology to fully remove them. The City should consider developing proactive policies to begin to address these issues.

Existing conditions

Wastewater System

The City of Whitefish's wastewater system consists of approximately 70 miles of gravity mains (for downhill flow of sewage), approximately 15.54 miles of force mains (transport sewage under pressure from lower to higher elevation), 16 lift stations (used to pump sewage when gravity flow is not possible) and a recently upgraded wastewater treatment Plant.

In 2021, the city completed the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant. The previous wastewater treatment facility was constructed in 1975 for an average daily flow of 1.25 million gallons but needed to be upgraded due to rising levels of ammonia and recent more stringent requirements than when the plant was initially constructed. The city estimates approximately 102 gallons of sewage is produced per person, per day. Current average totals the system are approximately two million gallons per day and the plant is designed for a maximum capacity of six million gallons per day.

"Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP): Much like the other master facility plans, the WSSUP contains evaluations of the current system and practices, and makes recommendations for improvements. The WSSUP recommends the formation of a drainage utility (upon which the City has already acted) to help fund millions in capital improvements. In addition, the WSSUP recognizes that contemporary drainage plans are more about the quality and sustainability of receiving water bodies than before. Untreated urban drainage has the potential to do significant damage to an aquatic system. In response to this issue, the WSSUP recommends setbacks from the Whitefish River, local creeks, and wetlands, and further recommends that development be restricted on slopes in excess of 30%. The WSSUP makes the critical connection between urban drainage and the water quality of the Whitefish River and local streams." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 88).

The Big Mountain Sewer District (BMSD) serves an area on the slopes of Big Mountain, in the vicinity of Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort. The city maintains an agreement with Big Mountain Development to receive and treat wastewater from their privately owned sewer system. Wastewater enters the city's system at East Lakeshore Drive and Big Mountain Road. The agreement allows for up to 2,000 equivalent dwelling units (EDUs) to be connected. As of 2024, approximately 878 EDU1s are estimated to be connected with up to 1,522 EDUs total either existing or proposed. Big Mountain contributes approximately 5.65% of the total wastewater flow.

The Big Mountain area is within the city's planning boundary, and under a 2002 agreement between the city and the Big Mountain Sewer District, Winter Sports Incorporated and the Big Mountain Development Corporation waived their right to

protest annexation after 20 years and when the city's boundary becomes contiguous with BMSD service areas. The feasibility of future annexation is being investigated.

Stormwater System

Whitefish's existing stormwater infrastructure consists of approximately 36.6 miles of storm gravity mains, 1,434 stormwater inlets (outlets), and 69 culverts, ditches, or open drains. Stormwater treatment devices, such as separators and infiltration structures, help remove pollutants before discharge into lakes and streams. Additionally, key structures like settling and retention ponds, overflow structures, pump stations, discharge points, and storage basins play a crucial role in managing excess stormwater and preventing flooding in the city.

"Stormwater generated from impervious surfaces and other non-point sources in the city and surrounding area is handled either through the city stormwater system, state systems associated with state and federal highways, or privately maintained systems within developed subdivisions." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p.87)

"The relationship between slope and water quality is quite clear and has been thoroughly
documented. When rain falls (or snow melts) on flat ground, it tends to stay there. It either sinks into the ground, or it ponds until it finally does sink in and/or evaporate. When rain falls or snow melts on slopes, the water might percolate into the ground under dry conditions, but it will tend to run downhill. Naturally, when water runs down a steep slope, its velocity increases and it can pick up loose soil particles eventually causing erosion, and sedimentation of whatever body of water this runoff finds its way into. When natural terrain is disturbed, for development or other reasons, erosion and sedimentation can be accelerated dramatically. Through this same process, nutrients and other pollutants can find their way into an aquatic system. When rain or irrigation water falls on a flat lawn, it percolates into the soil, or ponds until it percolates eventually." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 89).

"When a lawn is maintained on a steep slope, a certain amount of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals are carried down slope with the runoff. Fertilizers add "nutrients" to the receiving water body and its aquatic system, causing algae and other vegetation to grow at accelerated rates. In a lake, this accelerates the natural process of "eutrophication", causing algae blooms and the buildup of detritus on the lake bottom. Whitefish Lake is approximately 11,000 years old, and through natural eutrophication, could be around for another 11,000 years or more. But when nutrients are artificially

introduced through fertilizers, effluent from septic systems, and other sources, the "death" of the lake will arrive much sooner." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 89)

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

Whitefish's wastewater and stormwater master plan had last been updated in 2006, just prior to the adoption of the 2007 growth policy. As part of Vision Whitefish 2045, the city hired Robert Peccia Consulting (RPA) for an update (incorporated into this community plan by reference). The plan uses the projected 1.5% growth rate as discussed in the demographics chapter as the baseline for determining future capacities and makes the following recommendations as indicated below.

Wastewater System

The current wastewater facility has sufficient capacity to handle the projected flows and loads for the project population to 2045, including with future Big Mountain flows. However, by the mid-2030s, certain parameters, such as ammonia and nitrogen levels, are expected to approach design thresholds. To proactively manage growth, there are prioritized recommended improvements and operational adjustments to the facility such as pump improvements in the short term and an additional basin by 2035. Given the proximity to major waterbodies, the city shall not pursue a groundwater infiltration permit to remedy any wastewater collection and mitigation. As noted in the Public Water Section, shallow aquifers are often connected to the deep aquifer which may cause imbalance and disrupt ecological patterns and emphasize impairments.

Upsizing segments of sewer mains in three general areas is identified to increase capacity and flow - along Iowa Avenue between Skyles Place and Edgewood Lane, along East Lakeshore Drive from Reservoir Road to the Viking Creek lift station, and along the Whitefish River from East Edgewood Place to Riverside Park. The Iowa Avenue segment is the first recommended section for upsizing, with the Whitefish River portion from East Second to Riverside Park being the last. Due to the age of clay pipes, additional lining of sewer mains in the City Beach Area and Downtown is recommended. These improvements are recommended in three phases, beginning in 2035 and completion in 2039 (refer to the Recommended Wastewater System Improvements Map).

There are five lift stations recommended for improvement under existing conditions within the city limits. The River Lakes Lift Station is in the most need of improvement as it is presently at 93% capacity, and upgrades should occur before any significant development or annexation occurs within this station's drainage basin. The other stations needing improvements to serve the projected population over the next 20 years

include the lift stations at City Beach, Houston Point, Lacy Lane and the Baker Lift Station, listed in order of recommended priority.

Stormwater Improvement Needs

The current stormwater system has sufficient capacity to handle projected flows to 2045 if several improvements are made, however the city shall strive to incorporate new technology when available and cost-efficient. A street treatment device needs to be replaced at 7th Street, and there is a blocked stormwater outfall on Greenwood Drive and Shore View Court. As mentioned in detail in the public works section above, when Whitefish's fulltime population reaches 10,000, the city becomes subject to a MS4 permit which is required by the Environmental Protection Agency through the Montana Department of Environment Quality and implementation of this permit will involve lengthy coordination and require additional staff.

Areas of Potential Future Sewer Infrastructure

The 2025 Wastewater and Stormwater Master Plan considers and analyzes nine areas, most of which are presently outside the city limits, that due to proximity to collection infrastructure, could reasonably include future connection to the City's existing collection and treatment system infrastructure. The plan identifies future improvements that are required before these areas can be connected. (Please refer to the Potential Future Areas of Required Improvements to Connect to City Infrastructure Map.) These areas include the following:

- Big Mountain
- Reservoir Road
- East Texas Avenue
- Voerman to Armory
- Monegan to Voerman
- Kallner
- Highway 40
- Karrow
- Lion Mountain

Goal

Continue to provide cost-effective and efficient wastewater and stormwater collection, treatment, and disposal that protects the public health, and does not compromise the environment or further impair water quality.

Objectives:

A. Through the Land Use Element of this community plan and future regulations, direct new development to areas of the community already served by municipal sewer and stormwater infrastructure. If developments cannot or will not be served by municipal sewer and stormwater infrastructure, the city shall advocate that the development integrate a tertiary treatment system for its wastewater collection. The system shall be the best, advanced technology available. These developments shall submit contingency plans for eventual connection to the municipal wastewater system.
B. "Continue to work with the Whitefish County Water to develop and implement long range wastewater management plans and education for the urbanizing areas of the Planning Jurisdictional Area, including those areas around Whitefish Lake where much of the development continues to rely on individual sewage disposal systems." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p.87).
C. "Continue to work with the Flathead County Health Department to prepare a public education program on the proper operation, life expectancy, and potential pollution problems associated with individual on site disposal systems." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p.87).
D. "Continue to Work with the Flathead County Health Department and the Whitefish Lake Institute to monitor existing on-site sewage disposal systems around Whitefish Lake to detect failed systems, and devise a plan for corrective action." (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p.87).
E. Prioritize upgrading and replacement of existing sewer and stormwater infrastructure prior to additional development (concurrency).
F. Continue to work with the Big Mountain Sewer District to develop a feasibility plan prior to future annexation of the Big Mountain Community.
G. Continue to develop and update the comprehensive program to reduce water quality impacts associated with the City's urban drainage system, as scientific evidence becomes available. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 90).
H. Continue to explore and implement an incentive-based program that provides for "green roofs" and the reuse of stormwater for irrigation purposes when the collected stormwater will not impair or further impair the area or water quality. (2007 Whitefish Growth Policy, p. 90)
I. Continue to work with the Whitefish Lake Institute and other prominent agencies to update technology and correct water quality impairments.
J. Continue to identify green-infrastructure alternatives and incorporate the most advanced technology for wastewater treatment, including biosolid treatment and removal.
K. Prohibit the land application of septic tank waste within the City of Whitefish as a water quality risk.

L. Look to need to modernize their biosolids management practices. To address concerns about biosolids contamination,the City of Whitefish should develop a multi-faceted strategy that includes enhanced source control, advanced monitoring, improved public communication, and investments in alternative treatment technologies.

July 16, 2025

Whitefish Community Development Board,

Thank you for your work in reviewing the Public Facilities draft chapter. And, to staff, for their work in organizing and preparing this chapter. Citizens for a Better Flathead made comments on this chapter previous, which Alan adopted into this most current draft. We have a few comments on this updated chapter draft.

The term “manage” starting on page 1 of the document was changed to “guide.” We could not locate any clear comments on why this is changed and the intent behind, could you please explain this to us?

Under “Public Facilities General Goals” which currently reads:

“(1) Continue to plan for and provide a full range of efficient and quality services to meet the needs of the community over the next twenty years.”

We’d like to see the language edited to read:

“(1) Continue to plan for and provide a full range of efficient and quality services to meet the needs of the community over the next twenty years, within the limits of infrastructure expansion and financing to support it.”

We believe that including this wording allows the City to reference and integrate its limits of infrastructure and reinforces the concept of concurrency. Additionally, we recommend that the proposed timeline for the growth policy updates be published online on the Engage Whitefish website for easy reference.

Thank you for your work and consideration,

Cameron Dexter
Director of Policy and Planning
Citizens for a Better Flathead

PUBLIC FACILITIES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Public Works

DONE AS IF COST IS NO OBJECT?

Goal:

1. Provide efficient and high-quality public works services to support the health and safety of the current and future needs of the community.

   Objectives:

   a. Prepare a public works facilities master plan to determine the adequacy of existing public works facilities to accommodate the projected population, including environmental assessment of the utility operations property, necessary site improvements and potential future land uses.

   b. Begin preparations to become compliant with Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements for a MS4 community by ensuring accurate mapping of all public and private outfalls, stormwater facilities and green infrastructure.

Emergency Services

Goal:

1. Continue to provide the most modern and efficient fire, public safety and emergency services to the visitors and citizens of the Whitefish area.

   Objectives:

   DEFINE? SEE p. 4.

   a. The City of Whitefish shall manage the cost of emergency services through prudent land use practices that reduce travel distances by encouraging infill development and limiting sprawl.

   b. Continue to work with other public safety providers to evaluate mutual aid agreements and consolidation of service opportunities.

   c. Future expansions of the city limits should be within areas served with adequate emergency response times unless otherwise in the best interest of public health and safety.

   d. If city annexation of the Big Mountain community occurs, services of the Big Mountain Fire District Fire Station should be retained and improved to provide adequate response times.

$?

WHO PAYS?

6 MONTHS BEFORE BEFORE ANY ANNEXATION OCCURS, CLEAR AND DETAILED PROJECTIONS OF TAXPAYER COSTS FOR CITY SERVICES SHALL BE THE SUBJECT OF PUBLIC HEARINGS.

DOES ANYONE?

Financing and Improvement Mechanisms

Goal:

Ensure community services and facilities keep pace with growth so desired levels of service are maintained, and in a way that sustains the community and environment over the long term, integrating and balancing economic, environmental, and social goals.

Objectives:

a. Ensure new development provides its proportionate share of cost for impacted infrastructure serving the property in accordance with the recommended policies of the 2021 Extension of Services Plan and consider alternative methods to finance public improvements.

b. New developments ~~should~~ SHALL demonstrate that adequate infrastructure is available or will be available at the time of project completion or a financing plan is in place.

c. Formulate and adopt a concurrency policy for roads, sidewalks, parks, bike and pedestrian ways, and other related facilities integrating with an overall master plan for such facilities.

P. 24

?

d. ENSURE THAT NEW DEVELOPMENT, DOES NOT CAUSE ~~EXISTING~~ CURRENT TAXPAYERS' PROPERTY TAXES TO RISE.

OR ANNEXATION

NSS ADDITION TO d.

e PREPARE AN ANALYSIS OF HOW MUCH PROPERTY TAXES HAVE RISEN OVER THE PAST 5, 10, AND 15 YEARS, AND TO WHAT SUCH RISES ARE ATTRIBUTABLE.

LAST 10 YEARS, TO DETERMINE IF THEY PAY THEIR SHARE OF INFRA-STRUCTURE COST.

DO AN ANALYSIS OF WHITETAIL RIDGE OTHER DEVELOPMENTS OVER 50 HOUSING UNITS, APPROVED IN THE

Subject: Draft Public Facilities Element

Dear Members of the Whitefish Community Development Board,

We find the draft report written by staff to be thorough and informative, with reasonable goals and objectives. We encourage the Community Development Board to adopt the draft as-is, with the following considerations:

1) In the opening quotation, which begins, “we will prioritize the provision…” the phrase “use infrastructure to manage rather than respond to development” appears. This phrasing is somewhat awkward, and may read better by replacing the word “manage” with the word “direct” or “guide.” The word manage implies an anti-development framing, while the words direct or guide more accurately summarize an end-goal of guiding development patterns (as the city has limited control over how much development happens at any given time) in ways that are more cost-effective for the city, more environmentally friendly, and increase general quality of life for Whitefish residents.
    a) Similarly, this should be addressed in the last sentence of paragraph 3 on this same page (page 1).
2) On page 5, under “Fire Response Travel Distances,” it would be helpful to link this to the phrasing on page 1, paragraph 3 stating “cities generally incur disproportionate additional costs when development occurs at lower densities and further distances.” These same development patterns increase home insurance costs, fire department expenses, and fire department response times. This should be clearly stated in this section also.
3) On page 20, under “City-District Coordination” paragraph 1, clarity could be improved. Are we talking about housing developments? If what is located in a suitable area for a future school?
4) Lastly, we find the goals and objectives to be comprehensive and well-written. We believe that Emergency Services Objective A is one of the most important objectives in this section and must remain as it is currently drafted to read, “the City of Whitefish shall manage the cost of emergency services through prudent land use practices that reduce travel distances by encouraging infill development and limiting sprawl.” You may consider replacing the phrase “limiting sprawl” with the phrase “discouraging sprawl” to strengthen this objective and to use consistent phrasing within the objective.

Beyond these changes, we believe that the draft should be adopted in full as written by staff. This will help the Board to remain on track with its timeline to be able to revisit the Economic Development Element in August. Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

Nathan Dugan, President

ENSURING HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND AMENITIES

"We will prioritize the provision of high-quality municipal services, maintain appropriate service levels, use infrastructure to manage rather than respond to development, and provide exceptional parks and amenities to serve the needs of current and future residents and visitors."

This Public Facilities Element focuses on the infrastructure, facilities and services provided by the City of Whitefish, the Whitefish School District and other public or quasi-public entities in the planning jurisdiction. This includes general city administration, public works, police, fire and emergency services, schools, libraries, cultural and civic services, parks and recreational facilities, water, sanitary sewer, wastewater treatment, storm sewer, and solid waste disposal. The transportation network is also an essential city infrastructure. Due to its complexity and importance, it is being addressed as a separate plan element.

Two priorities regarding infrastructure have consistently been identified by residents: having the necessary infrastructure in place at the time of development (known as concurrency), and ensuring development takes place where utilities are located or easily extended. New growth should be encouraged only in areas where adequate public water, sewer, fire protection and emergency services, schools, transit, and roads are currently available or planned. If expansion occurs in areas without adequate planning or are in areas difficult to serve, it can challenge a city's ability to keep up with increased demand for utilities and services.

Cities generally incur disproportionate additional costs when development occurs at lower densities and further distances. For example, building and maintaining infrastructure like roads and utilities is more costly over longer distances. Providing public services like police and fire protection over large areas can strain municipal resources, increase response times and reduce the level of service. Infrastructure should be viewed as a tool to help manage growth, not as a service provided in reaction to growth pressures.

The purpose of this element is to identify the various public services and facilities, and ensure for their provision, maintenance and improvement required to fulfill the current and future needs of the area's residents and businesses as sustainably and efficiently as possible.

the snow storage lot at the northeast corner of Railway Street and Columbia Avenue was deeded to the Whitefish Housing Authority in 2022, snow storage was transferred to the public works site. The Montana Department of Transportation maintains and plows U.S. Highways 93 and Wisconsin Avenue through the city as well as the associated signal lighting and signage. Flathead County plows and maintains other public roads adjacent to the city that are not part of city limits.

The other two public works divisions are related to *water treatment and wastewater treatment,* located in two different locations. Please refer to the water and wastewater treatment sections for more details.

Future Needs to Serve Projected Population

- Public Works Utility Operations Property: Present resources on the site may be insufficient to accommodate the projected future population. There is currently one mechanic servicing the entire city fleet of vehicles out of a three bay, 3,200 square feet building. As the city population expands, additional fleet vehicles, a larger garage and more mechanics will be needed. Better workspaces are also desired as daily utility operations are being managed out of inadequate and antiquated buildings. Snow storage has been moved to this location which takes up additional space, and more land will be required to accommodate a water tower needed to increase water pressure at the south end of the city. Although vacant areas exist on the property, the site is located on top of a landfill of which the extent is unknown, and additional engineering and remediation efforts may be required. To determine the most efficient future usage of this city property and to accommodate needed improvements and facilities, an analysis and facilities plan is needed. Public Works does not presently have a facilities plan.

- Stormwater – Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES): When Whitefish's fulltime population reaches 10,000, the city becomes subject to a MPDES state stormwater permit which is required by the Environmental Protection Agency through the Montana Department of Environment Quality. These permits are required for communities with stormwater systems separate from the sanitary sewer system (called municipal separate storm sewer systems or "MS4"). The permit contains limits on what can be discharged, as well as monitoring and reporting requirements. Implementation of this permit will involve lengthy coordination, need additional staff and require a new stormwater utility be established financed by utility fees. With the population nearing this threshold, the city should begin preparing by ensuring mapping of outfalls, stormwater treatment facilities, and green infrastructure, both public and private, is accurate.

This growth policy should acknowledge the Critical Areas Ordinance and endorse its goals and objectives, which have been largely implemented within the Whitefish Subdivision regulations. Additionally, this chapter should reference and support Whitefish Water Quality Protection codes noted in Title 12, Chapter 4. Stormwater retention facilities should be constructed and maintained in accordance with Circular DEQ-8 and, additionally, within the bounds of the Whitefish City Code (i.e. 12-4-26, WCC).

Projected Needs/Issues

With an increase in population and expanding city limits through annexation, there will be a need for additional staff, approximately one to one and a half full time employees, to handle the increase in cases.

PARKS & RECREATION

Parks and recreation play a vital role in fostering a healthy and vibrant community. They provide residents with accessible green spaces for recreation, a place to engage in activities, increase social interaction, and promote physical and mental well-being. Parks also enhance the beauty of neighborhoods, offer a safe habitat for local wildlife, and contribute to environmental sustainability. Additionally, special events and recreation programs serve participants of all ages, promoting active and healthy lifestyles. Connecting people with nature, parks, and associated recreation helps create a sense of belonging and shared responsibility within the community.

Parks and recreational amenities are highly valued by the Whitefish community. During visioning sessions, outdoor access and recreation ranked first in what participants valued the most about Whitefish, and parks and open space ranked as the second most important element of the Whitefish Community (after "small town feel"). As new development occurs, the City should promote open spaces. It is unclear how and if the City has referenced the landscape standards and the importance of native plants in the landscaping. New parks are prime opportunities to integrate proper stormwater management. Historically, the City has discussed creating an open space plan for the City. Please provide an update on the plan and if that is an important goal given the increase in population Whitefish is experiencing.

Whitefish Parks & Recreation Department

The Whitefish Parks and Recreation Department maintains parks, trails, shared use paths, boulevard trees, and city-owned properties. It also operates key community facilities, such as the City Beach public boat launch, including Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) inspections and decontamination services. The department offers a wide range of recreational opportunities tailored to meet the community's diverse needs. Signature programs include the Stumptown Summer Day Camp, After School Program, and youth sports programs, which provide children and teens with opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and community engagement.

The department consists of 11 full-time staff members and approximately 245 annual volunteers. These include 70 regular volunteers and 175 Whitefish Trail contributors whose invaluable efforts support events, trail maintenance, and a variety of recreation programs. Since 2013, the department has significantly expanded its staffing, increasing from eight to eleven full-time positions to meet the community's growing needs and expectations[5].

DRAFT

Addressing current space limitations is a priority. Plans include the development of a new recreation center and two satellite facilities to enhance capacity for community programs, ensuring all residents have access to high-quality recreation opportunities. Additionally, there is potential to build seasonal, workforce housing and a campground adjacent to the parks maintenance shop, providing both additional services and a sustainable revenue source to support departmental initiatives. The City should develop policies for City owned workforce housing to ensure that such housing not only benefits the City, but meets the long term affordability of the City.

Revitalizing existing parks and green spaces remains a critical focus, with planned improvements centered on usability, accessibility, and environmental sustainability. Upgrades to irrigation systems and the adoption of eco-friendly landscaping practices, as outlined in the Irrigation and Landscape Master Plans, will further the department's commitment to conservation goals.

During visioning sessions, there were numerous comments regarding parks. These comments included removing the fence at Soroptimist Park because it is being used as a dog park, better access and boat launches at the Baker Bridge, river access at the "old" hospital property, better river access near JP Road and additional stand up paddleboard (SUP) storage at City Beach. (Please see the Transportation section regarding visioning comments regarding trails.)

The city does not favor the removal of the fence at Soroptimist Park because the fence contains activities such as soccer games as well as small child playground at the park, but the city is looking at locations for a possible dog park on the north side of town. Improvements next to the Baker Bridge are currently occurring, and these include stone steps down to the river and native planting to stabilize stream banks. This will make it easier to access the river for a kayak or SUP user. There have been conversations regarding boat access at the old hospital property although no formal plan has been established yet. Improvements are currently occurring at JP Road to improve access to the river, and the parks department is looking at additional non-motorized boat storage at City Beach. There are also plans to develop a City Beach Redevelopment Plan.

OTHER PUBLIC AND CIVIC FACILITIES

The quality of Whitefish's arts, cultural, and performance facilities is a source of community pride. Civic and cultural buildings provide spaces where community members can gather, engage in activities, and promote education, creativity and cultural preservation. Whitefish has historically been very supportive of the arts, recreation, and education and has an unusually high number of public and quasi-public facilities for a city of its size. Many of these facilities have been funded by the community at a grassroots level. Below is a brief discussion of these facilities.

DRAFT

All garbage and refuse collected in the city is disposed of at the Flathead County Landfill located south of the city between Whitefish and Kalispell. While Flathead County provides a collection site at the landfill for disposal of household chemicals (and holds a monthly Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day) there is no such facility in Whitefish. Flathead County Solid Waste (FCSW) reports having 1.57 million + 18.1 million cubic yards of licensed airspace for refuse at the County Landfill with no current deficiencies or Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) violations.

Recycling

According to the Waste Not Project, recycling is limited in Montana because of the distance from recycling markets. The city no longer offers centralized collection sites (the temporary site at the corner of Columbia Avenue and Railway Streets was permanently closed in 2022 due to contamination, overuse and being economically inefficient and is being redeveloped for affordable housing). However, recycling services remain available to those interested through private vendors and county-operated drop off sites located throughout the valley. Republic Services reported the amount of recycling collected in Flathead County in 2023 was 689 tons, a decrease of about 5% from 2022.[9] Today, the U.S. recycling rate for plastics sits at about 5 or 6 percent; it has never risen above 10 percent[10]. The County now has a privately-run glass recycling company, Blackbear Recycling. Blackbear is also able to recycle glass, locally, turning it into usable sand. The City should consider integrating glass and plastic recycling bins throughout the downtown area. The City should consider, given the expanded recycling efforts within the County, including Blackbear Recylcing, the City should consider re-bidding the service for recycling to expand options for the community.

In alignment with the 2007 Growth Policy, Climate Action Plan, and Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, the City Council is continuing to re-evaluate recycling in the city. If a new central collection were to be opened, it would need to be staffed and well designed (i.e. paved and fenced).

Organic Waste Diversion Programs (Composting)

Composting food scraps is the most energy-efficient form of recycling and provides local jobs and soil remediation products. Dirt Rich Compost, a company in Columbia Falls, offers commercial and residential service and yard waste drop off in the Flathead Valley. Many local businesses and restaurants in Whitefish recycle with Dirt Rich, including the City of Whitefish, Explore Whitefish, and the North Valley Food Bank. During 2023, Whitefish City Hall diverted 180 gallons (about 684 lbs.) of organic material from the landfill by using Dirt Rich's food scrap pickup. This amount potentially prevented 466 net pounds of CO2 emissions, or the equivalent of driving 532 miles in a standard vehicle[11]. According to the Whitefish Climate Action Plan, the three schools in Whitefish monthly compost more than 1,000 pounds of materials, in coordination with Dirt Rich.

[9] Source: Solid Waste Board- January 2025 Board Packet
[10] Source: https://grist.org/article/petrochemical-companies-have-known-for-40-years-that-plastics-

DRAFT

The City of Whitefish currently dries biosolids generated during the wastewater treatment process on site for several years before hauling the dried material to the landfill. The Whitefish Climate Action Plan and Sustainable Tourism Management Plan notes materials such as woody matter, leaves, and yard waste could be mixed with the biosolids at this location. Food scraps would not be accepted. Options for final usage of the compost are not specified. The City should consider turning biosolids into energy, through innovative technologies such as the Varcor system[1].

Climate Action Plan Relationship

The 2018 Climate Action Plan (CAP) calls for maximizing waste diversion opportunities throughout the community to meet its long-term sustainability goals. The CAP strategies and actions go beyond recycling and composting to include waste reduction in city and school district operations (ex. deconstruction material salvage, paper reduction policy, and phasing out Styrofoam).

Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Relationship

The City of Whitefish 2024 Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) was developed to incorporate sustainability principles into destination marketing and tourism management efforts. The Plan supports citywide curbside recycling, expanding composting services, and recycling construction materials.

Projected Needs

The landfill capacity is sufficient to meet the needs of Whitefish and Flathead County for the next 70 to 90 years. If needed, Republic Services could add trucks and drivers to meet increased demand in the city. FCSW has submitted an expansion document to DEQ to expand the landfill's capacity on their property.

WHITEFISH SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Whitefish School District #44, established on September 21, 1903, is located at the north end of Flathead Valley. The District is 307 square miles and serves students in grades Kindergarten to 12th grade in three separate schools.

According to the October 7, 2024, Flathead County Superintendent of Schools Statistical Report, Whitefish School District #44 had 1,965 students; 1,336 in the elementary schools (K-8) and 629 in the high school. This is a 13% increase in the elementary schools (K-8) and 29% increase in the high school over the past 10-years. The District has 250 staff to support the schools.

There are three schools in Whitefish School District #44. Muldown Elementary, the grade school, serves children in grades K-4. Muldown is a new building constructed in 2020 to the west of the former grade school, was designed to serve up to 836 students and is at

[1] https://sedron.com/our-technology/#:~:text=The%20VarcorTM%20technology%20is,where%20it%20undergoes%20mechanical%20recompression.

PUBLIC FACILITIES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Public Works

Goal:

1. Provide efficient and high-quality public works services to support the health and safety of the current and future needs of the community.

   Objectives:

   a. Prepare a public works facilities master plan to determine the adequacy of existing public works facilities to accommodate the projected population, including environmental assessment of the utility operations property, necessary site improvements and potential future land uses.

   b. Begin preparations to become compliant with Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements for a MS4 community by ensuring accurate mapping of all public and private outfalls, stormwater facilities and green infrastructure. Prioritize the integrate of eco-friendly, "green" stormwater management through collaboration with the Flathead Conservation District and educational support with the Whitefish Lake Institute.

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Emergency Services

Goal:

1. Continue to provide the most modern and efficient fire, public safety and emergency services to the visitors and citizens of the Whitefish area.

   Objectives:

   a. The City of Whitefish shall manage the cost of emergency services through prudent land use practices that reduce travel distances by encouraging infill development and limiting sprawl.

   b. Continue to work with other public safety providers to evaluate mutual aid agreements and consolidation of service opportunities.

   c. Future expansions of the city limits should be within areas served with adequate emergency response times unless otherwise in the best interest of public health and safety.

   d. If city annexation of the Big Mountain community occurs, services of the Big Mountain Fire District Fire Station should be retained and improved to provide adequate response times.

TO:

Alan Tiefenbach
City of Whitefish
Whitefish City Hall 59937

DREAM adaptive recreation
WWW.DREAMADAPTIVE.ORG

DATE:
July 7, 2025

Public Comment from DREAM Adaptive Recreation - Regarding the proposed update to the Public Facilities Element of the Growth Policy

To the City of Whitefish Planning Board and Planning Staff:

On behalf of DREAM Adaptive Recreation, thank you for your continued efforts to enhance public parks and recreation facilities in Whitefish. As a nonprofit that has served this community for 40 years through inclusive outdoor recreation, advocacy, and access projects - we believe every resident and visitor should be able to enjoy our shared public spaces.

We are pleased to see the City's focus on trails, open space, and recreation, but we believe there is an urgent and necessary opportunity to strengthen the plan's commitment to accessibility and universal design across all parks, pathways, and amenities.

We respectfully offer the following recommendations:

1. **Adopt Universal Design Standards:** Embrace universal design as the foundation for all new and renovated parks, trails, and public amenities. This includes elements like firm, stable surfaces, accessible seating and rest areas, integrated play spaces, ADA-compliant restrooms, and routes that connect all amenities without barriers.
2. **Prioritize Accessibility at City Beach:** City Beach remains one of the least accessible public spaces in Whitefish. As a highly trafficked and iconic community asset, it must be usable by people of all ages and abilities. We strongly urge the City to make accessibility a central pillar of the forthcoming City Beach Redevelopment Plan. This includes accessible parking, restrooms, changing room(s), picnic areas, pathways, and non-motorized water access such as ADA-compliant kayak/SUP launch points and beach access mats.
3. **Designate and Empower an ADA Coordinator:** As required under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, cities with 50 or more employees must designate an ADA Coordinator to oversee accessibility compliance. We recommend that the City of Whitefish clearly identify this role, ensure they are actively engaged across departments, and that they are consulted on all future planning and capital improvement projects. An empowered ADA Coordinator helps ensure not just compliance—but genuine inclusion—across programs, facilities, and events. It's important to note that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed over 30 years ago, establishes only the minimum requirements for accessibility. Meeting ADA compliance is not the same as creating inclusive, welcoming environments for all. We urge the City to view accessibility not as a checkbox, but as a baseline — and to adopt a universal design mindset that anticipates the needs of people with diverse abilities, including those with mobility, sensory, cognitive, and age-related challenges.
4. **Engage the Disability Community in Planning:** Individuals with disabilities and organizations like DREAM bring valuable lived experience and insights. Involving these voices early in the design process ensures accessibility solutions are both practical and meaningful.
5. **Conduct Access Audits:** We recommend the City conduct formal accessibility audits of existing parks and recreation spaces. The results can help prioritize improvements and ensure public dollars are invested where they will remove the most barriers.

6. **Ensure Future Recreation Facilities Are Fully Inclusive:** As the City explores plans for a recreation center and satellite facilities, we urge leadership to ensure they are universally designed, offer adaptive programming or equipment, and are accessible via transit and shared-use paths.

7. Revise the Parks and Recreation Goals to Include Accessibility: While we appreciate the City's commitment to expanding parks and recreation opportunities, we are concerned that the current Parks and Recreation Goals and Objectives (page 26) make no mention of accessibility, disability, aging populations, or inclusive design. For a community that values connection, wellness, and outdoor engagement, it is essential that these goals explicitly state a commitment to serving people of all ages and abilities. We respectfully recommend revising the Parks and Recreation Goal to reflect this priority and including language such as:

"*Ensure that all park spaces, programs, and facilities are designed and maintained to be inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to individuals of all ages and abilities, including people with disabilities, older adults, and young children.*"

Whitefish has a powerful opportunity to lead. With intentional planning and meaningful investment in accessibility, we can set a new standard for what it means to be an inclusive, welcoming mountain town. DREAM Adaptive Recreation believes Whitefish can be a model city—not just for ADA compliance, but for truly inclusive design that honors the dignity and diversity of every person who lives here or comes to experience the outdoors.

Building a community that works for everyone doesn't happen by accident—it requires intention, collaboration, and leadership. We applaud the City's continued investment in recreation and respectfully urge that accessibility be treated as foundational, not optional.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and for your ongoing commitment to building a more inclusive Whitefish.

Sincerely,

Julie Tickle
Executive Director
406-885-9539

July 7, 2025

Alan Tiefenbach
City of Whitefish
Whitefish City Hall 59937

To the City of Whitefish Planning Board and Planning Staff:

Please accept these comments from Safe Trails Whitefish regarding the proposed update to the Draft Public Facilities Element. We understand that the paths and trails will be addressed in more depth in the Transportation Element, but there is a critical overlap with both parks and trails as places that people go to experience the outdoors--VERY IMPORTANT to citizens of the Whitefish area.

Overall, the biggest issues that could be strengthened in this section are:

1) Prioritize accessibility and availability of places to get outdoors for all ages and abilities as a goal and specific policies;
2) Clearly identify, integrate and cross reference all plans that impact paths (transportation) and trails (recreation) as highly valued recreation priorities;
3) Support establishment of networks of interconnected recreation systems (parks, trails, paths, which include both parks and trails.)

We recommend that the Parks and Recreation goal be expanded, and that there are additional objectives to directly address connecting paths and trails, including river paddle routes, as recreation assets. (Perhaps the right place for the paddle trail is the "Transportation" element, but it is definitely a recreation experience.) The fact that parks, trails, paths and recreation are split over 3 different plans and multiple departments can be an impediment to implementation.

The following are specific to the overall text:

1) P. 1 In the introduction, recognize the parks, paths and trails are interconnected for both recreation and transportation, but that the trails will be treated in depth as transportation systems in another element.
2) P. 8 Clarify that trails and paths systems used as transportation and connections to parks and other trails will be addressed in the Transportation element.
3) P. 9 Approved Plans—include 2022 Transportation Plan; 2020 Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (upd. 2024). 2023 River Trail Improvement Project should be separate bullet.
4) P. 10 what do asterisks in Facilities table signify?

5) P. 11 Parkland acquisition should include funding for development and maintenance planning.
6) Recommend addition of staff to meet current needs (not 13 years ago).

Public Facilities Element (2025)	**Comments**
Goal: Expand and improve the diversity of Parks, open spaces and high quality recreational opportunities for the growing Whitefish area.	This replicates the goal from the 2007 Growth Policy. The 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan also included guiding principles regarding **accessibility, connectivity, and sustainability**. These concepts should be reflected in the overall goal statement.
Objectives	
A. The City of Whitefish shall adopt an updated Comprehensive park and recreation master plan to assess current parkland and recreational programs and facilities, identify and anticipate future needs, and explore funding options for new and upgraded facilities.	This was an action item in the 2007 Growth Policy. The assessment and update has been on the books but not completed. How can we make this a priority? The Parks and Rec Plan is 12 years old and the Connect Whitefish Plan is 9 years old. Any future plans should integrate parks and recreation with non-motorized trails. The Growth Policy policies should be specific enough to ensure integration. Are the existing plans, goals and policies of the existing plans being adopted by reference until they are modified? Has the City considered a mechanism for integrated parks and trails with community-led, "neighborhood" concept developments (e.g. South Whitefish area?_
b. Develop and implement strategies to address maintenance challenges associated with aging facilities, ensuring continued functionality and appeal.	Maintenance strategies should also incorporate accessibility for all ages and abilities and sustainability principles that preserve water quality, support urban forestry, and are wildlife friendly.
c. Enhance trail and park connectivity to promote outdoor recreation and alternative transportation.	Modify this objective to specifically reference designing trails for accessibility, addressing gaps in connectivity and to planning for water trails.
d. Collaborate with local organizations and volunteers to expand recreational opportunities and foster community engagement.	Expand to say "Collaborate with area stakeholders to plan for an integrated recreational system that expand opportunities, achieves multiple objectives (recreation, sustainability, health,...) and fosters community engagement."

e. Establish sustainable practices including upgraded irrigation system and eco-friendly landscaping to support environmental conservation goals.	This objective is part of a sustainable maintenance strategy. (See comments for Objective B). Instead replace with a broader to **promote a green infrastructure network** of connected greenways and natural corridors that enhance stormwater management, preserves natural areas, provide wildlife corridors and improves air quality.
Proposed New Objectives	
Water access and water quality	The 2013 Master Plan had a priority goal for expanding and preserving public access to lakes, rivers and streams via environmentally responsible design that protects water quality and wildlife habitats.
Health Benefits & Active Aging	Parks and recreation programs should promote physical activity, public health and active aging, and disability access through walkability, accessible design features, passive recreation, nature-based options and convenient locations to all neighborhoods.
Community Led Area Plans	Facilitate and participate in community-led parks, trail and path connections design plan such as the South Whitefish/Riverlakes Park area.

Sincerely,

SAFE TRAILS WHITEFISH

Diane Conradi

diane@outdoorcommunitypartners.org

https://safetrailswhitefish.org/

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, July 7, 2025 8:29 AM
To: Jared Sibbitt; Michelle Howke
Subject: public comment, growth policy

Hi Jared,

Part of the challenge of releasing portions of Vision Whitefish 2045 one piece at a time is the readers reviewing it cannot see how it will all piece together (until you see the complete product).

The Public Facilities Element is focusing on the capability of our public facilities to accommodate the current and anticipated increase in population over the next 20 years, and what, if any improvements are required.

You might have noticed a quick reference in the parks and recreation section of this element that says:

" As the majority of the trails and shared-use paths in Whitefish are considered an integral component of the transportation system and not merely a recreational amenity, the trails network is discussed in detail in the Transportation Element."

During visioning sessions "multimodality" and "walkability" was listed as the highest-ranking topic when respondents were asked how they envisioned Whitefish in 20 years and what they valued most about Whitefish.

Because of this, we decided the trails network should not be looked at as a recreational amenity but as an "active transportation network" and should be given equal priority as the road network. We did this so non-motorized routes could be prioritized for work programs, capital improvements, funding, etc.

The Transportation Element is nearly complete, and this is scheduled to come in front of the Community Development Board in September. All of what you have listed regarding connectivity, maps of existing and future trail connections and encouraging connectivity between our communities will be in there.

I hope this clarified everything. Feel free to circle back if you want more information.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413

From: Jared Sibbitt
Sent: Saturday, July 5, 2025 5:05 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: public comment, growth policy

You don't often get email from Learn why this is important

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi there, just wanted to make public comment on the Whitefish Growth Policy coming up for discussion July 16th.

I assert that we should prioritize trails and pathways that connect existing pathways and that connect communities and neighborhoods both within and beyond Whitefish City Limits. Prioritizing trails and pathways and connectivity benefits the residents of our town and the valley at large, and visitors, by reducing traffic, improving public safety and health, promoting real estate value and sustainable development and growth, and making a happier, healthier place to live. More trails, more better.

Thank you,
Jared Sibbitt

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, July 7, 2025 8:25 AM
To: Rebecca B; Michelle Howke
Subject: RE: City of Whitefish Growth Policy

Hi Rebecca,

We agree with you 100%.

Part of the challenge of releasing portions of Vision Whitefish 2045 one piece at a time is the readers reviewing it cannot see how it will all piece together (until you see the complete product).

The Public Facilities Element is focusing on the capability of our public facilities to accommodate the current and anticipated increase in population over the next 20 years, and what, if any improvements are required.

You might have noticed a quick reference in the parks and recreation section of this element that says:

" As the majority of the trails and shared-use paths in Whitefish are considered an integral component of the transportation system and not merely a recreational amenity, the trails network is discussed in detail in the Transportation Element."

During visioning sessions "multimodality" and "walkability" was listed as the highest-ranking topic when respondents were asked how they envisioned Whitefish in 20 years and what they valued most about Whitefish.

Because of this, we decided the trails network should not be looked at as a recreational amenity but as an "active transportation network" and should be given equal priority as the road network. We did this so non-motorized routes could be prioritized for work programs, capital improvements, funding, etc.

We did mention the WF Trail in the PF Element because it really is a recreational amenity and is not used so much for actual transportation.

The Transportation Element is nearly complete, and this is scheduled to come in front of the Community Development Board in September. All of what you have listed regarding connectivity, the importance of completing gaps in the WF River Trail, and maps of existing and future trail connections will be in there.

Stay tuned, we have not missed this topic! (BTW, I am also a mountain biker.)

I hope this clarified everything. Feel free to circle back if you want more information.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413

-----Original Message-----
From: Rebecca B
Sent: Friday, July 4, 2025 9:30 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: City of Whitefish Growth Policy

ATTENTION: External Email - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk<mailto:help@cityofwhitefish.gov> if in doubt.

Hello Michelle and Alan,
I am writing to request that the City of Whitefish Growth Policy prioritize the completion of key trail connections for the Whitefish River Trail. I would also like to see the City focus on recreation spaces and opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, as these opportunities have an outsized influence on quality of life and health and wellbeing for residents and visitors alike.

Specifically, I would like to see the Public Facilities Element of the Growth Policy prioritize path and trail connectivity, cyclist and pedestrian safety, and the completion of the missing Whitefish River Trail segments (specifically the Riverbend Condo connection and the River Lakes trail network). In conjunction with this work, the River Lakes Park should be developed for the benefit of all Whitefish residents, and especially the rapidly growing neighborhoods in south Whitefish.

As the former executive director of Flathead Area Mountain Bikers, I worked closely with the City of Whitefish and was always very appreciative of the City's commitment to trail connectivity and prioritizing support for outdoor recreation opportunities. Trail and path connectivity and building out new spaces for safe recreation have synergistic benefits to the community that include a mentally and physically healthier population, and also has the benefit of spreading out trails and park users across more area of recreational space as our valley grows. As this growth occurs, our recreation opportunities must also grow, connect in a safe manner, and modernize. I feel that the City's Growth Policy should strive to expand these safe recreational opportunities as the City's (and Flathead Valley's) population continues to increase.

Thank you for your work on this important strategic planning document.
I look forward to seeing the City's vision for the future to include expanded recreation opportunities and trail/path connectivity and safety.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Briber

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Craig Workman
Sent: Tuesday, November 26, 2024 8:40 AM
To: Richard Hildner; Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Bridger Kelch; Cole Hadley
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish-Public Facilities and Transportation

Richard,

Thank you for your continued interest in the update of the City's Growth Policy. As we've mentioned before, each emergency will have its own unique set of variables to deal with. Some could require people to shelter in place, others may require travel in one direction or another.

I will need Bridger and Cole to confirm this, but in the case of a wildfire, there will be traffic control in place to provide two lanes of southbound egress from Big Mountain Road to HWY 40. There is no question that the bulb outs in town (such as 1st & Baker) choke traffic, but that is very much intended both to calm the traffic, and provide a shorter crossing distance for pedestrians. Also, when the viaduct is reconfigured, hopefully next spring/summer, there will be two 12' travel lanes with 6' shoulders on each side for a total of 36' between the jersey barriers.

Craig C. Workman, PE
Director of Public Works
City of Whitefish | 418 E. 2nd Street |Whitefish, MT 59937
O: (406) 863-2455 | F: (406) 863-2419

From: Richard Hildner
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2024 5:57 PM
To: Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.org>; Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.org>
Subject: Vision Whitefish-Public Facilities and Transportation

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** - This email originated from outside of the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Craig and Alan,
I've been spending a little time recently thinking about the Public Facilities and Transportation element in the Growth Plan. At the most recent FireSafe Flathead meeting the inadequacy of Whitefish's transportation infrastructure in a wildfire emergency came up. This was just a comment in passing and I can't remember who made it. None-the-less, it is an issue that I believe must be addressed under any growth scenario. It must also be addressed in the City Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

It concerns me greatly that our current arterials, particularly Baker, Spokane/93, Edgewood, and Wisconsin have choke points that preclude three lanes of travel; two lanes of egress and one lane of ingress for emergency vehicles. Baker Bridge for example is 25 feet wide, as is the intersection at the VFW. Similar constraints exist on Spokane/93 and Edgewood, among others.

Many of the collectors are also problematic; Lupfer for example. With parking on both sides of the street these streets become *de facto* one way with no control as to direction of travel. This problem will only be compounded if, as has been suggested, the city core becomes more dense and surrounding streets more clogged due to the absence of any required off-street parking.

The absence of east/west connectors has been noted but must be recognized as an impediment to growth in these two directions.

Transportation infrastructure must precede growth, not follow it.

I think most would agree that wildfire is sure to come to Whitefish. It is only a question of where, when, and with what intensity. We must plan for that reality given that we face a warmer, drier, and prolonged wildfire environment for the foreseeable future.

I continue to desire to be a part of solving the Whitefish growth conundrum.

Best regards,
Richard

Richard Hildner
[redacted] 5th St.
Whitefish , MT 59937
[redacted]

PUBLIC FACILITIES ELEMENT DRAFT
FFRG COMMENTS
JULY 2, 2025

Page 1:

¶1: Delete …the Whitefish School District… . If you call out the WFSD then you will have to call out all the other quasi-public entities.

¶2: What does “without adequate planning” mean? The entire last sentence is confusing.

¶3: Replace “like” with “such as”.

Page 2:

¶2: City Administration: Delete the first two sentences in this paragraph. Substitute “serves” for “serving” in the third sentence.

¶2: In the last sentence delete “at some point in the future.” This will avoid redundancy in the sentence.

¶3: Add “treatment” after …efficient waste…

¶5: In describing the Public Works Divisions, why the use of italics?

Page 3:

¶1: Delete …”that are not part of of city limits”.

¶3: Revise the 2nd sentence to read, “Currently one mechanic services … “ Also, substitute “improved” in place of “better”.

¶4: add “and MS4 compliant.” to the end of the last sentence in the paragraph.

Page 5:

¶:3: Note that the Carnegie Mellon University study is out of date.

Page 6:

¶1: In the second sentence delete “with the intention of hiring an additional three”.

¶3: What is the projected population number that can be served by the Whitefish Fire Department?

It should also be noted that there is only one point of egress/ingress north of Edgewood

Page 8:

¶1: It is unclear if the additional staffing need by the Court is at the projected 2045 population estimate or sometime before that.

Page 10:

¶2: Parks Inventory: Delete the last sentence.

Page 12:

¶1: Add ”affordable” to the second sentence. “… access to ‘affordable’ high quality… .”

¶4: Note that the stone steps are at the Riverside Park footbridge, not at at Baker Street.

Page 14:

¶3: The WAVE also has a pre-school/daycare facility located within the building.

Page 17:

¶1: The O’Shaughnessy Center is owned and operated by the Whitefish Theatre Company (WTC). Also note the spelling of theatre vs. theater.

Page 25: Public Works Goal:

Add; Objective c. Prepare a Public Works Facilities Plan

Page 26: Emergency Services Goal

Add: Objective h. Prepare a robust Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

Add: Objective i. Create a workable evacuation plan in the event of wildfire or toxic spill in the rail yard.

Other areas of concern that we feel should be addressed:

Include the need to recognize the gaps in the City bike-pad trail system, especially the Riverbend Condos section.

Recognize the importance of the Whitefish River as an important recreation amenity and a part of the trail system.

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CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

The Following is a summary of the items to come before the City Council at its regular session to be held on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at **7:10 p.m**. at City Hall 418 East Second Street, 2nd Floor
Hybrid (In-person and/or Remotely via Zoom)

To attend the meeting via Zoom and provide live comment attendees should go to the web link below. **Raise your virtual hand to indicate you want to provide comment. Due to occasional technical difficulties, the most reliable way to participate is through in-person attendance. Electronic/virtual means are not guaranteed.**

Meeting Link**:** Zoom Link Meeting Number: **849 2808 8413** Password: **59937**

NOTICE: Effective **September 15, 2025,** live streaming of meetings on YouTube will no longer be available. To watch meetings live, please use the **Zoom Link** provided above. A **recording of the meeting** will be uploaded to the City of Whitefish YouTube channel the following day.

- We encourage individuals to provide written public comment; to the City Clerk, Michelle Howke at mhowke@cityofwhitefish.org or deliver by 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, January 20, 2026, to City Hall. Written comments should include name, address, should be short and concise, courteous, and polite. All written comments received by 4:00 p.m. will be provided to the City Council and appended to the packet following the meeting.
- Public comment by those attending the meeting "live" via Zoom or in-person will be limited to three minutes per individual.

Ordinance numbers start with 26-01. Resolution numbers start with 26-03

1) CALL TO ORDER

2) PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3) COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC– (This time is set aside for the public to comment on items that are either on the agenda, but not a public hearing or on items not on the agenda. City officials do not respond during these comments but may respond or follow-up later on the agenda or at another time. The mayor has the option of limiting such communications to three minutes depending on the number of citizens who want to comment and the length of the meeting agenda)

4) COMMUNICATIONS FROM VOLUNTEER BOARDS

5) CONSENT AGENDA (The consent agenda is a means of expediting routine matters that require the Council's action. Debate does not typically occur on consent agenda items. Any member of the Council may remove any item for debate. Such items will typically be debated and acted upon prior to proceeding to the rest of the agenda.)
   a) Minutes from January 5, 2026, Special Session (p.588)
   b) Minutes from January 5, 2026, Regular Meeting (p.589)
   c) Consideration of a request for Final Plat for Hope Corner Subdivision, a 2-lot subdivision located at 1150 Wisconsin Avenue, zoned WR-2 (Two-Family Residential District) (WFP 26-01) (p.598)

6) PUBLIC HEARINGS (Items will be considered for action after public hearings) (Resolution No. 07-33 establishes a 30-minute time limit for applicant's land use presentations.)

7) COMMUNICATION FROM CITY ATTORNEY
   a) Ordinance No. 26-__; An Ordinance to repeal Title 2, Chapter 10, Architectural Review Committee of the Whitefish City Code (First Reading) (p.629)

8) COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER
   a) Written report enclosed with the packet. Questions from Mayor and Council? (p.632)
   b) Other items arising between January 14th through January 20th

9) COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILORS
   a) Consideration to appoint a member to the Climate Action Plan Committee to complete the term ending December 31, 2026 – Mayoral Appointment (p.634)
   b) Letter from Citizens for Better Flathead regarding population projection per MLUPA requirements (p.635)

10) ADJOURNMENT (Resolution 08-10 establishes 11:00 p.m. as end of meeting unless extended to 11:30 by majority)

The following Principles for Civil Dialogue are adopted on 2/20/2007 for use by the City Council and by all boards, committees and personnel of the City of Whitefish:

- We provide a safe environment where individual perspectives are respected, heard, and acknowledged.

- We are responsible for respectful and courteous dialogue and participation.

- We respect diverse opinions as a means to find solutions based on common ground.

- We encourage and value broad community participation.

- We encourage creative approaches to engage public participation.

- We value informed decision-making and take personal responsibility to educate and be educated.

- We believe that respectful public dialogue fosters healthy community relationships, understanding, and problem-solving.

- We acknowledge, consider and respect the natural tensions created by collaboration, change and transition.

- We follow the rules and guidelines established for each meeting.

Adopted by Resolution 07-09
February 20, 2007

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January 14, 2026

The Honorable Mayor Muhlfeld and City Councilors
City of Whitefish
Whitefish, Montana

Mayor Muhlfeld and City Councilors:

Tuesday, January 20, 2026 City Council Agenda Report

There will be a work session at 5:00pm for a discussion with Carla Belski, Community Services Coordinator on City Beach boat launch fees and at 5:30pm Alan Tiefenbach, Long-Range Planner, will provide an update to the Vision Whitefish 2045 Growth Policy update. Food will be provided.

The regular Council meeting will begin at 7:10pm.

CONSENT AGENDA (The consent agenda is a means of expediting routine matters that require the Council's action. Debate does not typically occur on consent agenda items. Any member of the Council may remove any item for debate. Such items will typically be debated and acted upon prior to proceeding to the rest of the agenda.)

a) Minutes from January 5, 2026, Special Session (p.588)
b) Minutes from January 5, 2026, Regular Meeting (p.589)
c) Consideration of a request for Final Plat for Hope Corner Subdivision, a 2-lot subdivision located at 1150 Wisconsin Avenue, zoned WR-2 (Two-Family Residential District) (WFP 26-01) (p.598)

RECOMMENDATION: Staff respectfully recommend the City Council approve the Consent Agenda.

Items "a & b" are administrative matters; Item "c" is a quasi-judicial matter.

PUBLIC HEARINGS (Items will be considered for action after public hearings) (Resolution No. 07-33 establishes a 30-minute time limit for applicant's land use presentations.)

There no public hearing advertised.

COMMUNICATION FROM CITY ATTORNEY

a) Ordinance No. 26-__; An Ordinance to repeal Title 2, Chapter 10, Architectural Review Committee of the Whitefish City Code (First Reading) (p.629)

From City Attorney Angela Jacobs staff report.

History

Title 2, Chapter 10 of the Whitefish City Code establishes an Architectural Review Committee, the purpose of which is to review and make a recommendation to staff on applications submitted to the City by individuals or entities proposing to construct commercial, industrial, public or municipal buildings, or two-unit townhouses or multi-family residential. The ARC has been instrumental in creating a well-designed community that is aesthetically pleasing for citizens and visitors.

Current Report

Unfortunately, in 2023, the Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill 407 which prohibits municipalities from requiring review from an external board with respect to compliance with local design review criteria. Although the City did change its Code to designate ARC as a recommending body rather than a mandatory process, the City has been challenged by one organization with respect to the continued existence of the ARC.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff respectfully recommend the City Council adopt Ordinance No. 26-__; An Ordinance to repeal Title 2, Chapter 10, Architectural Review Committee of the Whitefish City Code (First Reading).

This item is a legislative matter.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER

a) Written report enclosed with the packet. Questions from Mayor and Council? (p.632)
b) Other items arising between January 14th through January 20th

COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILORS

a) Consideration to appoint a member to the Climate Action Plan Committee to complete the term ending December 31, 2026 – Mayoral Appointment (p.634)
b) Letter from Citizens for Better Flathead regarding population projection per MLUPA requirements (p.635)

ADJOURNMENT

Sincerely,

Dana

Dana Meeker, C.P.A
City Manager

PARLIAMENTARY MOTIONS GUIDE

Based on Robert's Rules of Order Newly Nevised (11th Edition) and www.jimslaughter.com

The motions below are listed in order of precedence. Any motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

PRIVILEDGED MOTIONS

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?	RECONSIDER?
Adjourn	I move to **adjourn**	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	Yes
Take a break	I move to **recess** for	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
Register complaint	I rise to a **question of priviledge**	Yes	No	No	No	None	No
Orders of the day	I call for the **orders of the day**	Yes	No	No	No	None	No

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?	RECONSIDER?
Lay aside temporarily	I move to **lay the question on the table**	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority	Negative vote only
Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes
Limit / extend debate	I move that **debate be limited to...**	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	Yes
Postpone to a certain time	I move to **postpone** the motion to...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
Refer to a committee	I move to **refer** the motion to...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
Amend a motion	I move to **amend** the motion by...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
Kill main motion	I move that the motion be **postponed indefinitely**	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	Affirmative vote only

MAIN MOTIONS

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?	RECONSIDER?
Bring business to motion	**I move that (or "to")...**	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes

No order of precedence. Arise incidentally and decided immediately.

INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?	RECONSIDER?
Enforce rules	**Point of order**	Yes	No	No	No	None	No
Submit matter to assembly	I **appeal** from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority	Yes
Suspend rules	I move to **suspend the rules** which...	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
Avoid main motion altogether	I **object to the consideration** of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3	Negative vote only
Divide motion / question	I move to **divide the question**	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
Demand rising vote	I call for a **division**	Yes	No	No	No	None	No
Paliamentary law question	**Parliamentary inquiry**	Yes (if urgent)	No	No	No	None	No
Request information	A **point of information,** please.	Yes (if urgent)	No	No	No	None	No

No order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else pending.

RENEWAL MOTIONS

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?	RECONSIDER?
Take matter from table	I move to **take from the table...**	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
Cancel or change previous action	I move to **rescind / amend** the motion...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 or majority w/notice	Negative vote only
Reconsider motion	I move to **reconsider** the vote on...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority	No

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WHITEFISH CITY COUNCIL
January 5, 2026
SPECIAL SESSION AT 5:00 PM

1) **Call to Order**

Deputy Mayor Sweeney called the meeting to order. Councilors present were Feury, Davis, Qunell, Caltabiano and Norton. Mayor Muhlfeld was absent. Staff members present were City Manager Meeker, City Clerk Howke, Housing Coordinator Zamoyski, and Planner Macdonald.

2) Interviews

City Council interviewed Ryan Walther and incumbent Keegan Siebenaler for the Climate Action Plan Committee; and Kurt Herzon (via phone), Nina Heller and John Flink for the Whitefish Lake and Lakeshore Protection Committee.

3) Public Comment

None

4) Appointment

Deputy Mayor Sweeney re-appointed, with Council confirmation, Keegan Siebenaler to the Climate Action Plan committee for a two-year term.

Deputy Mayor Sweeney appointed, with Council confirmation, Kurt Herzog to the Whitefish Lake and Lakeshore Protection Committee.

5) Adjourn

Deputy Mayor adjourned the meeting at 6:19 pm and opened the work session.

_____
Deputy Mayor Sweeney

Attest:

_____
Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk

WHITEFISH CITY COUNCIL
January 5, 2026
7:10 P.M.

1) CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Muhlfeld called the meeting to order. Councilors present were Qunell, Feury, Caltabiano, Davis, Sweeney, and Norton. City Staff present were, City Clerk Howke, City Manager Meeker, City Attorney Jacobs, Finance Director Gospodarek, Planning and Building Director Taylor, Public Works Director Workman, Parks and Recreation Director Butts, Deputy Police Chief Conway, Fire Chief Hadley, Planner Macdonald and Long-Range Planner Tiefenbach. Approximately 29 people were in the audience and 3 attended virtually.

2) PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Muhlfeld asked Terri Feury to lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3) OATH OF OFFICE AND SEATING OF COUNCIL (YouTube Video 4:33)

a) Administration of ceremonial oath of office to three (3) City Councilors – Mayor Muhlfeld

Mayor Muhlfeld administered the oath of office for Councilors Caltabiano, Davis and Feury who were re-elected during the 2025 General Election.

b) Election of Deputy Mayor

Councilor Feury, seconded by Councilor Caltabiano, made a motion to elect Councilor Sweeney to serve as Deputy Mayor. The motion carried.

4) PRESENTATION (YouTube Video 12:05)

a) Glacier Nordic Club: Winter Operations Storage Building at Big Mountain Trailhead (p.101)

Jennie Bender, Glacier Nordic Club Executive Director, provided an update on the storage building at the Big Mountain Trailhead. A copy is provided in the packet on the website.

5) COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC– **(This time is set aside for the public to comment on items that are either on the agenda, but not a public hearing or on items not on the agenda. City officials do not respond during these comments but may respond or follow-up later on the agenda or at another time. The mayor has the option of limiting such communications to three minutes depending on the number of citizens who want to comment and the length of the meeting agenda)**

(YouTube Video 20:14)

Jan Metzmaker reminded the Council that she previously presented data showing a serious and growing deer problem in the city and asked for an update on the long-promised deer management plan. She said the situation has worsened, raises safety and disease concerns, and offered to gather information from other cities.

She also expressed concern about increasingly bright LED string lights around town, calling them intrusive and inconsistent with the lighting ordinance. She asked the Council to review enforcement and better educate the community about light-trespass rules.

Toby Scott repeated earlier suggestions: painting signal boxes, adding a traffic light at Baker and 13th, and installing more EV chargers. He also questioned why EV charging spots require a leased permit during business hours after receiving a warning for parking his hybrid there. He suggested allowing limited public use instead.

Manager Meeker explained that the leased-parking rule applies only on weekdays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and the City currently has no way to bill users by the hour for charging. Outside those hours, charging is free.

Mary Beth Moran of Habitat for Humanity said Habitat has more building capacity than available land and wants to construct 22 townhomes on the snow lot using a Community Land Trust model. After reviewing the Depot Park Townhomes plans, Habitat believes it can build the units mostly as designed for under $350,000 each, or $250,000–$300,000 with small changes.

Habitat would build the 30–80% AMI units using staff, volunteers, and homeowner sweat equity, making them eligible for low-interest state mortgages. Units above 80% AMI would be built by their partner, Iron Star Construction. Iron Star could start in spring 2026 and finish by January 2027; Habitat would finish by December 2027.

Moran highlighted the strong community benefits, volunteer involvement, and local partnerships that support Habitat's mixed-income, co-building model.

Garrett Roberson of Habitat Flathead highlighted the group's long, successful history building affordable homes and said their construction capacity is stronger than ever. He emphasized their large volunteer base and ability to design cost-effective, volunteer-friendly homes. He encouraged the Council to review Habitat's proposed designs, noting that small adjustments could lower costs while keeping the homes attractive and well built.

Cameron Blake said the Glacier Nordic Club serves about 3,000 skiers a year and then voiced support for Habitat Flathead's mixed-income housing model. He explained that Habitat can build lower-income units affordably through volunteer labor, discounts, and special mortgage programs, while private builders would handle the 80–150% AMI units. He stressed the value of down-payment assistance and praised Habitat's strong education and mentorship programs that help homeowners succeed long-term.

Kisa Davison of Iron Star Construction said her team has reviewed the approved plans and is confident they can build the homes at reasonable costs. She sees many opportunities for cost-saving adjustments and is eager to discuss them with the City. Iron Star builds 20–30 homes a year and has efficient systems and strong subcontractor relationships that would benefit the project.

Her team is ready to start, and a late-spring launch fits their schedule due to delays on other jobs. She stressed the need for timely Council decisions to lock in pricing. Davison highlighted the rare partnership between the City, Habitat, the Land Trust, and a private builder, calling it a strong community effort to create affordable, attainable homeownership.

Rhonda Fitzgerald voiced strong support for the Glacier Nordic Club's storage building and praised the program's long-term community impact. On the Depot Park Townhomes, she reminded the Council that the original design was created with extensive neighborhood input and urged caution with any changes—value engineering is fine, but the community's work should be respected. She emphasized the need to move forward quickly, noting that creating homeownership opportunities is challenging but urgently needed after ten years of effort.

Mayre Flowers of Citizens for Better Flathead urged stronger City–County cooperation on lakeshore protection as the County begins updating its regulations. She said CBF will recommend improvements such as requiring a surveyor to mark the lakeshore protection zone before work begins, something Whitefish already does.

She also raised concerns about an after-the-fact lakeshore permit for a Whitefish Lake property where blasting occurred without a required survey. The permit includes artificial structures not allowed under County rules and has had no public hearing. Flowers said the permit appears inconsistent with current regulations and asked the Council to urge the County to delay action until proper information and review occur.

Richard Hildner urged the Council to act quickly on the proposed updates to Title 6 for non-motorized vehicles, e-bikes, and golf carts. He pointed to new high-speed electric bikes as a growing safety concern and suggested looking at how Columbia Falls regulates them. He encouraged proactive rules for motorized electronic vehicles while making sure any changes still support mobility-impaired residents.

Keegan Siebenaler of Shelter Whitefish urged the Council to revise the 2025 Housing Needs Assessment, saying the current numbers underestimate Whitefish's true housing shortage. He said both market-rate and subsidized housing are lacking and relying on pre-2020 data gives a false picture of demand. He supported the consultants' recommendation for higher housing targets and asked the Council to formally adopt updated figures, noting they are essential for accurate housing policy, land-use planning, and zoning reforms. He stressed that planning for only 100–150 units per year is not realistic if the real need is closer to 300–400.

Scott Wurster, 222 Montana Avenue, stated he would appreciate hearing some discussion tonight at the appropriate time about what the current status of the O'Shaughnessy property is at the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Edgewood Place.

Mack supported the revised Shelter Whitefish housing needs assessment, saying it raises valid points that counter the current narrative. He stressed the importance of creating the capacity to build more housing—even if not all units are ultimately built—and encouraged expanding opportunities for additional housing development.

"Z" criticized the City and police during public comment regarding an ongoing lawsuit over an alleged racial-profiling traffic stop. She attempted to show a poster and play body-cam audio despite the Mayor's request not to, citing active litigation and rules of civil dialogue. She argued the stop was racially motivated, questioned the delay in issuing the citation, urged the public to watch the released footage, and said the incident was wrong and should concern the community.

6) COMMUNICATIONS FROM VOLUNTEER BOARDS (YouTube Video 1:09:57)

a) Consideration of approval of the Whitefish Lake and Lakeshore Protection Committee Letter to the County Commissioners regarding Shoreline Development Concerns (p.104)

The Council showed support for the letter to be forwarded to the County Commissioners.

b) Consideration of a request from the Whitefish Community Library Board of Trustees to appoint Trustee-in-Training (p.108)

Kelly Peppmeier, Whitefish Community Library Board of Trustees Chair presented the letter that is provided in the packet.

Councilor Qunell made a motion, seconded by Councilor Caltabiano, to appoint Dr. Moira McKinnon Linam to the Library Board of Trustees as Trustee-in-Training. The motion carried.

Toby Scott said the Council's letter to the County Commissioners has been updated to include two overlooked lakeshore violations. He plans to attend the January 14 County Planning Board meeting to push for an interlocal agreement and is also working on changes to state law so the City can manage the county side of Whitefish Lake. He assured the Council that efforts are underway to protect the full lakeshore.

Councilor Caltabiano reported the Bike/Ped Committee met, and discussed and supported the drafted ordinance by the police department regarding motorized vehicles on paths.

7) **CONSENT AGENDA (The consent agenda is a means of expediting routine matters that require the Council's action. Debate does not typically occur on consent agenda items. Any member of the Council may remove any item for debate. Such items will typically be debated and acted upon prior to proceeding to the rest of the agenda.)** (YouTube Video 1:15:24)
   a) **Minutes from December 1, 2025, Special Session (p.112)**
   b) **Minutes from December 1, 2025, Regular Meeting (p.113)**
   c) **Minutes from December 15, 2025, Closed Executive Session**
   d) **Minutes from December 15, 2025, Special Session (p.116)**

Councilor Caltabiano made a motion, seconded by Councilor Sweeney to approve the Consent Agenda. Councilor Norton had corrections to the December 1, 2025, Special Session minutes; the minutes reflect that she was absent, but she was in attendance. (City Clerk Howke went back and realized she had stated that Councilor Caltabiano and Feury were also absent but were in attendance). The motion to approve the Consent Agenda as corrected carried.

8) **PUBLIC HEARINGS (Items will be considered for action after public hearings) (Resolution No. 07-33 establishes a 30-minute time limit for applicant's land use presentations.)**
   a) **Consideration of a request from Whitefish School District for a Conditional Use Permit to develop an expansion of academic and athletic facilities located at 1143 E. 4th Street, zoned as WR-1 (One-Family Residential District) (WCUP 25-13) (p.119)** (YouTube Video 1:15:34)

Planner Lauren Macdonald presented her staff report that is provided in the packet on the website.

Mayor Muhlfeld opened the Public Hearing.

Brandon Theis explained that the school project involves two separate bond-funded components: an athletics facility and an academic building addition. The athletics project includes a new track and field, 1,500-seat bleachers, concessions, restrooms, a practice field, a stormwater pond, and a new sidewalk on 4th Street. The academic project adds a two-story building on Pine Avenue and reworks parking, creating about 388 total stalls—roughly 20 more than today. Overall goals include improving pedestrian safety and traffic flow.

There being no public comment, Mayor Muhlfeld closed the Public Hearing and turned matters over the Council for consideration.

Councilor Norton made a motion, seconded by Councilor Sweeney to approve WCUP 25-13, the Findings of Fact in the staff report, and recommended 11 conditions of approval as recommended by the Whitefish Planning Commission. The motion carried.

b) Consideration of a request from Little Bear Developments No 4, LLC for a Conditional Use Permit to add a Beer and Wine liquor license to expand sales at Bonsai Brewery, located at 549 Wisconsin Avenue, zoned WB-1 (Limited Commercial District) (WCUP 25-12) (p.182) (YouTube Video 1:23:46)

Planning and Building Director Dave Taylor presented his staff report that is provided in the packet.

Mayor Muhlfeld opened the Public Hearing.

David Wright, 25 Fairway View, applicant stated they took over the operations of Bonsai Brewery at the end of June. Food and beverage industry is challenging. They intend to keep Bonsai running in the same vein as the previous owners as a community focal point. From a business point of view, the ability to be open for an extra three hours in the summer (11:00 am to 10:00 pm) would make a huge difference to their business. They are stacking their license on top of that current brewery license. They are going to remain brewery, predominantly selling beer that they brew onsite. This license will allow them to have a full kitchen in the main building.

There being no further public comment, Mayor Muhlfeld closed the Public Hearing and turned matters over to the Council for consideration.

Councilor Qunell made a motion, seconded by Councilor Norton to approve WCUP 25-12, with the eight conditions of approval. The motion carried.

c) Resolution No. 26-01; A Resolution approving an increase in ambulance fees and establishing new fees for certain fire rescue services provided by the Whitefish Fire Department (p.213) (YouTube Video 1:34:23)

City Manager Meeker reviewed her staff report and clarified how ambulance billing works for uninsured patients: they are billed directly, with occasional write-offs approved by the Fire Chief. Rates cannot differ for uninsured patients due to Medicare/Medicaid rules, and the City's roughly 50% collection rate is largely the result of required write-offs.

She said the City cannot offer free service to uninsured residents without another funding source, but the $59-per-year Rescue Care program provides full ambulance coverage for residents and property owners. Those with high-deductible insurance may still face large bills unless enrolled in Rescue Care.

Council discussed fairness, billing for residents versus visitors, and how higher rates lower collection rates. Norton stressed promoting Rescue Care, while Meeker cautioned that enrollment cannot grow too large without affecting revenue needed to operate the service.

Mayor Muhlfeld opened the Public Hearing. There being no public comment, Mayor Muhlfeld closed the Public Hearing and turned matters over to the Council for consideration.

Councilor Sweeney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Qunell to adopt Resolution No. 26-01; A Resolution approving an increase in ambulance fees and establishing new fees for certain fire rescue services provided by the Whitefish Fire Department. Councilor Davis said the ambulance

billing system is unfair and hurts uninsured and under-insured people, and he cannot support raising rates. He believes no one should fear calling EMS and that the broader medical billing system is broken. Councilor Norton agreed and suggested exploring a fund to help those who cannot pay. She noted ambulance services often lose money but are essential. Councilor Qunell asked about collections, and staff explained that accounts only go to collections if someone stops following a payment plan, and the City controls when that happens. **The motion carried 5-1, Councilor Davis voting in opposition.**

Mayor Muhlfeld called for a recess at 9:17pm and reconvened at 9:27pm.

9) COMMUNICATIONS FROM FIRE CHIEF

a) Consideration to award the consulting contract for the Community Wildfire Protection Plan and authorize the City Manager to finalize the professional services agreement (p.242) (YouTube Video 2:17:14)

Fire Chief Hadley presented his staff report that is provided in the packet. **Councilor Norton made a motion, seconded by Councilor Sweeney to award the consulting contract for the Community Wildfire Protection Plan to SWCA Environmental Consultants in the amount of $87,364.73 and authorize the City Manager to finalize the professional services agreement.** Mayor Muhlfeld disclosed that SWCA Environmental Consultants took control of his company River Design Group, 18 months ago. He had no role in the selection process. He will have no affiliation with the project. He will not be voting at any point on the adoption of this plan, and he has no financial gain. **The motion carried.**

10) COMMUNICATION FROM PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

a) Resolution No. 26-02; A Resolution authorizing the submittal of an MCEP Infrastructure Planning Grant Application (p.245) (YouTube Video 2:22:39)

Public Works Director Craig Workman presented his staff report. **Councilor Norton made a motion, seconded by Councilor Sweeney to adopt Resolution No. 26-02; A Resolution authorizing the submittal of an MCEP Infrastructure Planning Grant Application. The motion carried.**

11) COMMUNICATION FROM FINANCE DIRECTOR

a) Review and consideration of the annual 2025 Impact Fee Report (p.249) (YouTube Video 2:24:32)

Finance Director Lanie Gospodarek presented the 2025 Impact Fee Report. Councilor Davis questioned why the proposed fees are dropping so much, saying it shifts costs from developers to taxpayers and creates confusion. Manager Meeker explained that updated peak-demand data from 2022–2024 requires the fees to be lowered. Impact fees are recalculated every five years, and another update may occur in three to five years. **Councilor Norton made a motion, seconded by Councilor Feury to accept the 2025 Impact Fee Report. The motion carried.**

12) COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER (YouTube Video 2:36:28)

a) Written report enclosed with the packet. Questions from Mayor and Council? (p.258)

None

b) Other items arising between December 31st through January 5th

Manager Meeker said two Fire Marshal orders were issued to the O'Piccolos property owners, but with no response, the case now needs to move to court. Director Workman added that an asbestos remediation

company has been hired but has not provided a timeline. Councilor Sweeney urged the City to pursue court action to ensure debris removal, and the Council agreed.

c) Consideration of a request from Northwest Montana Community Land Trust to release the deed restriction on 714 and 610 Trailview Way and request funds from the City (p.259)

Kim Morisaki, Executive Director of the Northwest Montana Community Land Trust, reported that they have an opportunity to purchase 610 Trailview Way and are requesting $20,000 from the Community Housing Fund to support that purchase. She noted a setback with 714 Trailview Way and will know by Wednesday whether that sale can proceed. She also learned that the owner of 506 Trailview Way may be interested in selling as well.

Councilor Davis made a motion, seconded by Councilor Qunell to approve the land trust request pertaining to 610 and 714 Trailview Way along with the request for $40K. The motion carried.

13) COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILORS (YouTube Video 2:44:21)

a) Letter from Shelter WF requesting the City Council adopt the community housing needs projections in the Shelter WF Revised Community Housing Needs Assessment (p.269)

b) Letter from Shelter WF response to the Agnew Beck memo regarding Whitefish Community Housing Needs Assessment Talking Points (p.280)

Mayor Muhlfeld recommended delaying the discussion until the next meeting so Council can fully review the materials. Planner Alan Tiefenbach said housing will be addressed in a February 2 work session after the Planning Commission reviews it. Council will receive the full Vision Whitefish 2045 draft this week and start work sessions on January 20. Tiefenbach explained that the Planning Commission will determine whether the updated housing numbers would actually change policy. Councilor Davis confirmed that the Commission will review those impacts first.

Councilor Sweeney stated he thinks the appropriate time to discuss this is during the February 2nd work session. Council agreed.

c) Letter from Terry Marasco regarding teachers and affordable housing (p.282)

None

d) Appointments of City Council to Various Board, Commissions, and Committees

i) Bike/Ped Path Committee – Councilor Caltabiano current designee
Councilor Caltabiano to continue serving on Bike/Ped Path Committee.

ii) Climate Action Plan Committee – Councilor Davis current designee
Councilor Norton to serve on the Climate Action Plan Committee.

iii) Community Housing Committee – Councilor Davis current designee
Councilor Davis continue serving on the Community Housing Committee.

iv) Impact Fee Advisory Committee – Councilor Caltabiano current designee
Councilor Caltabiano continue serving on the Impact Fee Advisory Committee.

v) Insurance (Medical) Committee - (2) City Councilors (Ex-Officio members) Councilors Feury and Norton current designee
Councilors Norton and Feury continue serving on the Insurance Committee.

vi) Legacy Land Advisory Committee, Recreation/Conservation Committee (LLAC) – (2) City Councilors, Councilors Feury and Qunell current designee
Councilors Feury and Qunell continue serving on the LLAC.

vii) Whitefish Trail Operations Committee – (1) City Councilor – Councilor Feury current designee

Councilor Feury continue serving on the Whitefish Trail Ops.

viii) Montana West Economic Development Board of Directors – Councilor Caltabiano current designee

Councilor Caltabiano continue to serve on the MWEB Board of Directors.

ix) Park Board – Councilor Sweeney current, Councilor Caltabiano alternate

Councilor Sweeney and Councilor Caltabiano (alternate) continue serving on the Park Board.

x) Planning Commission – Councilor Sweeney, and Councilors Davis and Feury alternates

Councilors Sweeney and Davis, Feury and Norton serve on the Planning Commission (All Council member can serve as alternates) It is the responsibility of the primary members to communicate with other Council members to serve as alternate.

xi) Real Estate Advisory Committee – Mayor and Councilor Feury current designee

Mayor Muhlfeld and Councilor Feury continue serving on Real Estate Advisory Committee.

xii) Resort Tax Advisory Committee – Councilor Feury current designee

Councilor Feury continue serving on the Resort Tax Advisory Committee.

xiii) Tree Advisory Committee – Councilor Norton current designee

Councilor Norton continue with Caltabiano as alternate on the Tree Advisory Committee.

xiv) Whitefish Lake Institute – Mayor and Councilor Feury current designee

Mayor Muhlfeld and Councilor Feury continue serving on the WLI.

Council Comments.

Councilor Feury said he is grateful to continue serving and praised the teamwork of the Council and staff.

Councilor Norton raised several items: appreciation for "Z's" passion for civil rights; questions about progress on the deer management plan (a spring work session is planned); concerns about LED string lights, which would require amending the Dark Skies ordinance; interest in a traffic signal at 13th and Baker (a costly project needing MDT involvement); possible artwork on signal boxes (requires MDT approval and an artist proposal); EV charging comments; and Habitat for Humanity's interest in the Depot Park Townhomes. Staff suggested issuing an RFP since multiple parties are now interested, but the Mayor postponed that discussion.

Councilor Davis thanked voters, apologized for earlier frustration, and asked for a future discussion on ambulance billing practices. He also supported taking time to evaluate the Habitat proposal with partners.

Councilor Sweeney said the Habitat/Iron Star opportunity is significant and should be prioritized soon. He asked about attendance at an upcoming County Planning Board meeting on lakeshore issues.
Councilor Qunell welcomed returning councilors and emphasized maintaining respectful dialogue in Council chambers. He also praised the Glacier Nordic Club.

Councilor Caltabiano criticized "Z's" use of imagery equating police with hate groups, calling it harmful and unacceptable.

Mayor Muhlfeld congratulated retiring Fire Department employee Scott Alexander on his long service.

14) ADJOURNMENT (Resolution 08-10 establishes 11:00 p.m. as end of meeting unless extended to 11:30 by majority)

Mayor Muhlfeld adjourned the meeting at 10:22 p.m.

Mayor Muhlfeld

Attest:

Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk

418 East 2nd Street · PO Box 158 · Whitefish, MT 59937
(406) 863-2410 · Fax: (406) 863-2409
www.cityofwhitefish.gov

January 13, 2026

Mayor and City Council
City of Whitefish
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Re: Final Plat for Hope Corner subdivision; 1150 Wisconsin Avenue Street (WFP 26-01)

Honorable Mayor and Councilors:

This office is in receipt of a final plat application for Hope Corner subdivision. The Hope Corner subdivision is a 2-lot subdivision located at 1150 Wisconsin Avenue. The property is zoned WR-2 (Two-Family Residential District). This preliminary plat was approved as an Administrative Minor by Planning Staff on October 17, 2025.

Following is a list of the conditions of approval and a discussion of how they are met.

COMPLIANCE WITH PRELIMINARY PLAT CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL:

Condition 1. The Subdivision must comply with Chapter 12-4 of the Whitefish Subdivision Regulations.

- Condition met. The final plat conforms to applicable City Codes and the approval granted by the Planning Staff.

Condition 2. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality and Whitefish Public Works Department must approve the water and sewer facilities. (Whitefish Engineering Standards, Section 4)

- Condition met. See document EQ# 26-1592 from DEQ, dated 11-21-25.

Condition 3. A separate water & sewer service must be provided in accordance with the City of Whitefish's policies and design standards. (Whitefish Engineering Standards, Section 4)

- Condition met. Existing water and sewer are in the public right-of-way and connection will be made at the time a home is constructed on Lot 1. See note 'c' on the face of the plat.

Condition 4. In lieu of installing a sidewalk along Glenwood Road, a fee must be paid prior to final plat. The fee will be based on a 5-foot-wide sidewalk for the entire Glenwood Road frontage. Contact the Public Works Department for the most current fee. (2019 Whitefish Engineering Standards, Chapter 6)

- Condition met. A check for $38,112.00 for fee in lieu of sidewalk along Glenwood Road was submitted. This fee will go in the north district.

Condition 5. If impervious area exceeds 10,000 square feet, an engineered stormwater plan must be submitted to the Public Works Department for review and approval. (Whitefish Engineering Standards, Section 5)

- Condition met. This will be reviewed at the time of building permit.

Condition 6. A mail facility must be provided by the developer and approved by the local post office. (Whitefish Subdivision Regulations, §12-4-24)

- Condition met. See email from USPS office, dated 12-1-25.

Condition 7. Obtain addressing from the City Clerk's Office prior to final plat and provide this information on the face of the plat. (Flathead County Addressing Standards)

- Condition met. See face of plat.

Condition 8. The following notes must be placed on the face of the plat:

a. All house numbers must be visible from the road, either at the driveway entrance or on the house and must conform to the current Fire Code, as adopted by the City Council.

b. All noxious weeds, as described by the Whitefish City Code, must be removed throughout the life of the development from the recorded property owner.

c. Water and sewer mains are available in the public right-of-way. It is the responsibility of the property owner to connect to the water and sewer mains located in the public right-of-way and extend service lines to the new lots.

- Condition met. See notes on the face of the plat.

Condition 9. The preliminary plat approval is valid for three years and will expire on October 17, 2028. (Whitefish Subdivision Regulations, §12-3-9, WCC)

- Condition met. Request is within the 3-year timeframe.

Please be advised that the Council should act on this application within 30-days following receipt of this recommendation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Wendy Compton-Ring

Wendy Compton-Ring, AICP
Senior Planner

Attachments: 1 reproducible mylar of final plat
Letter, applicant, 12-24-25
Final plat application, 12-24-25
Email, USPS, 12-2-25
Letter, Craig Workman, Public Works Department, 11-20-25
Letter, DEQ, EQ#26-1592, 11-21-25
Memo, Craig Workman, Public Works Department, 1-1-22
Title Report, Fidelity National Title Insurance, Guarantee No. FT1585-252432, 11-26-25
Treasurer's Tax Certification, 1-24-25

c/w/att: Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk

c/wo/att: United Methodist Church of Whitefish, attn: Dan Chamberlin PO Box 4248 Whitefish, MT 59937
Eric Mulcahy, Sands Surveying Inc 2 Village Loop Kalispell, MT 59901

Hope Corner

Parkland

District:	Location

Land Value:		**Edit
Appraised land value from the year the application was submitted	MT ID CARD	
Gross Acreage:		**Edit
Net Acreage of all Lots:	1.033	**Edit
Parkland Acreage % on Net Acreage:	0.114	
Parkland Percentage of Acreage Required:	11%	**Edit
Cash in Lieu Due:	#DIV/0!	

Sidewalk

District:	North

Property Frontage:	635.21	**Edit
Number taken from applications' letter of survey		
Unit Price per Square Foot:	$ 12.00	**Edit
As of January 1st, 2022 current unit price determined as above.	Memo	
Fee per Linear Foot:	$ 60.00	**Edit
Amount based on standard 5' wide sidewalk. Represents labor, equip., materials necessary to install 4-inch-thick concrete sidewalk		
Sidewalk Width in Feet:	5	**Edit
Cash in Lieu Due:	$ 38,112.60	

Trees

District:	Location

Cost per Tree:	$ 550.00	**Edit
The City Forester will annually provide the Planning Department with updated costs for materials and planting. A 20% admin fee is built into this cost.		
Number of Trees Required:	0	**Edit
Cash in Lieu Due:	$ -	

Subdivision Fee Caluclations-Cash in Lieu
CIL2023

Revised April 25, 2024

12/26/2025

By: SANDS SURVEYING, Inc.
2 Village Loop
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 755-6481

JOB NO: 627701
DATE: November 21, 2025
COMPLETED DATE: / /
FOR/OWNER: United Methodist Church of Whitefish

Plat Of
HOPE CORNER
A Subdivision Located in
GOV'T LOT 1, SEC. 25, T.31N., R.22W., P.M.,M.,
CITY OF WHITEFISH, FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA

TOTAL: 4.537 Ac.
Lots (2) 4.537 Ac.

CERTIFICATE OF DEDICATION:
I/WE, THE UNDERSIGNED PROPERTY OWNER(S), DO HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I/WE HAVE CAUSED TO BE SURVEYED AND PLATTED INTO LOTS ALL THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBED PROPERTY AS DESCRIBED IN THE CERTIFICATE OF DEDICATION, AND SHOWN BY THE ANNEXED PLAT OR MAP AND SITUATED IN FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA:

A TRACT OF LAND, SITUATED, LYING, AND BEING IN GOVERNMENT LOT 1 OF SECTION 25, TOWNSHIP 31 NORTH, RANGE 22 WEST, P.M.,M., FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA, AND MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS TO WIT:

BEGINNING at the northeast corner of Tract 2 of Certificate of Survey No. 7419 (records of Flathead County, Montana) which is a found iron pin on the southerly R/W of a 40 foot deeded city street known as Glenwood Road; Thence along said R/W S89°38'49"E 635.21 feet to a set iron pin at the intersection of said southerly R/W and the westerly R/W of Wisconsin Avenue; Thence leaving said Glenwood Road R/W and along said Wisconsin Avenue R/W S00°04'33"E 310.00 feet; Thence leaving said R/W N89°51'06"W 635.22 feet to a found iron pin; Thence N00°04'21"W 312.28 feet to the point of beginning and containing 4.537 ACRES; Subject to and together with all appurtenant easements of record.

The above described tract of land shall hereafter be known as:
HOPE CORNER

UTILITY EASEMENT CERTIFICATE:
The undersigned hereby grants unto each and every person, firm, or corporation, whether public or private, providing or offering to provide telephone, telegraph, electric power, gas, cable television, water or sewer service to the public, the right to the joint use of an easement for the construction, maintenance, repair, and removal of their lines and other facilities, in, over, under and across each area designated on this plat as "UTILITY EASEMENT" to have and to hold forever.

LOTS 1-2 are excluded from sanitation review by the Department of Environmental Quality pursuant to MCA 76-4-125(1)(d) as certified pursuant to MCA 76-4-127: (i) new divisions subject to review under the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act. The certifying authority shall send notice of certification to the reviewing authority that adequate storm water drainage and adequate municipal facilities will be provided for the subdivision.

NOTE: "Buyers of property should ensure that they have obtained and reviewed all sheets of the plat and all documents recorded and filed in conjunction with the plat and that buyers of property are strongly encouraged to contact the local planning department and become informed of any limitations on the use of the property prior to closing." Pursuant to ARM 24.183.1107(2)(e)(xxiii)(B).

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH
By: _____

STATE OF _____)
SS
County of _____)

On this _____ day of _____, 202___, before me, a Notary Public in and for the State of _____ personally appeared _____ as _____ for UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH, known to me to be the person(a) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument and who duly acknowledged to me that he/she/they executed the same.

_____
Notary Public for the State of _____

SCALE : 1" = 50'
50' 25' 0 50' 100'

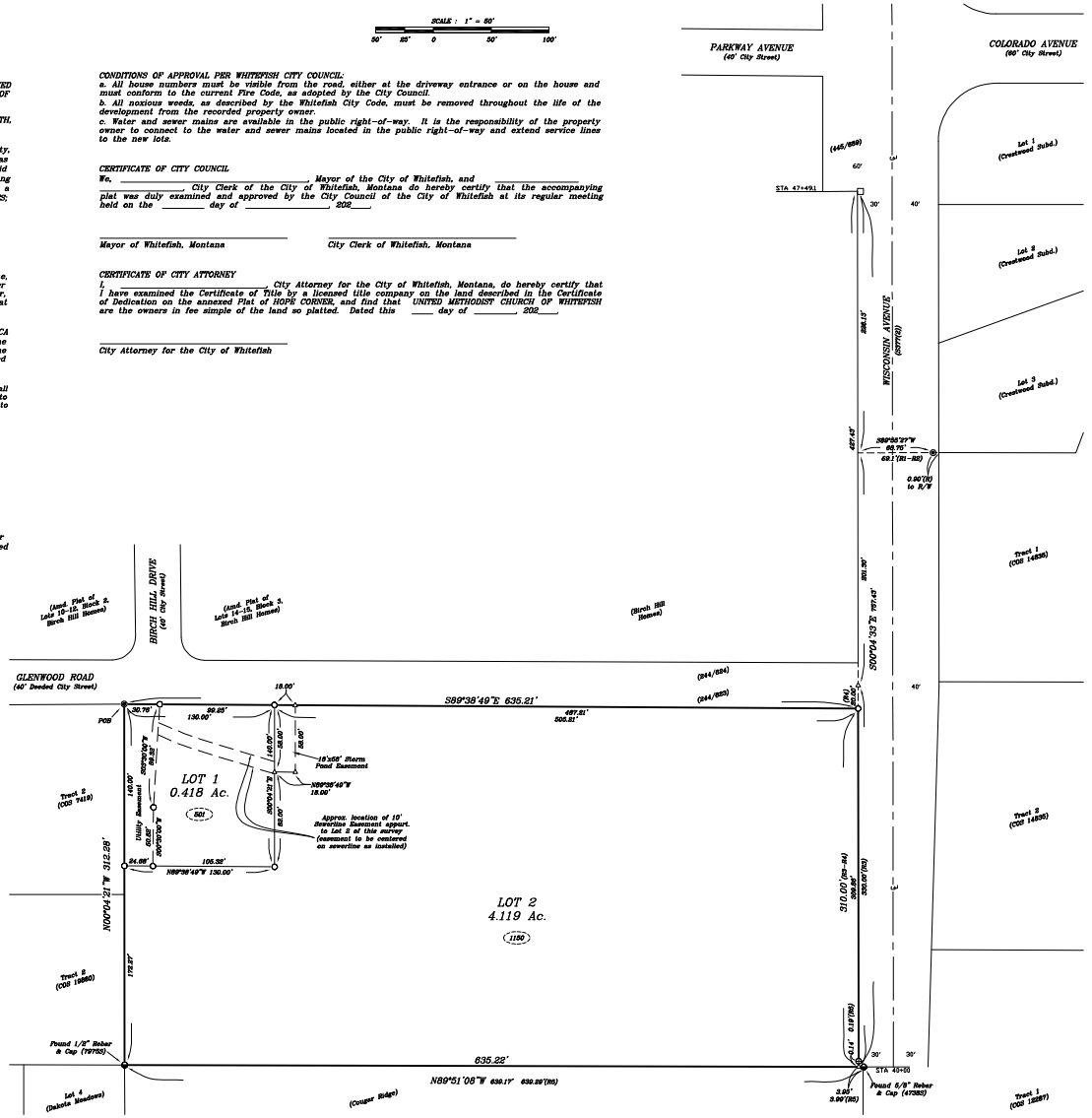
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL PER WHITEFISH CITY COUNCIL:
a. All house numbers must be visible from the road, either at the driveway entrance or on the house and must conform to the current Fire Code, as adopted by the City Council.
b. All noxious weeds, as described by the Whitefish City Code, must be removed throughout the life of the development from the recorded property owner.
c. Water and sewer mains are available in the public right-of-way. It is the responsibility of the property owner to connect to the water and sewer mains located in the public right-of-way and extend service lines to the new lots.

CERTIFICATE OF CITY COUNCIL
We, _____, Mayor of the City of Whitefish, and _____, City Clerk of the City of Whitefish, Montana do hereby certify that the accompanying plat was duly examined and approved by the City Council of the City of Whitefish at its regular meeting held on the _____ day of _____, 202___.

_____ Mayor of Whitefish, Montana
_____ City Clerk of Whitefish, Montana

CERTIFICATE OF CITY ATTORNEY
I, _____, City Attorney for the City of Whitefish, Montana, do hereby certify that I have examined the Certificate of Title by a licensed title company on the land described in the Certificate of Dedication on the annexed Plat of HOPE CORNER, and find that UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH are the owners in fee simple of the land so platted. Dated this ___ day of _____, 202___.

_____
City Attorney for the City of Whitefish



LEGEND:
- ○ Set 1/2"x24" Rebar & Cap (19236S)
- ◉ Found 5/8" Rebar
- ◒ Found (as noted)
- ⊕ Found 3/4" Pipe & Disc (2989ES) (did not find original rec. of this mon.)
- □ Found 4"x4" Conc. R/W Monument
- △ Computed Point (nothing found or set)
- (R1) Record Information Per MDOT R/W Plans S 377(2)
- (R2) Record Information Per COS 14835
- (R3) Record Information Per Bk. 154, Pg. 219
- (R4) Record Information Per Bk. 244, Pg. 623
- (R5) Record Information Per COS 16053 and Per Plat of Couger Ridge
- POB Point of Beginning
- Street Address

Basis of Bearings:
Geodetic North per static GPS single-point calibration

CERTIFICATE OF SURVEYOR

_____
JOSHUA NELSON 19236S

APPROVED: _____

_____
EXAMINING LAND SURVEYOR
Lic. No. _____

STATE OF _____)
COUNTY OF _____) SS

FILED THIS _____ DAY OF _____, 202___
AT _____, PAID FEE _____

_____
CLERK & RECORDER

_____
DEPUTY

INSTRUMENT REC. No. _____

[PRELIMINARY]

SHEET 1 OF 1
FILE No. _____

NOTE:
Surveyor has made no investigative or independent search for easements of record, encumbrances, restrictive covenants, ownership title evidence, or any other facts that an accurate and current title search may disclose.

SANDS SURVEYING, INC.
2 Village Loop Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-755-6481
Fax 406-755-6488

December 24, 2025

Whitefish Planning and Building Office
Wendy Compton-Ring, AICP, Senior Planner
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Dear Wendy:

Attached please find the materials necessary to review and approve the final plat Hope Corner. I have listed the Conditions of Approval and address how each Condition is met.

Hope Corner was granted Administrative Preliminary Plat approval on October 17, 2025 with file number WPP-25-07. The conditions of approval are addressed as follows.

1. The Subdivision must comply with Chapter 12-4 of the Whitefish Subdivision Regulations.

   This condition is met.

2. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality and the Whitefish Public Works Department must approve the water and sewer facilities.

   This condition is met. See attached MFE EQ# 26-1592 dated 11/21/25.

3. A separate water and sewer service must be provided in accordance with the City of Whitefish's policies and design standards

   This condition is met. The service connections will be made at the time the home is constructed on Lot 1.

4. In lieu of installing sidewalk along Glenwood Road, a fee must be paid prior to final plat. The fee will be based on a five foot wide sidewalk for the entire Glenwood Road frontage. Contact Public Works Department for the current fee.

   This condition is met. According to Public Works, the current sidewalk cost is $60.00 per lineal foot of five-foot sidewalk. The is 635.2 feet of frontage along Glenwood Road. The cash-in-lieu of sidewalk payment is $38,112.00. The applicant has provided a check in this amount with the Preliminary plat.

5. If impervious area exceeds 10,000 square feet, an engineered stormwater plan must be submitted to the public works department for review and approval.

This condition is not applicable. The impervious surface on Lot 1 will not exceed 10,000 sf

6. A mail facility must be provided by the developer and approved by the local post office.

   This condition is met. The USPS approved the placement of a single mail box in front of the new lot on the south side of Glenwood.

7. Obtain addressing from the City Clerks Office prior to final plat and provide this information on the face of the plat.

   This condition is met. The addresses appear on the face of the Final Plat as approved by the City Clerk.

8. The following notes must be placed on the face of the final plat.
   a. All house numbers must be visible from the road, either at the driveway entrance or on the house and must conform to the current fire code, as adopted by the City Council
   b. All noxious weeds, as described be the Whitefish City Code, must be removed throughout the life of the development from the recorded property owner.
   c. Water and sewer mains are available in the public right-of-way. It is the responsibility of the property owner to connect to the water and sewer mains located in the public right-of-way

   This condition is met. The notes appear on the face of the final plat

9. The preliminary plat approval is valid for three years and will expire on October 17, 2028.

   This condition is met. Final plat is submitted prior to expiration.

Attached please find a title report and tax certification. Thank you for your consideration of this application. If you should have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Eric H. Mulcahy, AICP
Sands Surveying, Inc.

Attach: Final Plat Application
Application Fee - $2,380.00
Cover Letter
Sidewalk cash-in-lieu fee $38,112.00
Whitefish PW Approval (11/20/25)
MDEQ MFE Approval EQ #26-1592 (11/21/25)
Email – Cody Macy, USPS, (12/2/25)
Fidelity National Title Subdivision Guarantee (FT1585-252432; dated 11/26/25)
Tax Cert

City of Whitefish
Planning & Building Dept
418 E 2nd St | PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Phone: 406-863-2410

File #: WFP- 26-01
Date: 12/24/25
Intake Staff: SF
Check #:
Amount: $2,380.00
Acct #: 1000.101000.341070
Date Complete:

FINAL PLAT APPLICATION

FEE ATTACHED $ 2,380.00
(see current fee schedule)

INSTRUCTIONS:

- ☐ Submit the application fee, a complete application, with appropriate attachments, to the Whitefish Planning & Building Department no less than **ninety (90) days** prior to expiration date of the preliminary plat.
- ☐ When all application materials are submitted to the Planning & Building Department, and the staff finds the application is complete, the staff will submit a report to the City Council. Incomplete submittals will not be accepted and will not be forwarded to the Council for approval. Changes to the approved preliminary plat may necessitate reconsideration by the Planning Board.
- ☐ The regularly scheduled meetings of the City Council are the first and third Mondays of each month at 7:10PM in the Council Chambers at 418 E 2nd Street.

A. PROJECT INFORMATION:

Project/Subdivision Name: Hope Corner

Legal Description of the Property: Will be known as Hope Corner in Gov't 1, Sec 25, T31N, R22W, P.M.M., Flathead County

Date of Preliminary Plat Approval: 10/17/25

I hereby certify that the information contained or accompanied in this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. The signing of this application signifies approval for the Whitefish Staff to be present on the property for routine monitoring and inspection during the approval and development process.

Daniel L. Chamberlin — Owner's Signature** — 10-24-25 — Date

Daniel L. Chamberlin — Print Name — Chairman of Leadership/SPRCA

Applicant's Signature — Date

Print Name

Representative's Signature — Date

Print Name

**May be signed by the applicant or representative, authorization letter from owner must be attached. If there are multiple owners, a letter authorizing one owner to be the representative for all must be included.

B. APPLICATION CONTENTS:

All applicable items required by *Appendix C: Final Plat Contents* of the Whitefish Subdivision Regulations must be submitted with the application for final plat including the following. Check items attached or not applicable.

Not Applicable	Attached	
(MUST CHECK ONE)		
Required	■	Electronic version of the entire application and supplemental information (i.e. pdf)
Required	■	Cover letter listing each condition of approval and individually state how each condition is specifically met. In cases where documentation is required, such as an engineer's certification, State Department of Health certification, etc., original letters shall be submitted. Blanket statements stating, for example, "all improvements are in place" are not acceptable.
Required	■	Montana DEQ Health Department Certification (*Original)*
Required	■	Title Report, not more than 90 days old
Required	■	Tax Certification (*Property taxes must be paid*)
■	❑	Consent(s) to Plat (*Originals and notarized*)
■	❑	Engineer's Certification (*Original)*
		Subdivision Improvements Agreement (*Attach collateral*)
■	❑	Engineering Improvements (*sidewalks, walkways, street lights, street signs, solid waste facilities, utilities)*
■	❑	Landscaping Improvements (*landscaping, street trees, parkland improvements – trails, park facilities,*)
■	❑	Parkland Cash-in-Lieu (*Check attached payable to City of Whitefish*)
❑	■	Sidewalk Cash-in-Lieu (*Check attached payable to City of Whitefish*)
■	❑	Street Tree Cash-in-Lieu (*Check attached payable to City of Whitefish*)
■	❑	Public Tree Removal Fee *(Check attached and payable to City of Whitefish)*
■	❑	Maintenance Agreement (*as applicable: stormwater facility, private roads, parks, etc)*
■	❑	Articles of Incorporation and Conditions, Covenants & Restrictions
■	❑	Original Legacy Home deed(s) ready for City Manager signature (*when applicable)*
■	❑	Approach Permit (*when applicable)*
❑	■	**Plat**: One (1) 24x36 paper copy and two (2) mylars signed by all owners of record, the surveyor, and the examining land surveyor.

****NOTE: Please be advised that the County Clerk & Recorder and the City of Whitefish request that all subdivision final plat applications be accompanied with digital copies.**

**A digital copy of the final plat in an AutoCAD file format (.dwg), consisting of the following layers:

1. Exterior boundary of subdivision
2. Lot or park boundaries
3. Easements
4. Roads or rights-of-way
5. A tie to either an existing subdivision corner or a corner of the public land survey system

C. OWNER/APPLICANT INFORMATION

OWNER(S) OF RECORD:

Name: Unioted Methodist Church of Whitefish, Attn Dan Chamberlin Phone (406) 461-5850

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 4248

City, State, Zip: Whitefish, MT 59937

Email: _____

APPLICANT (if different than above):

Name: Same Phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email: _____

OTHER TECHNICAL/PROFESSIONAL:

Name: Sands Surveying, Inc – Attn Eric Mulcahy Phone: (406) 755-6481

Mailing Address: 2 Village Loop

City, State, Zip: Kalispell, MT 59901

Email: eric@sandssurveying.com

D. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF SUBDIVISION

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Type of Subdivision: ■ Residential ❑ Industrial ❑ Commercial ❑ PUD ❑ Other and church

Total Number of Lots in Subdivision: 2 Lots

Land in Project (acres): 4.537 acres Parkland (acres): N/A

Cash-in-Lieu Parkland: $ _____ ■ Not Applicable

Cash-in-Lieu Sidewalks: $ 38,112.00 ❑Not Applicable

Cash-in-Lieu Street Trees: $ _____ ■ Not Applicable

Legacy Homes # of units: _____ rent _____ own ❑ Alternative Option ■ Not Applicable

NUMBER OF LOTS BY TYPE:

Single Family: 1 Townhouse: _____ Mobile Home Park: _____

Duplex: _____ Apartment: __ Recreational Vehicle Park: _____

Commercial: _____ Industrial: _____ Planned Unit Development: _____

Condominium: _____ Multi-Family: _____ Other: Church

Eric Mulcahy

From: Macy, Cody M - Whitefish, MT <Cody.M.Macy@usps.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 2, 2025 8:52 AM
To: Eric Mulcahy
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Two lot subdivision called Hope Corner

Curbside mailboxes can be put up on the south side of Glenwood.

Cody Macy
Postmaster
Olney MT 59927
Whitefish MT 59937

From: Eric Mulcahy <eric@sandssurveying.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 2, 2025 8:38 AM
To: Macy, Cody M - Whitefish, MT <Cody.M.Macy@usps.gov>
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Two lot subdivision called Hope Corner

CAUTION: This email originated from outside USPS. **STOP and CONSIDER** before responding, clicking on links, or opening attachments.

Yes it will have a Glenwood Address the Church will maintain its Wisconsin address.

Eric H. Mulcahy, AICP
Sands Surveying, Inc
(406) 755-6481
eric@sandssurveying.com

2 Village Loop
Kalispell, MT 59901

From: Macy, Cody M - Whitefish, MT <Cody.M.Macy@usps.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 1, 2025 4:15 PM
To: Eric Mulcahy <eric@sandssurveying.com>
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Two lot subdivision called Hope Corner

Will it have a Glenwood address?

Cody Macy
Postmaster
Olney MT 59927
Whitefish MT 59937

From: Eric Mulcahy <eric@sandssurveying.com>
Sent: Monday, December 1, 2025 2:18 PM
To: Macy, Cody M - Whitefish, MT <Cody.M.Macy@usps.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Two lot subdivision called Hope Corner

CAUTION: This email originated from outside USPS. **STOP and CONSIDER** before responding, clicking on links, or opening attachments.

Hi Cody,
I'm working on a two lot subdivision for the United Methodist Church located at Glenwood Road and Wisconsin Avenue. The church is splitting off a lot for a single family house in order to raise money to make repairs on the church building. The result is that their will be just one new lot with the subdivision as the church already sits on Lot 2. We are required to get your approval for a mailbox site. It appears mailboxes are located on the south side of Glenwood. Can Lot 1 just install a new box on Glenwood when the future owner builds a house? I attached a preliminary plat of the subdivision that shows the proposed lot and the existing mailboxes on Glenwood.

Eric H. Mulcahy, AICP
Sands Surveying, Inc
(406) 755-6481
eric@sandssurveying.com

2 Village Loop
Kalispell, MT 59901

City of Whitefish
Department of Public Works
418 E. 2nd Street | PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406) 863-1260 | Fax (406) 863-2419

November 20, 2025

Mr. Jack Burton
Water & Environment Technology
102 Cooperative Way, Suite 100
Kalispell, MT 59901

Re: Hope Corner Subdivision Plan Approval

Mr. Burton,

This letter is regarding the Plans and Specifications for the Hope Corner Subdivision. The plans, dated October 24, 2025, have been reviewed and approved by the Public Works Department.

The City's water and sewer systems have adequate capacity to serve this project. Approval is given with the understanding that any deviation from the approved plans and specifications will be submitted to the Public Works Department for review and approval.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval expires on November 20, 2027. Revised plans will need to be submitted to the Public Works Department for review and approval if it is determined that acceptable construction progress does not occur before this date.
2. In lieu of installing a sidewalk along Glenwood Road, a fee must be paid prior to final plat. The fee will be based on a 5-foot-wide sidewalk for the entire Glenwood Road frontage. The current fee is $60 per linear foot.
3. Snake pits must be used for all tracer wires (water and sewer).
4. Mueller meter pits shall be installed directly adjacent to each curb stop.
5. If any excavation is planned in the public right of way within 50 feet of a boulevard tree, the Parks Department must be notified.

Upon project completion and before final acceptance, a Montana Professional Engineer shall submit the city's Private Project Acceptance Checklist to the Public Works Department

Office Manager. This closeout list includes record drawings that follow the Whitefish Engineering Standards. Prior to final acceptance of infrastructure improvements, the property owner, developer, or contractor shall provide a maintenance bond equal to ten percent of the value of the public improvements.

Any contractor working in the existing City right-of-way must fill out a right-of-way permit with the associated insurance and bonding requirement. Please call Tammy Omundson at (406) 863-1260 to schedule a pre-construction meeting prior to the commencement of the installation of any public infrastructure.

Also note that approvals from other agencies, including but not limited to the Flathead Conservation District, may be required for this project to proceed.

Sincerely,

Craig C. Workman
Director of Public Works

DEQ
Montana Department of Environmental Quality

1809
RECEIVED

November 21, 2025

Jack Burton
Water & Environmental Technologies
102 Cooperative Way Suite 100
Kalispell MT 59901

RE: Hope Corner
Municipal Facilities Exclusion
Location: Section 23, T. 31N., R22W.
EQ# 26-1592
City of Whitefish
Flathead County

Dear Mr. Burton:

This is to certify that the information and fees received by the Department of Environmental Quality relating to this subdivision are in compliance with 76-4-127, MCA. Under 76-4-125(1)(d), MCA, this subdivision is not subject to review, and the Declaration can be filed with the county clerk and recorder.

Plans and specifications must be submitted when extensions of municipal facilities for the supply of water or disposal of sewage are proposed 76-4-131. Construction of water or sewer extensions prior to DEQ, Public Water Supply Section's approval is prohibited, and is subject to penalty as prescribed in Title 75, Chapter 6 and Title 76, Chapter 4.

Hope Corner Municipal Facilities Exclusion will consist of (2) Lots.

Sincerely,

Rachel Clark
Engineering Bureau Chief
Water Quality Division
Department of Environmental Quality
(406) 444-1277
Email rachel.clark2@mt.gov

cc: City Engineer
County Sanitarian
file

Mulcahy
Sands

City of Whitefish
Department of Public Works
418 E. 2nd Street | PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406) 863-2460 | Fax (406) 863-2419

Memo

Date: January 1, 2022

To: Planning Department

From: Craig Workman, Public Works Director

Re: Updated Sidewalk Cash-In-Lieu Unit Price

Beginning January 1, 2022, and continuing until further notice, the unit price for cash in lieu of sidewalks will be $12 per square foot. This will be $60 per liner foot for standard 5' wide sidewalk. This price represents all labor, equipment, and materials necessary to install 4-inch-thick concrete sidewalk in accordance with the City of Whitefish Engineering Standards.

This value was determined using the bid price for 4-inch-thick concrete sidewalk received for the Fiscal Year 2022 Sidewalk Assistance Program.

Sincerely,

Craig C. Workman, P.E.
Director of Public Works

SUBDIVISION

Issued By:

Fidelity National Title
Insurance Company

Guarantee/Certificate Number:

FT1585-252432

FIDELITY NATIONAL TITLE INSURANCE COMPANY

a corporation, herein called the Company

GUARANTEES

United Methodist Church of Whitefish, a Montana non profit corporation

herein called the Assured, against actual loss not exceeding the liability amount stated in Schedule A which the Assured shall sustain by reason of any incorrectness in the assurances set forth in Schedule A.

LIABILITY EXCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1. No guarantee is given nor liability assumed with respect to the identity of any party named or referred to in Schedule A or with respect to the validity, legal effect or priority of any matter shown therein.
2. The Company's liability hereunder shall be limited to the amount of actual loss sustained by the Assured because of reliance upon the assurance herein set forth, but in no event shall the Company's liability exceed the liability amount set forth in Schedule A.

Please note carefully the liability exclusions and limitations and the specific assurances afforded by this guarantee. If you wish additional liability, or assurances other than as contained herein, please contact the Company for further information as to the availability and cost.

Fidelity National Title Insurance Company

By:

Michael J. Nolan, President

Attest:

Marjorie Nemzura, Secretary

Fidelity National Title Company of Montana, LLC
150 1st Avenue WN, Suite A
Kalispell, MT 59901

Countersigned By:

Karla Kemm
Authorized Officer or Agent

ISSUING OFFICE:
Title Officer: Karla Kemm (MG) Fidelity National Title Company of Montana, LLC 150 1st Avenue WN, Suite A Kalispell, MT 59901 Main Phone: (406)755-7004 Email: Karla.Kemm@fnf.com

SCHEDULE A

Liability	Premium	Tax
$10,000.00	$200.00	$0.00

Effective Date: November 26, 2025 at 08:00 AM

The assurances referred to on the face page are:

That, according to those public records which, under the recording laws, impart constructive notice of matter relative to the following described property:

A tract of land, situated, lying, and being in Government Lot 1 of Section 25, Township 31 North, Range 22 West, P.M.,M., Flathead County, Montana, and more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the NE corner of Tract 2 of Certificate of Survey No. 7419, which is a point on the southerly right of way of a 40 foot deeded city street known as Glenwood Road; thence
along said right of way S89°38'49"E 635.21 feet to a point at the intersection of said southerly right of way and the westerly right of way of Wisconsin Avenue; thence
leaving said Glenwood Road right of way and along said Wisconsin Avenue right of way S00°04'33"E 310.00 feet; thence
leaving said right of way N89°51'08"W 635.22 feet to a point; thence
N00°04'21"W 312.28 feet to the point of beginning.

The above described tract of land shall hereafter be known as:
Hope Corner

Title to said real property is vested in:

United Methodist Church of Whitefish, a Montana non profit corporation

subject to the matters shown below under Exceptions, which Exceptions are not necessarily shown in the order of their priority.

END OF SCHEDULE A

SCHEDULE B

A. Any facts, rights, interests or claims which are not shown by the Public Records but which could be ascertained by an inspection of said Land or by making inquiry of persons in possession of the Land.

B. Any encroachment, encumbrance, violation, variation, or adverse circumstance affecting the Title that would be disclosed by an accurate and complete land survey of the Land and that are not shown in the Public Records.

C. Easements, claims of easements, or encumbrances which are not shown by the Public Records.

D. Any lien, or right to a lien, for services, labor, or material heretofore or hereafter furnished, imposed by law and not shown by the Public Records.

E. (a) unpatented mining claims; (b) reservations or exceptions in patents or in Acts authorizing the issuance thereof; (c) water rights, claims or title to water, whether or not the matters accepted under (a), (b), (c) are shown by the Public Records.

F. Taxes or assessments which are not shown as existing liens by the records of any taxing authority that levies taxes or assessments on real property or by the Public Records. Proceedings by a public agency which may result in taxes or assessments, or notices of such proceedings, whether or not shown by the records of such agency or by the Public Records.

G. County road rights-of-way, not recorded and indexed as a conveyance of record in the office of the Clerk and Recorder pursuant to Title 70, Chapter 21 M.C.A., including but not limited to any right of the public to use and occupy those certain roads and trails.

H. Mineral rights, claims or title to minerals in or under said Land, including but not limited to metals, oil, gas, coal, and other hydrocarbons, sand, gravel, or stone, and geothermal energy rights, and easement or other rights or matters relating thereto, whether express or implied, recorded or unrecorded.

SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS:

1. General Taxes for the year 2025

   1st Half: $485.89, PAID
   2nd Half: $485.89, DUE and will become delinquent after May 31, 2026
   Tax Account No.: 74-E000558

2. By provision of Montana Law, the Land is partially exempt from taxation.

3. This property lies within the boundaries of Resolution No. R85-16 for annexation, recorded May 31, 1985 at 85-151-10510 and will be subject to any levies and assessments thereof.

4. Statement of Trust Ownership

   Recording Date: June 12, 2008
   Recording No.: 200800016296

5. Recitals, notes, sanitary restrictions, ordinances, resolutions, easements, dedications and covenants as referred to on proposed plat to be recorded prior to or as a part of this transaction.

SCHEDULE B
(continued)

6. Please be advised that our search did not disclose any open Deeds of Trust of record. If you should have knowledge of any outstanding obligation, please contact the Title Department immediately for further review prior to closing.

7. The land described in the commitment/policy shall not be deemed to include any home trailer or mobile home located on the property.

8. Exceptions and reservations contained in Patents of record.

END OF SCHEDULE B

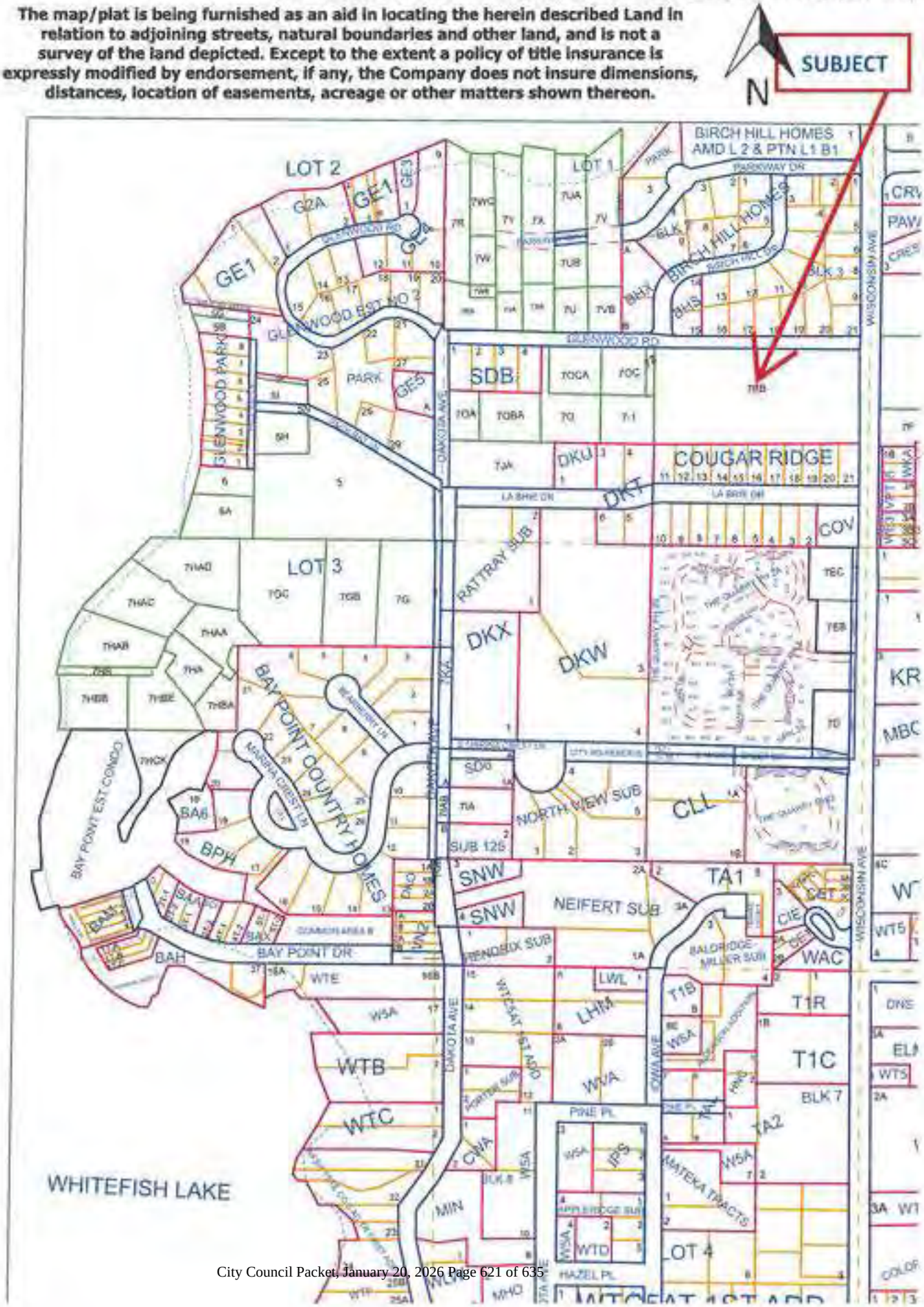
25-31-22

THIS MAP IS PREPARED ONLY FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE USE OF FLATHEA
REPRESENTATION OF THE LOCATION OR EXISTENCE OF TRACTS OF REC

The map/plat is being furnished as an aid in locating the herein described Land in relation to adjoining streets, natural boundaries and other land, and is not a survey of the land depicted. Except to the extent a policy of title insurance is expressly modified by endorsement, if any, the Company does not insure dimensions, distances, location of easements, acreage or other matters shown thereon.

LORADO AVE, ALLEY
CHARD LN L2A
EN MEADOWS L1A
LORADO AVE, DENVER ST
CSAT L2 B1 PT
STWOOD SUB L53

CSAT ADD 1 L2 AMD L20 21 B8
CH HILL HOMES L12 B2
CH HILL HOMES L10 B2
JERSON ADD TR 2 IN T
SH L11 N2, S2, B15
PNT COUNTRY HOMES L10
RTHVIEW SUB L1
SNWOOD EST 1 LA; 1 TR B
CSAT ADD 1 S2 L23 B8
SH AMD L7-9 B8 L2
DEN MEADOWS PRSERVE LI
L11 B14
IDIVISION NO 2N1 L2
EN VIEWS SUB L7
EPINE MEADOWS L2
ENWOOD EST NO 2 L14



Flathead County Treasurer
Adele Krantz, Treasurer
290 A North Main
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 758-5680
https://flatheadcounty.gov/property_tax

County Tax Bill
Tax Year 2025

40855*111**G50**0.596**1/2*********AUTO**5-DIGIT 59937
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH
PO BOX 4248
WHITEFISH MT 59937-4248

Assessor #:	E000658
Tax District	0334-L74 / Whitefish Water Distri
Geo Code	07429225228500000
Mill Levy:	360.727
Market Value:	4,288,369
Real Estate:	0
Building & Improvements:	0
Personal Property:	0
Exemption:	0.00
Taxable Value:	0

Key Taxing Authority	Levy	Total Due
OT FCSW Fee - Commercial		$191.24
OT STATE FORESTER		$52.00
OT WFSH CITY STREETS		$402.00
OT WFSH LT 1		$82.50
OT WFSH PRK/GRNWY MNT 1		$166.00
OT WFSH STRMWTR IMP&MNT		$77.53
TOTAL TAX		$971.77

Legal Description

SCT: 25 TWN: 31 N RNG: 22 W

S2o, T31 N, R22 W, TR 78B IN N2SE4NE4SW4

Physical Address: 1150 WISCONSIN AVE

Distribution Breakdown

OT	OTHER	100.00	$971.77

This property may qualify for: Montana Disabled Veteran Property Tax Relief, Property Tax Assistance Program, Land Value Assistance Program and/or Elderly Homeowner's Tax Credit. Contact the Department of Revenue at (406)758-5760 for further information.

2nd Half:	**$485.88**
2nd Half Due:	**05/31/2026**

DO NOT PAY THIS IF IT IS INCLUDED IN YOUR MORTGAGE PAYMENT

Assessor No:	**E000658**

NO SECOND HALF NOTICE WILL BE SENT.
YOUR CHECK IS YOUR RECEIPT.
STUBS MUST ACCOMPANY PAYMENT. FOR A COPY OF YOUR TAX RECEIPT INCLUDE A SELF ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE.

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH
PO BOX 4248
WHITEFISH MT 59937-4248

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO:
Adele Krantz
Flathead County Treasurer
290A N MAIN ST
KALISPELL, MT 59901-3946

PAYMENT MUST BE HAND DELIVERED, PAID ONLINE OR POSTMARKED BY 5:00PM ON MAY 31, 2026

EFFECT OF FAILURE TO RECEIVE NOTICE - Penalty and interest will not be waived due to non-receipt of a tax bill.

DELINQUENT TAXES - Once a full year becomes delinquent, you must pay the year in full. If more than one tax year is delinquent, the most current year must be paid first per MCA 15-16-102.

ADDRESS CHANGES - The Plat Room processes address changes with a written request or email request. 406-758-5510

EXTENDED DUE DATES - If the date on which taxes are due falls on a holiday or Saturday, taxes may be paid without penalty or interest on or before 5 pm of the next business day in accordance with MCA 1-1-307.

PAYMENT PROCESSING - Please allow at least 2 weeks for mailed payments to be processed.

PAYING UNDER PROTEST - Payments under protest must be in writing and comply with the provisions of state law. These laws can be found in MCA 15-1-402 and 15-1-406. Protest forms are available upon request at the Treasurer's Office or online.

PROPERTY VALUATION - Property valuation staff may be visiting your property to conduct an on-site review for property tax purposes. You or your agent may want to be present. If you wish to make an appointment, contact your local Department of Revenue at (406)758-5700.

RETURNED CHECK FEE - A $25 fee is charged on all returned checks and payment may be cancelled. Each account is then subject to applicable interest, penalty, costs and seizure by sheriff.

TAX BILL TIME TABLE - The 1st installment is due by 5:00 p.m. November 30th, and the 2nd installment is due no later than 5:00 p.m. on May 31st.

FOR SECURITY PURPOSES - International access to our website is restricted to the United States and Canada

INQUIRIES:
Address Changes - Plat Room - plat@flathead.mt.gov
Ownership Changes - Clerk and Recorder - (406) 758-5526
Property Assessment/Appraisal - (406) 758-5700
Exemptions - Department of Revenue - (406) 758-5700
School Taxes - Superintendent of Schools - (406) 758-5720
County Landfill - (406) 758-5910
BF or LK Solid Waste Fee - (406) 758-5910

WATER AND SEWER DISTRICTS:
Big Mountain Sewer - (406) 249-5669
Bigfork Water & Sewer - (406) 837-4566
Coram Water & Sewer - (406) 852-7352
Evergreen Water & Sewer - (406) 257-5861
Happy Valley Water & Sewer - (406) 730-1031
Hungry Horse Water & Sewer - (406) 387-5694
Lakeside County Water & Sewer - (406) 844-3881
Martin City County Water & Sewer - (406) 387-4360
Ranch County Water & Sewer - (406) 837-5461
Somers County Water & Sewer - (406) 857-2580
Whitefish County Water Dist - (406) 863-4820

Kalispell - 406)758-7700
Columbia Falls - (406)892-4391
Whitefish - (406) 863-2400

State Forester - Department of State Lands - (406) 751-2240

TV DISTRICTS:
Blacktail TV - (406) 249-3251
Swan Hill TV - (406) 314-8226

FIRE DISTRICTS:
Badrock Rural Fire - (406) 892-3145
Bigfork Fire - (406) 837-4590
Big Mountain Fire - (406) 862-3748
Blankenship Rural Fire - (406) 387-4349
Columbia Falls Rural Fire - (406) 892-3911
Coram/West Glacier Fire - (406) 387-4298
Office of Emergency Services (406)758-5560
Creston Fire - (406) 250-7396
Evergreen Fire - (406) 752-4636
Ferndale Fire - (406) 837-6900
Hungry Horse Fire - (406) 387-9111
Marion Fire - (406) 854-2828
Martin City Rural Fire - (406) 890-0652
Olney Rural Fire - (406) 881-2220
Smith Valley Fire - (406) 752-3548
Somers Fire - (406) 250-8225
South Kalispell Fire - (406) 257-2282
West Valley Fire - (406) 756-9878
Whitefish Fire Service Area (406) 863-2483

Please fold on perforation BEFORE tearing

Payments made after 5:00 pm on the due date must include penalty & interest. Call (406)758-5680 for correct amount.
Both installments can be paid together, but must be paid by the first installment due date to avoid late charges.

Mail payment to:
ADELE KRANTZ
FLATHEAD COUNTY TREASURER
290 A North Main St.
Kalispell, MT 59901

Bring payment to:
FLATHEAD COUNTY NORTH COMPLEX
PROPERTY TAX DEPARTMENT
290 A North Main St.
Kalispell, MT 59901

***Pay online by e-check (currently no fee)**
***Pay online by credit/debit card (3%fee)**
flatheadcounty.gov
*United States and Canada only
Phone - (406) 758-5680

1

199703714090

FM-19531

WARRANTY DEED

0978264

APPROVED subject to

THIS INDENTURE, made this 31st day of January, 1997, between ELIZABETH LOCKRIDGE 1984 TRUST, Party of the First Part, and UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH, 625 Park Ave, Whitefish, MT 59937, Party of the Second Part.

WITNESSETH, that the said Party of the First Part, for and in consideration of the sum of TEN DOLLARS ($10.00) and other good and valuable consideration to it in hand paid by the said Party of the Second Part, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, does hereby grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said Party of the Second Part, and to their heirs and assigns, forever, all that certain lot, piece, or parcel, of land situate, lying and being in the County of Flathead, State of Montana, and particularly described as follows, to-wit:

SEE EXHIBIT "A" ATTACHED HERETO AND INCORPORATED HEREIN BY REFERENCE.

SUBJECT TO any and all easements, covenants, reservations or restrictions of record.

TOGETHER with all and singular the hereinbefore described premises together with all tenements, hereditaments, and appurtenances, thereto belonging or in anywise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues, and profits thereof; and also all the estate, right, title, interest; right of dower and right of homestead, possession, claim, and demand whatsoever, as well in law as in equity, of the said Party of the First Part, of, in or to the said premises, and every part and parcel thereof, with the appurtenances, thereto belonging, TO HAVE AND TO HOLD, all and singular the above mentioned and described premises, together with appurtenances, unto the said Party of the Second Part and to their heirs and assign, forever.

And the said Party of the First part and its heirs do hereby covenant that they will forever WARRANTY and DEFEND all right, title and interest in and to the said premises and the quiet and peaceable possession thereof, unto the said Party of the Second Part, their heirs and assigns, against the acts and deeds of the said Party of the First Part and all and every person or persons, whomsoever, lawfully claiming or to claim the same.

ELIZABETH LOCKRIDGE 1984 TRUST

~~ELIZABETH ANN CHRISTMANN, Trustee~~

KEVIN MCMAHON, Trustee

STATE OF TEXAS)
) ss.
County of Lubbock)

On this 31st day of January, 1997, before me the undersigned, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared ~~ELIZABETH ANN CHRISTMANN~~ AND KEVIN MCMAHON as Trustee of the ELIZABETH LOCKRIDGE 1984 TRUST, known to me to be the personswhose names subscribed to the within instrument, and acknowledged to me that they executed the same.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official Notarial Seal the day and year first above written.

BARBARA GAIL RHILEY
Notary Public, State of Texas
My Commission Expires 7-22-99

Barbara Gail Rhiley
Notary Public for the State of Texas
Residing at Lubbock, TX
My commission expires: 7-22-99

19970371 4090

FM-19531

WARRANTY DEED

THIS INDENTURE, made this 3rd day of February 1997, between ELIZABETH LOCKRIDGE 1984 TRUST, Party of the First Part, and UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WHITEFISH, 625 Park Ave, Whitefish, MT 59937, Party of the Second Part.

WITNESSETH, that the said Party of the First Part, for and in consideration of the sum of TEN DOLLARS ($10.00) and other good and valuable consideration to it in hand paid by the said Party of the Second Part, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, does hereby grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said Party of the Second Part, and to their heirs and assigns, forever, all that certain lot, piece, or parcel, of land situate, lying and being in the County of Flathead, State of Montana, and particularly described as follows, to-wit:

SEE EXHIBIT "A" ATTACHED HERETO AND INCORPORATED HEREIN BY REFERENCE.

SUBJECT TO any and all easements, covenants, reservations or restrictions of record.

TOGETHER with all and singular the hereinbefore described premises together with all tenements, hereditaments, and appurtenances, thereto belonging or in anywise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues, and profits thereof; and also all the estate, right, title, interest; right of dower and right of homestead, possession, claim, and demand whatsoever, as well in law as in equity, of the said Party of the First Part, of, in or to the said premises, and every part and parcel thereof, with the appurtenances, thereto belonging. TO HAVE AND TO HOLD, all and singular the above mentioned and described premises, together with appurtenances, unto the said Party of the Second Part and to their heirs and assign, forever.

And the said Party of the First part and its heirs do hereby covenant that they will forever WARRANTY and DEFEND all right, title and interest in and to the said premises and the quiet and peaceable possession thereof, unto the said Party of the Second Part, their heirs and assigns, against the acts and deeds of the said Party of the First Part and all and every person or persons, whomsoever, lawfully claiming or to claim the same.

ELIZABETH LOCKRIDGE 1984 TRUST

Elizabeth Ann Christmann
ELIZABETH ANN CHRISTMANN, Trustee

KEVIN MCMAHON, Trustee

PATRICIA LOVATO NOTARY PUBLIC SUBLETTE COUNTY

STATE OF ~~TEXAS~~ Wyoming)
) ss.
County of Sublette)

My Commission Expires
July 13, 2000

Patricia Lovato
Notary Public State of WY
Residing at Sublette County, WY
My Commission Expires: 7-13-00

On this 3rd day of February, 1997 before me, the undersigned Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared **Elizabeth Ann Christmann as Trustee of the Elizabeth Lockridge 1984 Trust** known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument and acknowledged to me that she executed the same.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have here unto set my hand and affixed my Notarial Seal the day and year first above written.

1997037 14090

EXHIBIT A

FILE NO.: FM-19531

A tract of land in Government Lot 1, Section 25, Township 31 North, Range 22 West, P.M.M., commencing at the Southeast corner of Lot 1; thence

North along the East boundary of Lot 1, a distance of 330.00 feet to a point which is the Point of Beginning; thence
North, a distance of 310.00 feet to a point on the South boundary of the County Road; thence
West, along the South boundary of the County Road, a distance of 660.00 feet; thence
South, a distance of 310.00 feet; thence
East, a distance of 660.00 feet to the Place of Beginnning.

EXCEPTING right of way for public road along the East boundary.

Return to:
United Methodist Church
of Whitefish
625 Park Avenue
Whitefish, MT 59937

STATE OF MONTANA, } ss
County of Flathead }

Recorded at the request of FCTC
this 6 day of February 19 97 at 2:09 o'clock P M and recorded in the records of Flathead County, State of Montana.
Fee $ 18 - Pd.
RECEPTION NO. 1997037 14090
RETURN TO

Susan K. Hayes-Kiesz
(Flathead County Clerk and Recorder)
Deborah J. Hughes
(Deputy)

Plat Room
Flathead County, Montana
800 S. Main St.
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 758-5510

This Form is for Subdivisions Only

BY: Sands

FOR: United Methodist Church of Whitefish DATE: 11/13/2025

DESCP: Hope Corner in 25-31-22 PURPOSE: Subdivision

YEARS	ASSESSOR #
2022 thru 2024	E000658
2025	Same (updated 12/24/2025 sa)

I hereby certify that there are no outstanding taxes on the property assigned the assessor numbers listed above, for the years indicated for each assessor number.

DEC 24 2025

Deputy Treasurer
(seal)

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ORDINANCE NO. 26-___

An Ordinance of the City Council of the City of Whitefish, Montana, repealing Title 2, Chapter 10, Architectural Review Committee, of the Whitefish City Code.

WHEREAS, Title 2, Chapter 10 of the Whitefish City Code establishes an Architectural Review Committee, the purpose of which is to review and make a recommendation to staff on applications submitted to the City by individuals or entities proposing to construct commercial, industrial, public or municipal buildings, or two-unit townhouses or multi-family residential; and

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 407, passed by the Montana Legislature in 2023, prohibits municipalities from requiring review from an external board with respect to compliance with local design review criteria; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interests of the City and the inhabitants thereof to repeal Title 2, Chapter 10 of the Whitefish City Code and abolish the Architectural Review Committee in order to be in strict compliance with Senate Bill 407.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it ordained by the City Council of the City of Whitefish, Montana, as follows:

Section 1: Title 2, Chapter 10 of the Whitefish City Code is hereby repealed.

Section 2: This Ordinance shall take effect thirty (30) days after its adoption by the City Council of the City of Whitefish, Montana, and signing by the Mayor thereof.

PASSED AND ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WHITEFISH, MONTANA, ON THIS _____ DAY OF _____ 2026.

_____
John M. Muhlfeld, Mayor

ATTEST:

_____
Michelle Howke, City Clerk

Staff Report

To: Mayor Muhlfeld and City Council

From: Angela Jacobs, City Attorney

Date: January 13, 2026

Re: Repealing Title 2, Chapter 10 of the Whitefish City Code

History

Title 2, Chapter 10 of the Whitefish City Code establishes an Architectural Review Committee, the purpose of which is to review and make a recommendation to staff on applications submitted to the City by individuals or entities proposing to construct commercial, industrial, public or municipal buildings, or two-unit townhouses or multi-family residential. The ARC has been instrumental in creating a well-designed community that is aesthetically pleasing for citizens and visitors.

Current Report

Unfortunately, in 2023, the Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill 407 which prohibits municipalities from requiring review from an external board with respect to compliance with local design review criteria. Although the City did change its Code to designate ARC as a recommending body rather than a mandatory process, the City has been challenged by one organization with respect to the continued existence of the ARC.

Recommendation

Staff respectfully recommends the Council adopt Ordinance 26-___ repealing Title 2, Section 10 of the City Code and thanks all members of the ARC for their service.

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CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

January 13, 2026

MEETINGS

At the last City Council meeting, Habitat for Humanity proposed building the Depot Park Townhomes project. Given previous City Council direction to negotiate an agreement with Housing Whitefish, I met with Executive Director, Daniel Sidder. We discussed the presentation by Habitat for Humanity, the challenges with this project given the judgement lien against the Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) that is attached to the property, and the best path forward. Staff are diligently working with the WHA to have the judgement lien removed and transfer the property back to the City. Additionally, staff have considered the new interest in this project by Habitat for Humanity and the best process moving forward. Staff are developing a request for proposals (RFP) to provide an opportunity for all interested parties to submit proposals, especially given the significant amount of taxpayer funds committed to date and in the future. It is expected the request for proposals will be presented to the City Council in February for consideration and direction.

OTHER

An open house is scheduled for January 14th from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. with the consultant team drafting the Land Use Element Chapter of the Vision 2045: Growth Policy Update. The open house will feature presentation boards outlining the overall chapter framework and recommendations for the upcoming Land Use Plan. Community members are welcome to arrive at any time during the open house to review materials and ask questions at their own pace. There will be no formal presentation.

NEXT CITY COUNCIL MEETING

The next regular City Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 2nd. A work session will be held prior to the regular meeting for Planning staff to review the remaining draft chapters of the Vision 2045: Growth Policy Update.

Future Work Session Topics:
Feb 17th: Vision 2045: Growth Policy Update
Mar 2nd: Deer Management Plan (tentative)

Respectfully submitted,

Dana

Dana M. Meeker, CPA
City Manager

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City Clerk's Office
Attn: Michelle Howke
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Ryan E. Walther
[redacted] Birch Hill Drive
Whitefish, Montana
ryanwalther@gmail.com | [redacted]

Dear Members of the City Council,

I am writing to express my interest in serving on the City of Whitefish's Climate Action Plan Committee. I bring to the table 16 years of federal experience managing international grant and contract portfolios valued between $150 million and $350 million annually. The awards that made up these portfolios covered issues and sectors relevant to Whitefish's climate-related efforts, including governance, climate-sensitive agriculture, forest and fisheries management, conservation, and climate change-related health issues.

My role covered budgeting and fundraising; coordination with stakeholders within my agency, the State Department and other agencies, host country officials, fellow donor organizations, and civil society; monitoring, evaluation, and learning; communications; strategy and project design; and process management.

We have owned property in Whitefish for over a decade and this summer we moved here full-time. I am interested in helping the city effectively pursue climate change-related objectives, including those referenced and alluded to within the CAP. Balancing progress on these objectives with growth, city character and livability, and other issues must be managed in a transparent, judicious manner without posing excessive delays and barriers to progress.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,
Ryan Walther

January 7, 2026

To: The Whitefish Planning Board/Commission
The Whitefish City Council
The Whitefish Planning staff: Alan Tiefenbach and Dave Taylor

MLUPA requires that the city's Growth Policy include a population projection for the next 20 years. This projection can come from several sources, but the preferred source is the projection provided by the Montana Dept of Commerce. As current data comes available, the MT Dept of Commerce information is updated. The last 2 1/2 years has seen a sharp decline, statewide, in the previous extremely rapid growth during the Covid-19 growth bubble. The 2023/24 data for Whitefish shows a mere .9% increase.
https://commerce.mt.gov/Infrastructure-Planning/Community-Planning-Platform/

The 2024/25 data will likely be similar, resulting in a much lower total population projection than was initially modelled for the Vision Whitefish Plan back in 2023. By 2045 the projection is forecast to decrease to only a .3% increase per year.

Since the entire Growth Policy must be designed to meet the forecast population, it is essential that the population projection be updated with the most recent numbers to be as accurate as possible. Efforts to inflate the numbers are a disservice to the community.

Suggestions to greatly inflate the population growth numbers we do not find are accurate and strongly encourage the commission and the city council to rely on population numbers established by the Montana Department of Commerce as recommended under MLUPA.

Mayre Flowers,
Citizens for a Better Flathead
PO Box 2198, Kalispell, MT 59903
Mayre@flatheadcitizens.org

The following pages were handed out at the City Council meeting the night of the meeting. They are included here as an addendum to the packet.

BOAT LAUNCH AND COMMERCIAL PERMIT FEE ADJUSTMENTS

- DAY PASSES
- SEASON PASSES
- COMMERCIAL PERMITS
- DOCK SERVICE HOURS

Funding the Gap

Launch Fees: Current boat launch fees have not increased since 2017. Revenues generated (~$32,590) only cover approximately 20% of operational costs.

Infrastructure: Boat ramp and access road improvements were recently completed at a cost of $235,000.

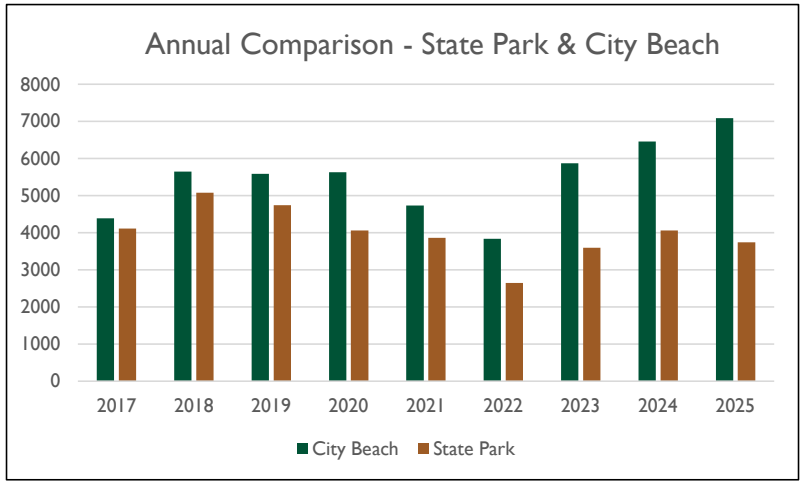
Protecting Our Waters

AIS Prevention: Fees directly support seasonal staff performing critical inspections at City Beach and Whitefish Lake State Park.

Decontamination: This vital service will continue to be provided free of charge to all boaters.

THE NEED FOR FEE INCREASES

WHITEFISH INSPECTION STATION VISITS



Limited parking at State Park and shallow water in Dog Bay have contributed to increased visits to Whitefish City Beach for both private launching and commercial use. Increased use is anticipated with recent City Beach boat ramp improvements.

BOAT LAUNCH PASSES

Regional Comparison for Day and Season Pass Rates				
Location	**Resident Day**	**Resident Season**	**Non-Resident Day**	**Non-Resident Season**
Whitefish Lake State Park	Free*	N/A	$8	N/A
Kootenai County, ID	$15	$50	$30	$150
City of McCall, ID	$15	$100	$30	$200
Tahoe City, CA	$20	$195	$75	$1,050
Whitefish City Beach (current)	$10	$50	$10	$50
PROPOSED WHITEFISH CITY BEACH FEE SCHEDULE	**$15**	**$100**	**$30**	**$200**

*Montana residents who pay the $9 state parks fee with their annual vehicle registration have no daily entrance fees to state parks. For residents who don't include this in their vehicle registration, non-resident day use fees apply.

COMMERCIAL PERMITS

Commercial permits have almost tripled since 2017 (9 to 24), increasing congestion.

Key Issues:

- Heavy use during spring/fall for deliveries.
- Summer congestion from motorized rentals.
- Increased demand for parking by commercial clients.
- Rental permit quota is consistently full with waitlists.
- Individuals renting boats online has increased.
- Rental of E-motorized hand launch watercraft is a new commercial use that needs to be included in the permitting program.

OTHER COMPARABLE COMMERCIAL PERMIT PROGRAMS

Montana State Parks	
Livery/watercraft delivery	$150 per year
Non-consumptive (dock services and construction)	$50-$1000 per launch
Service Providers (guides, high use rentals)	$5 per client day

Other Cities/Counties	
Town of LaGrange, WI	$500
Kootenai County, ID	$200-$500
Lake Forest, Tahoe, CA	$1,000
City of McCall, ID	$1,500 (includes 5 season passes)

City of Whitefish Current

$125 Permit

Includes one season pass or punch card

Must pay additional boat launch day fee or purchase additional season passes

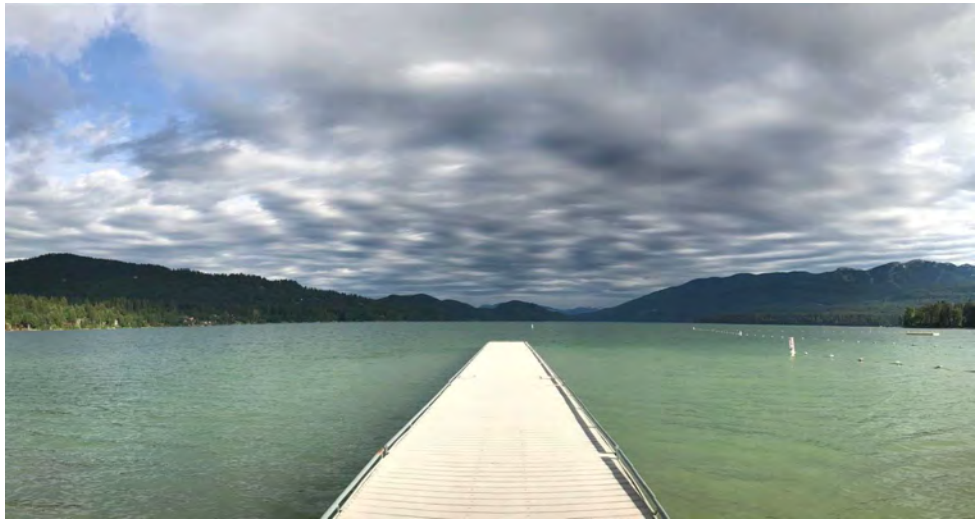
PROPOSED COMMERCIAL PERMIT FEE SCHEDULE AND QUOTAS

2026 Summer Season			
Program	**Proposed Fee**	**Permit Quota**	**Notes**
Watercraft Delivery, Dock Services, Sales, and Marina launching	$500	No Limit	Includes two punch cards
Level 1 Motorized Rentals (including e-motors)	$500	2 permits	1-15 launches per season, includes 1 season pass
Level 2 Motorized Rentals (including e-motors)	$750	2 permits	15-30 launches per season, includes 1 season pass
Level 3 Motorized Rentals (including e-motors)	$1,000	2 permits	30 plus launches per season, includes 1 season pass
Commercial Boat Launch Permit – Guiding	$500	3 permits	Includes two punch cards
Commercial Boat Launch – River Non-motorized	$250	No Limit	5 launches per day limit
Commercial Launch E-motor (use of motorized mooring area on beach)	$5 per watercraft $50 season pass	N/A	Falls under rental and guiding quotas above
Commercial Motorized Punch Card	$100 (5 launches)	N/A	-

Current Annual Permit Quotas:

- 6 annual guiding permits
- 4 annual motorized rental permits.
- No limit on boat storage/delivery, marine service/sales, and dock service commercial use permits.
- Non-motorized rental delivery is not permitted. E-motors are not included in current permit quotas.

DOCK SERVICE PROVIDERS



Morning Window

7:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Dedicated time for material delivery and launching.

Evening Window

6:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Evening access to reduce conflict with peak public use.

Exceptions

Emergency access between 11 AM and 6 PM requires approval from the Lead Ranger.

CONSIDERATIONS

Provide feedback on:

- Proposed fee schedule

This item will be scheduled for a public hearing at the next available City Council meeting.

VISION WHITEFISH 2045

PLANNING COMMISSION DRAFT

GROWTH POLICY

- An official public document adopted and used by Montana cities, towns, and counties as a guide for making decisions about their future, particularly with regards to land use.
- SB 382 (Montana Land Use Act) REQUIRES growth policy for any City of > 5,000 people in a county of > 70,000 people
- Very specific requirements from State
- Not a regulation; rather, it is a community's official policy meant to guide and help manage change for the benefit of residents.
- Zoning and Subdivision Regs implement growth policy and should be generally in conformance.
- Also known as a Community Plan, Master Plan or a Comprehensive Plan.

POLICY DOCUMENT

- A Community Plan (Growth Policy) is a policy document
- Vision, values and official positions
- These policies and priorities drive future regulations, work programs, standards, funding, etc.
- Who are we? What do we want to be? What do we value? How do we grow? What should our goals and strategies be?
- This is not a scientific or financial study
- Each plan element has a brief narrative with goals and objectives and detailed background information supporting the goals and objectives in the resource document section (Part Two)

BACKGROUND

- This draft contains background information, three plan elements, and resource document narrative information regarding these plan elements
- Next sections will be Housing and Transportation on February 2.
- Intended to meet statutory requirements – there are still placeholders for later work
- This is a text document; layout and graphics will follow at a later date
- This presentation is intended to familiarize you with the community plan and the issues
- Planning Commission still working on land use element through January and early February
- Planning Commission scheduled to discuss adoption on February 19, 2026
- Plan sections could still be revised by Planning Commission during the final adoption
- Public hearing for Council adoption scheduled for March 2 & 16

PUBLIC PROCESS

- Kick Off Meeting – robust initial community outreach
- engagewhitefish website with all content posted
- Newsletter alerts with all recent updates (600+ subscribers)
- Six visioning sessions
- Twenty-nine Planning Commission work sessions
- Five City Council work sessions (not including this one)
- Three town hall land use workshops
- Three dedicated community housing committee work sessions
- Two dedicated Climate Action Committee work sessions
- Direct Whitefish High School involvement
- Press releases before each work session

PLAN COMPOSITION

PART ONE

- BACKGROUND
  - Executive Summary
  - Planning Framework
  - Setting
- VISION
- PLAN ELEMENTS (goals and objectives)
  - Land Use
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Economic Development
  - ENRH
  - Public Facilities

PART TWO – RESOURCES

- Demographics
- Climate
- History
- Land Use Background
- Housing Background
- Transportation Background
- Economic Background
- ENRH Background
- Public Facilities Background
- Appendixes

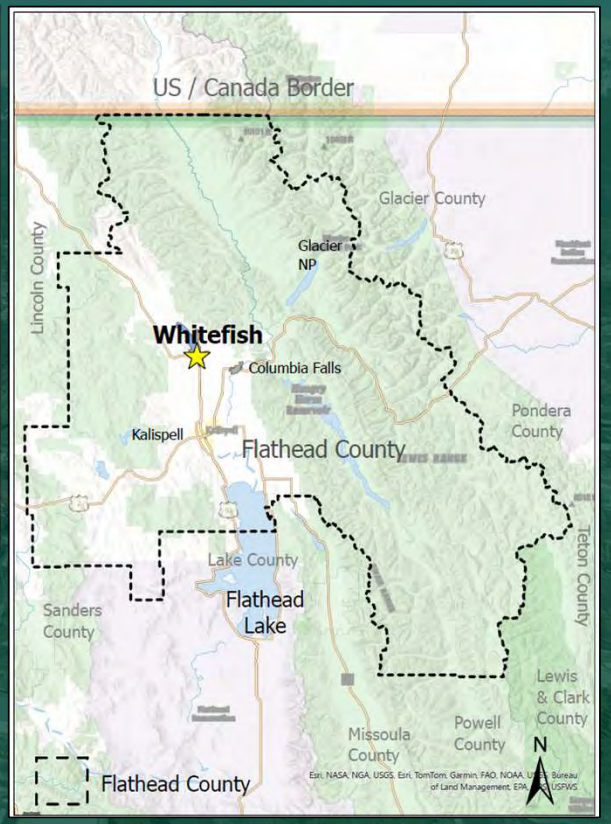
QUESTION – DOES THE COUNCIL LIKE THIS ARRANGEMENT?

REVIEW PROCESS

- Research – Existing Policies, Plans, Studies, Agencies, Census, Case Law, State Requirements, Visioning Input, Stakeholders and Citizen Input
- Write Drafts
- Planning Team Review
- City Department Review
- Outside Agency / Expert Review
- Public Review
- Planning Commission

PLANNING FRAMEWORK & SETTING

- What is a Community Plan?
- State Requirements
- Relationship with Other Plans
- Organization
- Overview of Public Outreach
- Geographic Setting
- General Layout of City
- Planning Boundary



VISION

- Process by which a community forms a mental picture of the future it wants
- Happens very early in the process to recognize shared values and define what makes Whitefish special and how to protect valuable assets
- A growth policy typically has a general vision for the city and often each element has more specific visions to set goals and provide a mental picture.

DESIGNING THE VISION

- ***How would you describe Whitefish to someone?***
- ***What makes Whitefish unique?***
- ***What do you value about Whitefish?***
- ***What do you believe is missing in Whitefish?***
- ***What are the biggest threats to Whitefish?***
- ***What needs to be improved in Whitefish?***

"Small town"

"Railroad Town"

"People"

"Community"

"Walkable"

"Working Class"

"Friendly"

"Mountains"

"Whitefish Lake"

"Safe"

"Community Events"

"Historic Character"

"Local businesses"

"Outdoors"

"Sustainable"

DESIGNING THE VISION

Vision Themes correlate with each plan element. Each theme includes a theme statement which serve as lead into each element

VISION WHITEFISH 2045

The **CITIZENS OF WHITEFISH** value the working-class origin of our city and embrace the future while honoring our past. We treasure the walkability, quality of life, scale, character, and small town feel of our community. To ensure Whitefish remains an exceptional place to live, work and play, we will grow responsibly while protecting and enhancing our trails and open spaces, water quality, wildlife, natural resources, local businesses, historic downtown, and existing neighborhoods. The following themes articulate our commitment and establish the framework of VISION WHITEFISH 2045:

- *Fostering Responsible Community Development (Land Use)*
- *Encouraging a Diversity of Housing (Housing)*
- *Being a Multimodal Community (Transportation)*
- *Supporting a Robust Economy (Economic Development)*
- *Leding in Environmental Sustainability and Resiliency from Hazards (ENRH)*
- *Ensuring High Quality Public Services and Infrastructure (Public Facilities)*

VISION WHITEFISH 2045

The citizens of Whitefish value the working-class origin of our city and embrace the future while honoring our past. We treasure the walkability, quality of life, and small town feel of our community. We will ensure Whitefish remains an exceptional place to live, work and play. We will protect and enhance our trails, parks and open spaces, water quality, wildlife, and natural resources. We will respect and support our local businesses, historic downtown, and existing neighborhoods. We will continue to pursue all opportunities to be an affordable, inclusive and diverse community. Six themes articulate our commitment and establish the foundation of VISION WHITEFISH 2045:

- Fostering Responsible Community Development
  We welcome new and infill development that supports the efficient use of land, respects existing neighborhoods and natural resources, and can be adequately and cost-effectively served by public facilities and services. Our downtown will remain the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of our community.

- Encouraging a Diversity of Housing
  "We encourage a diversity of stable housing types integrated throughout all areas of the city. We will provide for all demographic segments of our population, particularly our local [illegible] to live in [illegible] place, ensuring everyone can remain here across multiple generations. [illegible] will be complementary to and respectful of existing neighborhoods.

- Being a Multimodal Community.
  We champion alternatives to private automobile use. We will be a connected, walkable community and prioritize a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system for all modes of travel. We place equal emphasis on non-motorized and motorized forms of transportation while considering impacts on the existing transportation network.

- Supporting a Robust Economy
  We support local businesses retention and expansion encourage a diverse year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities through policies supporting moderate economic growth for our community.

- Leading in Environmental Sustainability and Community Resiliency
  We will respond and adapt to climate change and employ sustainability principles, practices, and education. We will demonstrate environmental stewardship and preserve and enhance our natural resources while managing, preventing, and mitigating impacts from hazards.

- Ensuring High Quality Public Services, Infrastructure and Amenities
  We will prioritize the provision of high-quality municipal services, maintain appropriate

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

- City to provide, at a minimum, a description, map and analysis of how the jurisdiction will accommodate its projected population over the next 20 years
- Population projections are to be obtained by one of the following:

1. Provided by demographics published by the Department of Commerce;
2. Generated by the local government; or
3. Produced by a professional firm specializing in projections

When population projection not available, population projections must be reflective of the area's proportional share of the total county population and population growth (8%)

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

- 2000 to 2020 – 5,881 to 7,855 people – 1.5% annually
- 2000 to 2023 – 2.6% (including pandemic)
- Since 2010 – 2.8% annually (3.25% including 2020)
- Over the last two years, population rate in Montana, Flathead County and Whitefish has been < 1%
- Kalispell using growth rate of 2.5%
- Flathead County using 2% growth rate for unincorporated areas
- WF Transportation Plan uses growth rate of 1.5%

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

State of Montana Projection Model – Method One

- Ignores 2020
- Accounts for WF skewing older, births and deaths, geographic constraints, cost of construction and diminishing returns, Montana has gotten more expensive, WF will grow slower than Flathead County
- Starts at 2.5% and flattens curve over time
- Averages out at about 1%
- Projects a full-time resident population of 11,087 in 2045

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Historic Growth Rate – Method Two

- Applies growth rate of approximately 1.5% over twenty years
- Projects approximately 12,707 full-time residents in 2045

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

- Approximate 30% Seasonal Population
- Added 30% to both scenarios
- Results in population of 15,839 or 18,153
- This is 2,616 to 4,930 more people
- **THIS RESULTS IN 3,000 TO 5,000 PEOPLE OVER THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS**
- Adding the seasonal population results in a combined annual
- growth rate of approximately 2.6% to 3.23%

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What was originally an economy based on the timber and railroad industries is now primarily a visitor economy with some healthcare, education, railroad, information, retail and entrepreneurial and service industries.

BNSF is still a major employer in the city, employing approximately **280** people.

$71,110
Whitefish Median Household Income

$67,915
Montana Median Household Income

< $35,000
Average salaries of service workers

AREAS OF EXPECTED JOB GROWTH
Professional Services
Health Care
Tourism

AREAS OF JOB DECLINE
Transportation
Warehousing
Information Services

76% of employees who work for Whitefish businesses do not live in Whitefish.

Approximately **43%** of all jobs in the City of Whitefish are related to tourism.

21% of working Whitefish residents work remotely

TOP WHITEFISH EMPLOYERS (2024)	
Logan Health	483
BNSF	280
Whitefish School District	250

In 2023, non-resident spending in Flathead County was **1 billion** with the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau reporting tourism bringing in approximately **$390 million** for the City of Whitefish. Resort tax brought more than **6 million** dollars into the city in 2023.

BUSINESSES MOST LACKING IN WHITEFISH
Personal and business services
Construction
Clothing retailers (for locals)

Goods and services limited by zoning or availability in Whitefish results in Whitefish residents driving to other nearby communities for their needs.

"Availability of Attainable Housing, Traffic and Shift of Resource and Transportation Based Jobs into Tourism Economy"
Indicated as trends that will influence economic development opportunities

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SUPPORTING A ROBUST RESILIENT ECONOMY

"We support local business retention and expansion and encourage a diverse year-round economic base to accommodate current and future commercial enterprises while protecting our unique character and qualities through policies supporting moderate economic growth for our community" . ~~We will endeavor to provide a full range of goods, services, and jobs to serve our local population."~~

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- MLUPA requires a growth policy to include an economic development analysis:
  - Assess existing and potential business enterprises
  - Summarize job composition, labor force and future trends
  - Inventory sites which could support existing and potential enterprises
  - Assess what local characteristics supports or constraints future enterprises
  - Assess existing and projected facilities needed to support business enterprises
  - Assess financial feasibility of supporting anticipated economic growth

ECONOMIC STUDY

- In September of 2023, staff contracted with GSBS Consulting to provide this analysis
- 30 stakeholders were contacted
- GSBS had numerous one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, city leaders, as well as group meetings
- Results of this study presented to CDB in two separate public meetings

Stakeholders who participated in GSBS Economic Development Study	
AppCOM	Heart of Whitefish
Averill Hospitality	KCM Enterprises
BNSF	Montana West Economic Development
Chamber of Commerce	Mountain Mall
City of Whitefish	National Parks Realty
Explore Whitefish	Two Bear Capital
Garden Wall Inn	Whitefish Mountain Resort
Glacier Bank	The ZaneRay Group
Haskill Creek Farms	

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Areas of Expected Job Growth
Tourism
Professional Services
Health Care

Areas of Expected Job Decline
Transportation
Warehousing
Information Services

BUSINESSES MOST LACKING

- Personal and business services
- Clothing retailers (for locals)
- Construction

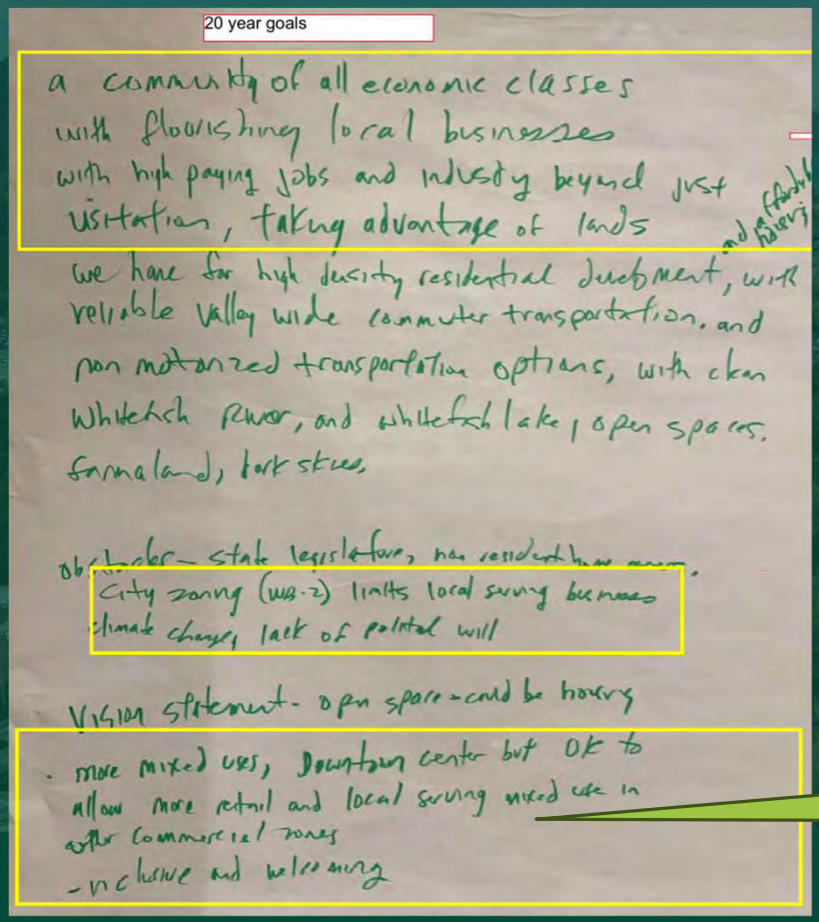
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 43% of jobs are tourism based
- The majority of the WF economy IS tourism.
- Need to diversify economy
- 76% of people who work for WF businesses do not live here
- 69% of Whitefish residents are employed in the management, business and financial sectors
- Only 10% of these jobs offered in WF
- 21% residents work remotely
- Many locals must commute out of WF

RECOMMENDATIONS OF CONSULTANT STUDY

- Attract more diversity in primary job generating businesses
- Review whether zoning is too strict
- Determine if there could be additional neighborhood commercial or mixed use locations in the city
- Consider limiting the number of particular business types in the downtown that are over-abundant (i.e. – jewelry stores, art galleries)
- Consider additional parking management, particularly downtown, for more customer turnover and revenue to develop additional off-street parking now that we no longer have Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts

VISIONING COMMENTS

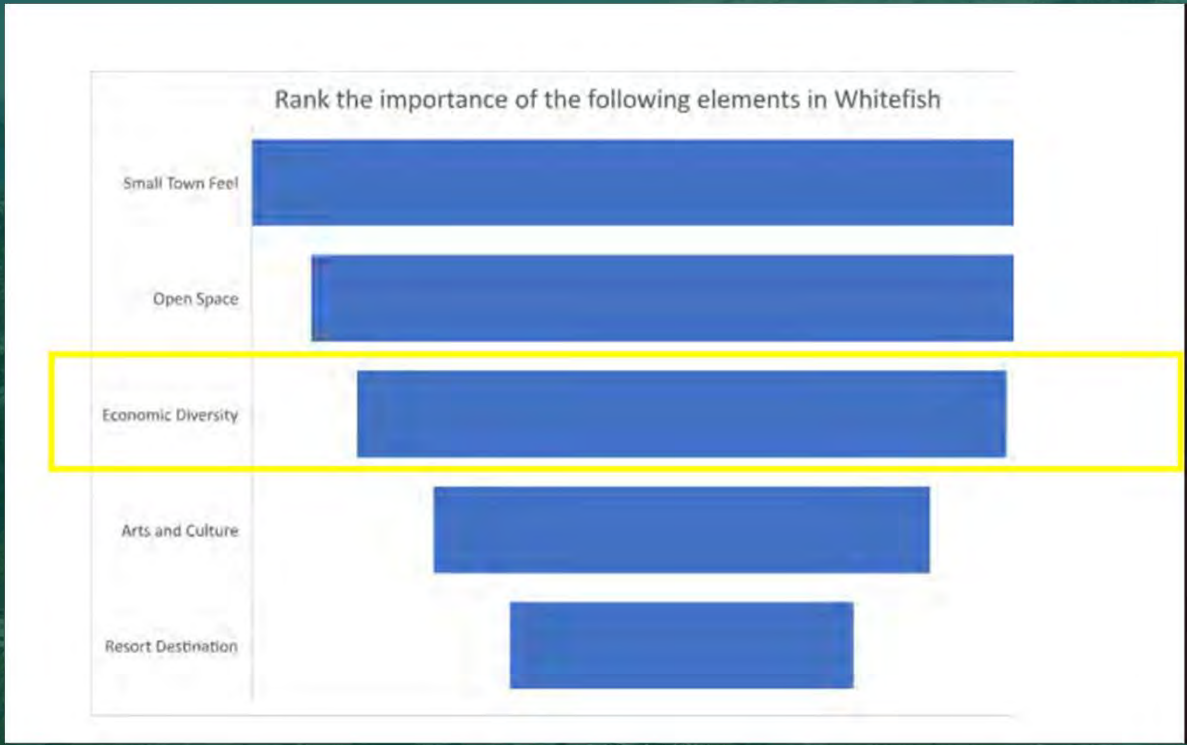

20 year goals

a community of all economic classes with flourishing local businesses with high paying jobs and industry beyond just visitation, taking advantage of lands and fisheries we have for high density residential development, with reliable valley wide commuter transportation, and non motorized transportation options, with clean Whitefish River, and whitefish lake, open spaces, farmland, dark skies.

City zoning (WB-2) limits local serving businesses
climate change, lack of political will

Vision statement - open space - could be heavy

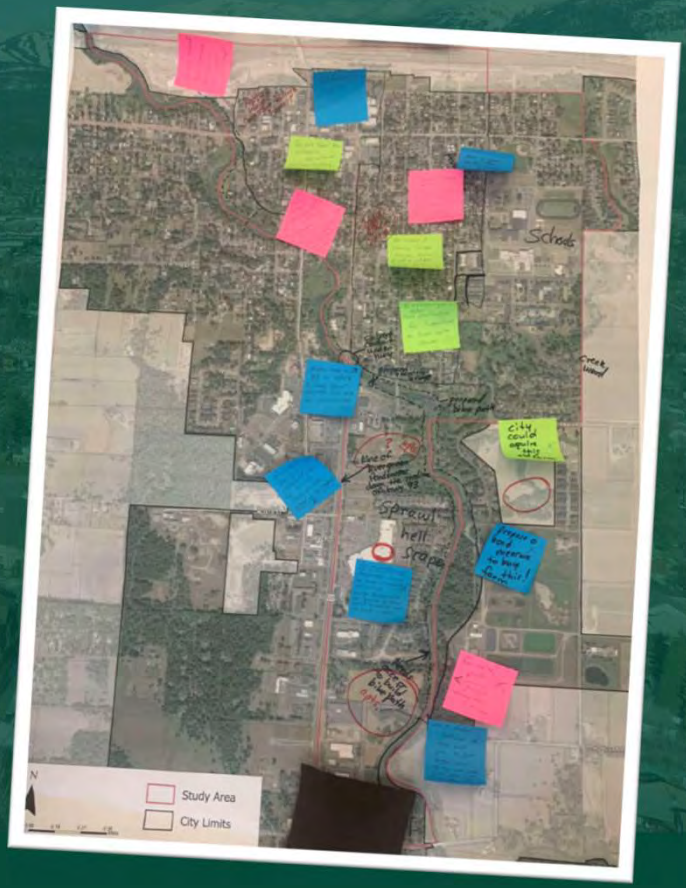
- more mixed uses, Downtown center but OK to allow more retail and local serving mixed use in other commercial zones
- inclusive and welcoming



At least 7 groups of 10 people mentioned economic diversity and 5 groups mentioned better access to locally serving goods and services or mixed use.

VISIONING COMMENTS

- Need a more diverse economy
- More higher-paying jobs for Whitefish locals
- Reduce costs and protect existing local businesses
- Closer access to goods
- More locally serving restaurants
- Too often locals have to drive outside of Whitefish for jobs and daily goods and services



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

- Following economic development study, staff created preliminary goals and objectives, and later, a draft economic development element
- This element was prepared using the following primary sources:

  ✓Findings and recommendations of study provided by economic development experts in recent GSBS report

  ✓Summary of stakeholder comments

  ✓Feedback from visioning sessions, in which five groups of 10 or more people and 17 additional participants mentioned zoning being too restrictive and / or need for more availability of affordable goods and services for locals

  ✓2007 and 1996 Growth Policy

  ✓Economic analyses completed for Baker Avenue Property, Wisconsin Ave Corridor Plan and US 93 South Corridor Plan

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION

- Early presentations in April and June 2024 which were generally PC supported
- Renewed discussion regarding Econ Dev goals and objectives began in September
- Econ Dev topic was then raised at every subsequent PC meeting
- The Commission directed staff to put the economic development goals and objectives on the agenda for a May 21, 2025 work session
- In the month prior to this meeting, staff completed the draft economic development element and released it for public review for the upcoming PC meeting
- During the public comment period, in April, staff received a rewritten version of the economic development element submitted by Heart of Whitefish (HOW)
- At the PC meeting, after staff presentation, Heart of Whitefish presented an updated version of the economic development element
- The PC voted 4-2 to approve the HOW version in its entirety
- Four work sessions have been dedicated to economic development

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Staff has received a significant amount of public comment regarding economic development
- Key issues include:

  - Whether Whitefish inspires to be a rapid growth or moderate growth community
  - Whether the city needs to provide a full range of goods and services
  - Whether people should need to drive elsewhere to get what they need
  - Whether the city should steer or incentive economic development
  - Whether commercial uses are appropriate in or adjacent to residential neighborhoods
  - Whether paid parking would help or harm downtown businesses

CITY COUNCIL DIRECTION

- Following the PC work session, staff received many letters from the public expressing concerns with how the approval process had occurred
- Pressing issue was whether public could have known a different version could have been adopted in its entirety as it was not the draft distributed for public review
- Council directed Board and staff to announce the HOW version would be discussed at an upcoming meeting and for the PC to revisit the proposed revision line-by-line
- At an August 20, 2025 work session, the PC discussed the economic development element and again approved the revised version with minor changes involving "undeleting" a few sentences.

STAFF CONCERN WITH RED-MARKS

- Language added to vision statement regarding moderate economic growth (how is that tracked, measured, or defined?)
- Removed all objectives and discussions regarding locally needed goods and services
- All objectives and discussions regarding reviewing or revising zoning to consider additional commercial areas or mixed use have been removed
- Any discussions regarding studying paid parking have been removed
- Approximately two pages of narrative regarding the benefits of tourism have been added
- Several paragraphs regarding the impacts of STRs on the economy have been added, although this was not identified by plans, studies and minimally in visioning sessions
- Removal of language discussing the loss of locally serving businesses with a new paragraph added detailing all the businesses currently in Whitefish
- Deletion of certain findings from the economic development study (lack of affordable restaurants, hyper specific zoning, parking recommendations).

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES & HAZARDS

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES & HAZARDS

Whitefish residents repeatedly express their desire for clean air, clean water, scenic vistas, and protection of wildlife habitat, open space and forest lands.

Since the last adopted growth policy, Whitefish has adoped water quality and lakeshore regulations.

4-6° Fahrenheit is the average temperature Montana is projected to increase by mid-century.

LEADING CAUSES OF AIR POLLUTION IN WHITEFISH
1. Vehicle Emissions
2. Open Burning
3. Wildfires

There is a healthy bear population in and around Whitefish. There have been 381 bear incidents reported since 2018.

BIGGEST CONTRIBUTORS TO WHITEFISH WATER QUALITY DECLINE
1. Failing Septic Tanks
2. BNSF Spill Incidents
3. Polluted Stormwater

70% of the Whitefish Lake perimeter is adjacent to properties which require septic systems for development. As they age, septic tanks are prone to failure and leakage.

Climate change consequences **ALREADY AFFECTING** Whitefish include reduced snowfall, hotter summers, bigger wildfires and smokier air, more droughts, decline in water supplies, increased flooding, and increased sediment into water.

Whitefish has a **90% higher** risk of wildfire than other communities in the United States. The entire city is within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

Natural Resources have driven the early development and economy of Whitefish - farming and ranching, fishing and hunting, and healthy forests for logging.

ENVIRONMENTAL, NAT RES, & HAZARDS

LEADING IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY FROM HAZARDS.

"We will respond and adapt to climate change and employ sustainability principles, practices, and education. We will demonstrate environmental stewardship and maintain and improve our natural resources while managing, preventing, and mitigating impacts from natural hazards."

TOPICS

ENVIRONMENT

- Air Quality
- Water Quality
- Wildlife and Habitat
- Climate Change

NATURAL RESOURCES

- Water Supply
- Water Conservation
- Agriculture
- Timber Resources

HAZARDS

- Wildfire
- Floodplains
- High Groundwater
- Seismic Activity
- Steep Slopes

REVIEW AGENCIES

- All City Departments
- City of Kalispell
- City of Columbia Falls
- Flathead County
- Flathead Conservation District
- Flathead County Env. Health
- Glacier Nat'l Park Conservancy
- Flathead National Forest
- Land to Hand
- Stoltze Lumber
- USDA
- Big Mountain Fire
- Firesafe Flathead
- BLM
- Haskill Creek Watershed Group
- Montana Dept of Env. Quality
- Montana Dept of Natural Resources
- Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- US Forest Service
- Whitefish Lake Institute
- NW Montana Community Land Trust
- Save Farmland
- Trust for Public Land
- BNSF
- WF Fire Service Area
- Flathead Electric

PUBLIC INPUT

- Involved 26 agencies
- Personally met with Climate Action Committee, Whitefish Lake Institute, BNSF, Stoltze Lumber, Big Mountain Fire, Save Farmland, Montana FWP, attended meetings with Firesafe Flathead
- Seven Planning Commission Work Sessions on ENRH
- Hundreds of pages of public comment

STAFF CONCERNS WITH RED-MARKS

- Water Quality Objectives 2. c, d, & e (requiring reports and studies)
  - Not within typical staff duties, will require excess staffing, expertise and financing and / or are not within the purview of the city.
- Hazards Objective 9.c (prepare CWPP within 6 months of community plan approval)
  - Not realistic time limit
- Hazards Objective 10.a (Design and feasibility study for Big Mtn alternative egress)
  - Big Mountain not within the city, road locations are primarily on private land, does the city really want to hire a firm to engineer a preliminary design and do a study?
- Hazards Objective 10.b (moratorium on subdivisions without adequate egress)
  - Moratoriums are for public health and safety emergencies and typically apply for only one year for the city to complete zoning or similar actions. This puts the city in a position of legal liability.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

90.1 acres of developed and 56.1 acres of undeveloped parkland.

During visioning sessions, outdoor access and recreation ranked first in what participants valued the most about Whitefish, and parks and open space ranked as the second most important element of the community.

A 5 mile driving distance is a guideline used when locating fire stations. At least 18 percent of Whitefish residences are beyond the five mile radius.

WFD can serve the projected population but a second fire station located on the north side of the railroad tracks would benefit at least 400 residences.

change impacts may require exploration of groundwater sources and an additional water storage tank is required.

Municipal water is primarily sourced from Haskill Creek with Whitefish Lake serving as a backup source of water.

The city sewer treatment can serve the projected population but sewer main upsizing and improvement of lift stations is required.

Whitefish has an unusually high number of public and quasi-public facilities for a city of its size. Some of these include:
Stumptown Ice Den
The Wave Aquatic Center
O'Shaughnessy Center
Whitefish Performing Arts Center
Whitefish Lake Golf Club

MLUPA REQUIREMENTS

76-25-207 requires a land use plan to

- Determine existing and anticipated levels of service, capacities and deficiencies to serve projected population
- Include law enforcement, fire protection, EMS, local health care, water, wastewater, stormwater, solid waste and other utilities
- Contain inventory and map of jurisdictional areas, response times, mutual aid agreements
- Contain maps of all utility service areas, networks and facilities
- Identify planned capital improvements
- Coordinate with school districts to determine existing capacities, expansions and improvements to serve projected population
- **Transportation, including the non-motorized network (trails), is being addressed separately as its own plan element.**

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Contents

- City Administration
- Public Works
- Water, Sewer and Stormwater (pending)
- EMS
- Fire, Police
- Courts
- Parks and Recreation (parks and facilities)
- Other Public and Civic Facilities
- Overview of Financing for Public Facilities
- Goals and Objectives

STAFF CONCERNS WITH RED-MARKS

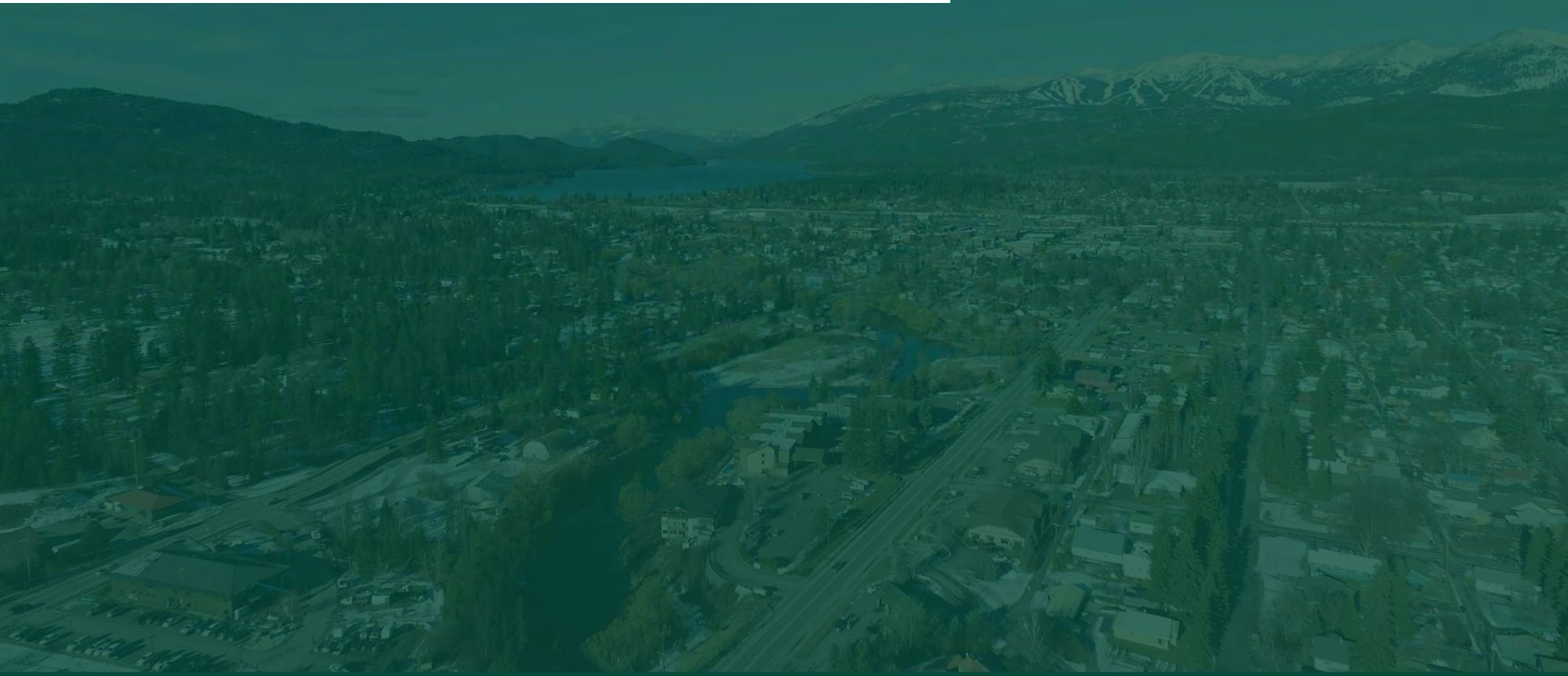
- Public Works Objective 4.4 (requiring preparing report on quantity of water pumped from Lake and discussing drop in lake levels)
  - Preparation of the report is already done on an annual basis, but discussion of lake level and additional water sources is an extremely political topic.
- Public Sewer and Stormwater Objective 5.d (regarding developing and updating program to reduce water quality impacts associated with city urban drainage)
  - This objective is rather vague and does not give staff very clear direction
- Public Sewer and Stormwater Objective 5.f & g (regarding testing and mapping of storm drainage outfalls)
  - These objectives will be required once the City becomes an MS4 system
- Financing and Improvement Mechanism Objective 11.3 (regarding preparing analysis of city tax rise attributable to public facilities)
  - There are already requirements for showing property tax increase with an adopted budget. It will be difficult to identify exactly what is causing an increase in property taxes when numerous factors contribute to the revenue needs of the city.

NEXT STEPS

VISION WHITEFISH 2045 WORK PROGRAM

	PLANNING COMMISSION	CITY COUNCIL
Jan 7, 2026	HOUSING	
Jan 14, 2026	OPEN HOUSE W/ LAND USE CONSULTANTS	
Jan 15, 2026	LAND USE CONSULTANTS WORKSESSION	
Jan 20, 2026		WORK SESSION ON VISION WF 2045 (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENRH, PUBLIC FACILITIES)
Feb 2, 2026		WORK SESSION ON VISION WF 2045 (TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING)
Feb 4, 2026	LAND USE	
Feb 11, 2026	LAND USE	
Feb 17, 2026		WORK SESSION ON VISION WF 2045 (LAND USE)/ZONING AND SUBDIVISION INPUT
Feb 19, 2026	**PUBLIC HEARING ON COMPLETED DRAFT**	
Feb 25, 2026	**PUBLIC HEARING ON COMPLETED DRAFT – IF PUBLIC HEARING IS CONTINUED**	
Mar 2, 2026		**VISION WF 2045 PUBLIC HEARING**
Mar 4, 2026	Zoning/Subdivision Work Session – 1st	
Mar 16, 2026		**VISION WF 2045 PUBLIC HEARING – IF PUBLIC HEARING IS CONTINUED**
Mar 18, 2026	Zoning/Subdivision Work Session – 2nd	
April 6 or April 20, 2026		ZONING/SUBDIVISION WORK SESSION
April 16, 2026	**PUBLIC HEARING ZONING / SUBDIVISION**	
May 4, 2026		**ZONING / SUBDIVISION FINAL ADOPTION – 1ST READING**
May 18, 2026		**ZONING / SUBDIVISION FINAL ADOPTION – 2ND READING**
June 17, 2026		ZONING IN EFFECT

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS?



January 14, 2026

Whitefish City Council
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
Whitefish, Montana 59937

Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Community Plan Land Use, Economic Development, and Housing Elements

Commissioners,

Crandall Arambula, representing The Heart of Whitefish respectfully submits our issues, concerns, and proposed changes to the Vision Whitefish 2045 Community Plan. We request that the Economic Development, Land Use, and Housing Elements do not include Mixed Use or Neighborhood Center policies promoting retail use, nor zoning updates that include permitted or conditional retail use outside the Downtown Business District or other town areas where retail is currently permitted by right or conditionally.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

The need for more neighborhood housing is well supported by state mandated MLUPA policies and housing needs assessment data, however no growth policy rationale nor data has been provided to justify the need for retail use in neighborhoods. The proposed Vision Whitefish 2045 scenarios propose polycentric, mixed-use neighborhoods without assessing Whitefish's long-term supply and demand for retail, nor the impacts on struggling downtown retail businesses if neighborhood retail is permitted.

Permitting additional neighborhood retail businesses will exacerbate the downtown vacancy condition, weakening the Downtown Business District as a destination for local and tourist shoppers, and in turn reducing resort tax revenues. Our initial analysis indicates that there is not sufficient latent demand to justify expanding current retail supply outside the Downtown Business District. Currently there are 89,750 square feet of storefront parcel vacancies and retail sites available downtown (Attachment A). Moreover, based on our assessment of the Vision Whitefish 2045 growth scenario housing development areas, there are 3 areas where neighborhood retail use could be technically viable, resulting in up to 90,000 square feet of competing entitled retail use (Attachment B).

Neighborhood mixed use retail is difficult to finance and will tamper affordable housing developer interest. Rather than providing developers with predictability and certainty that building workforce housing will be financially feasible, including retail use as a component of neighborhood housing place types adds unnecessary financial and design barriers to existing hard to develop affordable housing sites. Adding well-intended but poorly conceived policy and zoning to sites where retail is not viable will result in little or no housing development and in turn, Whitefish's non-compliance with state mandated 2045 housing targets.

REQUESTED ACTIONS

Crandall Arambula proposes the following actions:

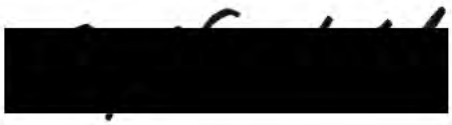
- **Remove all references to retail in the Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development, Land Use , and Housing elements' policy text and graphics.** Mixed Use Neighborhood and Mixed-Use Center Place Types are removed and replaced with an alternative residential 'Mixed Income' place type(s) or other place type(s) determined by town planning staff and the community.
- **Provide Downtown Retail Preservation Policy and Regulations.** Preserve and strengthen downtown as the sole focus for retail shopping in Whitefish by including policies and regulations that will direct planning, design, and funding of a new downtown supportive projects identified in the Downtown Business District Master Plan such as the 2nd and Spokane parking structure, and prohibition of any changes to the character and function of Central Avenue such as removal of existing motor vehicle roadway access and parking.
- **Add Transportation Element policy that directs the buildout of a robust town-wide active transportation network by 2045.** Complete and supplement Connect Whitefish Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan network connections to the downtown to ensure all neighborhoods have equitable, safe, direct, and convenient access to the Downtown Business District goods and services.

Reference information:

Crandall Arambula requested actions are supported by the firm's 28-year experience in downtown revitalization, including the Whitefish Downtown Business District Plan, numerous neighborhood planning projects throughout North America, and an intimate understanding of Whitefish's unique physical, economic, and social conditions. To aid your deliberations we have included attachments that include information about downtown retail land use that we publish as part of the firm's Revitalization Series planning and design educational materials that is available upon request at our website, www.ca-city.com

Whitefish is a community that we have both have a professional pride in our role in the revitalization of the Downtown Business District, and a personal attachment to this special part of America. We provide our input with the hope that we can aid the adoption of a bold yet realistic Vision Whitefish 2045 Community Plan.

Thank you,



Don Arambula, Principal
Crandall Arambula
darambula@ca-city.com
503.417.7879 (office)
503.703.2879 (mobile)

George Crandall, Principal
Crandall Arambula
gcrandall@ca-city.com
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Attachment A

Downtown Business District Vacant Land and Storefront Vacancies. In December 2025, the Heart of Whitefish prepared a Downtown Business District assessment of vacant storefront and undeveloped retail sites within the Downton Business District.

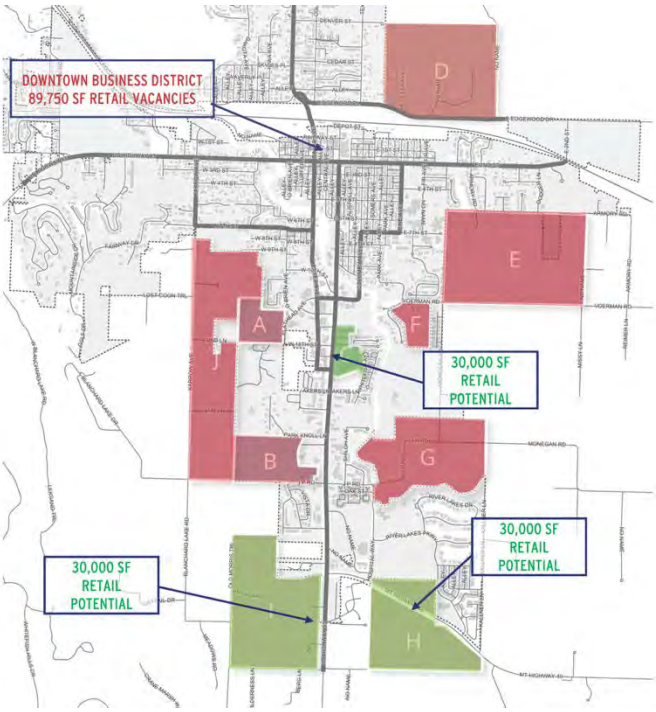
A total of 89,750 square feet of storefronts and vacant parcels are currently available.

Attachment B

For the analysis of Mixed-Use Center proposals, Crandall Arambula has prepared a Main Street Retail Development assessment to determine the viability of retail, based on the firm's experience developing downtown and neighborhood plans over the last twenty-eight years. We offer the assessment as a tool to inform Vision Whitefish 2045 Place Type decisions.

The assessment indicates:

- **Punitive Development Policy.** Seven of the proposed areas identified (including areas within the current city limits and outside the city limits) will not meet drive-by traffic or population performance standards (See Attachment C) for neighborhood retail success. Any policy allowing retail by right in Mixed Neighborhood or Neighborhood Center Place Types policies will cannibalize existing downtown retail, therefore Crandall Arambula recommends that all neighborhood retail policy be removed from 2045 growth scenarios. Instead, we suggest a new 'Mixed Income" housing-only place type(s) that fosters a range of 'missing middle' unit types– townhome, duplex, tri-plex, small lot detached housing. Moreover, to provide essential walking and biking access between residential neighborhoods and retail goods and services in the downtown, we recommend robust pedestrian and bicycle network improvement policies and regulations as described in the Connect Whitefish Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan (gray lines).
- **Unwarranted and Unnecessary Retail Destinations.** Areas C, H, I lack nearby existing households nor sufficient developable land area to support a neighborhood main street retail destination. However, areas C, H, and I front busy highways, and as result can meet minimum drive-by traffic performance standards. Combined, these three areas represent up to 90,000 square feet of potential entitled new retail uses that would pose significant Downtown Business District competition. As such, without a market analysis indicating demand for additional retail use, we recommend that these areas designated as Mixed Income moderate density or other place types.



MAIN STREET RETAIL DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

Performance Standards:

VIABLE: Meets Standards

NOT VIABLE: Cannot Meet Standards

SCENARIO AREAS

Area	Performance Standards: Drive-by Traffic	Population
A	NO	NO
B	NO	NO
C	YES	NO
D	NO	NO
E	NO	NO
F	NO	NO
G	NO	NO
H	YES	NO
I	YES	NO
J	NO	NO

Attachment C

The following pages include information concerning retail land use, including:

- Brick and Mortar Retail Trends
- Where People Shop
- Types of Retail Shopping
- Main Street Retail Performance Standards
- Main Street Design Standards and Guidelines

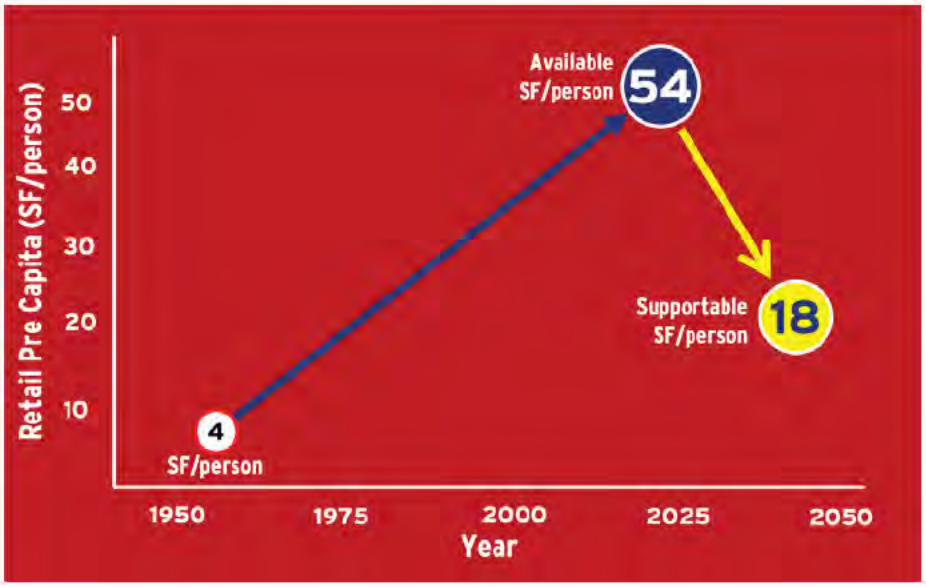
REVITALIZING CITIES SERIES

CRANDALL ARAMBULA
URBAN DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | PLANNING

'BRICK & MORTAR' RETAIL TRENDS

America is considered 'over-retailed'. Historically, the United States communities have maintained significantly more 'brick and mortar' retail space per capita than other nations, a trend that accelerated into the 21st century due to suburban sprawl, poly-centric community plans, and de-emphasis on downtown as the focus for retail development.

Crandall Arambula's retail research indicates that 12-18 square feet of retail building floor area per capita is a sustainable target range amount for a vigorous community.



Reliance on tax revenue.

Many communities rely on retail sales to provide revenue for public services. Competition for tax revenue has had a significant effect on retail growth, primarily by driving the "fiscalization" of retail land use–where local governments make land-use decisions based on their ability to generate tax revenue with disregard of the impacts on existing retail districts that have generated the revenue. **Healthy cities ensure that tax revenues benefit the districts that generated the revenue.**

Retail Policy Consequences.

Communities often require retail as part of district and neighborhood plans to improve livability without understanding the fundamental requirements for retail success.

- **Mixed Use Mandates.** Project financing is difficult for neighborhood mixed use buildings where retail is required as a ground floor use, resulting in 'shelf plans' that are not implemented that in turn, lead to community frustration that their vision of active and vital neighborhood retail shopping destination is not realized.
- **'Ghost' Storefronts.** Where mixed use buildings are constructed without regard to retail development fundamentals, retail tenants are difficult to recruit, and if spaces are filled businesses often fail. Long-term, this results in vacant mixed use building ground floor storefronts that become an economic burden for the building owners and create inactive 'dead edges' along street frontages, resulting in visual blight and opportunities for vandalism and crime – reducing community livability, the very objective that they were intended to improve.

REVITALIZING CITIES SERIES

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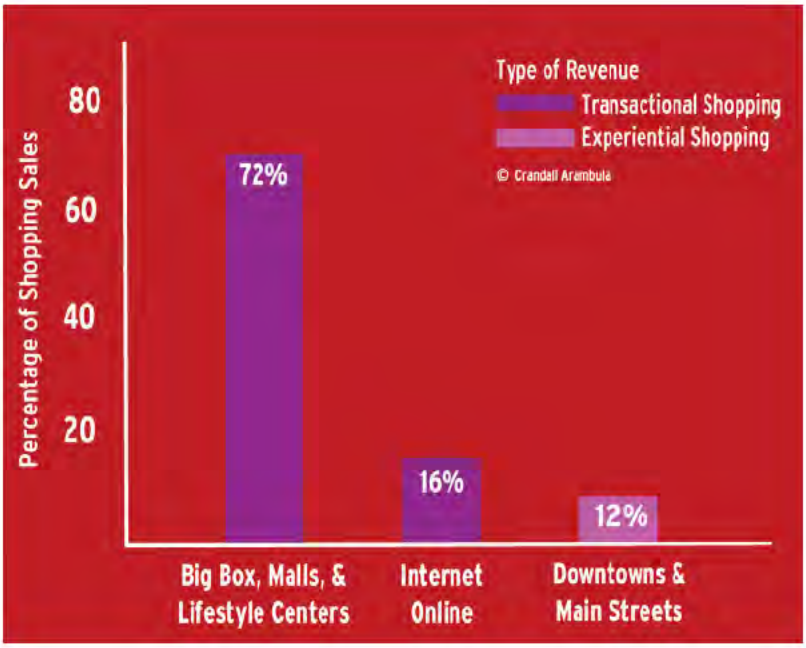
WHERE PEOPLE SHOP

Americans still primarily shop in physical 'brick & mortar' stores, but the online share of sales is rapidly increasing and is the main driver of change in the retail landscape.

Downtown and Neighborhood Main Street stores account for a small share of shopping expenditures. While some growth has occurred in this segment, this increase is not likely to result in a significant uptick in the percentage of total retail sales.

Revenue by Segment (2025)

- **BIG BOX, MALLS, AND LIFESTYLE CENTERS.** In the U.S., 72 percent of all retail purchases occurs in this segment, with big box store transactional retail spending accounting for the vast majority of segment revenue.
- **ONLINE.** The most significant change over time has been the rapid rise of e-commerce, which has grown from under 5% in 2010 to over 16% of total retail sales in 2025.
- **DOWNTOWN/NEIGHBORHOOD MAIN STREET.** A study by the International Downtown Association indicates their relative minor shopping share. Using Census and tax data the analysis found that in cities with healthy downtowns can generate up to 12% of citywide sales tax revenue.



Revenue Trends

Overall, transactional & experiential shopping trips are declining.

- **Fewer Transactional Trips on Weekly Basis.** A good indicator is grocery shopping which the single greatest generator of shopping trips. The average number of grocery store trips per person has dropped from eight per month in 2022 to around six per month in 2024.
- **Transactional Shopping Trip Consolidation.** The reduction in trips can be accounted to consumers making larger purchases per trip, an increase in shopping at warehouse membership stores such as Costco and using online ordering for supplemental utilitarian purchases such as house cleaning supplies.
- **Experiential Trip Expansion.** The broader "retailtainment" trips are projected to more than quadruple by 2035, yet the total number experiential trips will remain a small portion of all shopping trips.

REVITALIZING CITIES SERIES

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TYPES OF RETAIL SHOPPING

Retail planning must consider and address objectives of a shopping trip. Transactional retail shopping is about efficiently acquiring a product, while experiential retail shopping is about the journey - the entire interaction and feeling associated with shopping.

'Transactional' Retail Shopping

The primary type of shopping, it includes local independent businesses but typically are regional or national brand stores and restaurants such as Walmart, Albertsons, Costco, RiteAid, Home Depot, McDonald's, Starbucks, or Olive Garden.

Primary shopper considerations are:

- **Availability of essential household goods and services purchased on daily & weekly basis,** such as groceries. Shoppers want to get in, get what they need, get out, or have it delivered.
- **Cost of goods, range of selection, and availability** of specific features (size, color, material).
- **Familiarity and trust of brands**, especially for eating and beverage establishments.

Primary requirements are:

- **Store adjacency, visibility, and access to high volume regional serving roadways** to serve residents from a regional capture area.
- **Site auto orientation, including large parking lots** designed for peak seasonal demand.
- **Stores are typically large** and designed with consistent brand architectural elements.
- **Store drive-through window** for food and beverage establishments.

'Experiential' Retail Shopping

The primary objective is to participate in an entertaining shopping activity. Businesses are more often independently owned and operated, but may include a limited number of national brands. These uses appeal to local clientele, but because of their authenticity and vibe, can draw out of town visitors and tourists.

Primary shopper considerations are:

- **The 'place' is integral to a store or restaurant purchase.** Streets and storefronts are designed to foster sitting, viewing, and window-shopping.
- **Stores that offer unique goods and services, rather than mass produced, formulaic products.** High-quality, premium products with local craftsmanship over value brands and disposable imported goods.
- **Restaurants and cafes create unique 'third places'** where social interaction and activities is fostered.

Primary requirements are:

- **Store adjacency, visibility, and access to moderate volume roadways** to serve residents from a town-wide capture area.
- **Shopping along walkable 'main streets' worthy of a postcard.** Pedestrian-friendly sidewalks with street-oriented buildings.

REVITALIZING CITIES SERIES

CRANDALL ARAMBULA
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MAIN STREET RETAIL PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Designing Main Street Retail is a science. A unique and memorable retail experience requires stores be arranged in a tight knit, mutually beneficial collection of shops. Sustainable Main Street Retail requires either high populations within walking and biking proximity, or busy street adjacency. Ideally, a combination of the two should be provided.

Retail Floor Area Performance Standards

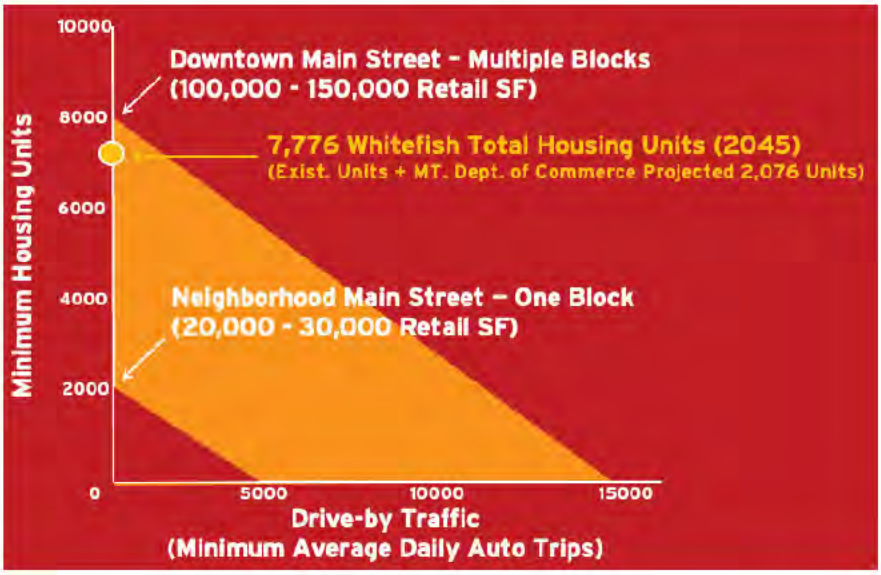
Downtown and neighborhood shopping destinations must be 'right-sized'. A 'critical mass' of contiguous retail shop floor area must be:

- **Downtown Main Street.** A minimum of 100,000 and a maximum of 150,000 square feet of floor area.
- **Neighborhood Main Street.** A minimum of 20,000 and a maximum of 30,000 square feet of floor area.

Population Performance Standards

Main Street retail floor area can be viable if adequate household population can be provided within the downtown or neighborhood. If residential population is below thresholds, Drive-by Traffic Performance Standards must be met.

- **Downtown: 8,000 housing units** are required within a town-wide retail capture area. Because downtown serves as the focus of city retail and residential development activity, more residential development must be provided to support a greater retail aggregation.
- **Neighborhoods: 2,000 housing units** are required within a neighborhood capture area, a 5-minute (quarter mile) walking distance.



Drive-by Traffic Performance Standards

Drive-by traffic increases the retail capture area where downtown or neighborhood population is not adequate to support retail shops. Minimum drive-by motor vehicle traffic ensures enough customers see storefronts. Too much traffic erodes the Main Street pedestrian atmosphere and becomes a nuisance and deterrent for window shopping and outdoor dining.

Average Daily Trips (ADT) 'sweet spot' for drive-by traffic:

- **Minimum Traffic.** 5,000 ADT provided along or perpendicular to Main Streets.
- **Maximum Traffic.** 15,000 ADT provided along or perpendicular to Main Streets.

REVITALIZING CITIES SERIES

CRANDALL ARAMBULA
URBAN DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | PLANNING

MAIN STREET DESIGN STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

Main streets in both downtown and neighborhood centers require strict adherence to design requirements. The requirements are not arbitrary, nor discretionary 'rules of thumb' or 'best practices'; rather they are indisputable proven rules that are non-negotiable.

Minimum Objective Design Standards.

- **Downtown Main Street Length**. Quarter-mile maximum – a 5 minute walk
- **Neighborhood Main Street Length**. A one block maximum
- **Ground Floor Use**. Continuous, uninterrupted, edge-to-edge retail stores and restaurants fronting on both sides of the street. Prohibited uses include street-level uses including banks, offices and housing.
- **Ground Floor 'Active Edge'**. Street fronting doors and windows must be transparent (75% of ground floor facade) to foster walking and drive by window shopping, especially for restaurants. Store finished floor elevations shall be no higher or lower than 30 inches above or below the adjacent sidewalk grade.
- **Pedestrian-friendly frontage.** Buildings must be oriented to the street with parking or driveways between the front facade and property line. Store front doors must be directly accessible from the public street. Doors must be universally accessible.
- **Pedestrian-friendly Sidewalks**. Publicly accessible sidewalks between the main street building facade and street curb line must be present. Sidewalks must be a minimum of 10 feet in width.
- **Shopper-friendly Parking.** Curbside parking must be provided along streets with retail ground floor use.

Downtown Main Street Retail Configuration

Neighborhood Main Street Retail Configuration

Subjective Design Guidelines.

Guidelines provide aspirational design direction beyond regulatory rules are capable of describing, addressing more nuanced and more ephemeral concerns such as authenticity, compatibility, and ambiance.

Architecture
- Style
- Color and Materials

Site Guidelines
- Views
- Screening
- Publicly Accessible Space

Michelle Howke

From: Ginia Hauf <giniahauf@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 2:09 PM
To: Michelle Howke
Subject: Public comment on economic development Chapter of the Growth Policy

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Dear Mayor Muhlfeld and City Council Members,

I am writing as a long-time homeowner on Rest Haven Drive and a resident of Kalispell. I have actively participated in the public comment process by attending several consultant-led planning sessions and a Planning Commission meeting, and I have discussed local economic and housing issues extensively with my neighbors.

I was concerned by the atmosphere at the recent Planning Commission meeting, which felt dismissive and hostile toward community members whose views differed from those supporting the business community. Residents who spoke eloquently about the need for affordable housing, mixed-use density, walkability, and environmental stewardship were met with a lack of respect.

I implore you to listen to all members of the community, rather than a powerful few who may be focused on maintaining the status quo at the expense of fact-based data and creative solutions. Adopting the Planning Commission's version of the plan, which appears heavily tilted toward specific business interests, would be detrimental to our community as a whole.

Many other Montana cities are looking forward to adopting mixed-use structures and modern policies. In contrast, the Planning Commission seems focused on preserving the status quo and limiting density to the downtown area. While the plan put forward by city planners and consultants may not align perfectly with my views, it at least attempts to consider a broader range of community opinions. Whitefish needs to look forward and not back, and assure that the interests of all are considered. Please hold the planning commision accountable and adopt the original city planners.

Sincerely,

Ginia Hauf

Michelle Howke

From: Heart of Whitefish <heartofwhitefish@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 17, 2026 4:54 PM
To: Andy Feury; Ben Davis; frank@pfsfjs.net; John.Muhlfeld@swca.com; squenell@cityofwhitefish.gov; Rebecca Norton; caltabiano.giuseppe@gmail.com
Cc: Michelle Howke
Subject: Growth Policy Economic Development Element Comment for Tuesday, January 20, 2026 Work Session
Attachments: Alan T Stakeholder Request emails April 2025.pdf

You don't often get email from heartofwhitefish@gmail.com. Learn why this is important

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Hello, John, Frank, Andy, Rebecca, Steve, Ben, and Guiseppe,

There appears to be a misunderstanding about the Draft Economic Development Element of the Growth Policy adopted by the Planning Commission on May 21, 2025. I hope this message will clear this up.

What were titled *Heart of Whitefish Edits*, were an in-good-faith compilation of public comment and suggested edits. These are all included in your work session packet. Because of the cumbersome nature of the process, we compiled the comments as red-line edits into the draft to make them easier to understand. We included a cover-letter, footnotes and source information, pages 311 - 334 of your packet.

Although the title on the edits is "Heart of Whitefish Edits", it should more accurately have been titled "Edits Compiled by Heart of Whitefish." The suggested edits came from community comments submitted during the Vision Whitefish 2045 Visioning Sessions, and from Explore Whitefish, Citizens for A Better Flathead, Housing Whitefish, and Flathead Families for Responsible Growth, as well as

from Heart of Whitefish members and board members. These are all included in your packet.

The suggested edits were originally submitted on April 18, 2025 with a cover letter, footnoting and source information. This submission was in response to a request from Alan Tiefenbach sent to identified stakeholders, including the Heart of Whitefish. The original submission can be found on pgs 311 - 334 of your packet. Alan's April 9, 2025 request is attached below and is also on pages 335 and 336 your packet.

Between April 18, 2025 and the May 21, 2025 Planning Commission meeting, the suggested edits were expanded and resubmitted to include public-record input from Explore Whitefish (pgs 306-311 of your packet) and Housing Whitefish (verbally communicated to Rhonda Fitzgerald, a member of the City Housing Committee, then additionally during public comment at the May 21, 2025 Planning Commission meeting).

I hope this clears up any misunderstanding you might have regarding this matter as you prepare for your work session Tuesday January 20, 2026.

Sincerely,
Chris

--

Chris Schustrom, Chair
Heart of Whitefish
c.[redacted]

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2025 3:17 PM
Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element

Good afternoon,

Attached is the DRAFT Economic Development Element for Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's Growth Policy Update.

The Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA) has specific requirements regarding economic development. These include assessing existing and potential commercial enterprises, summarizing job composition and labor force, assessing local constraints to commercial enterprises, inventorying existing and potential commercial sites, and analyzing local facilities and financial feasibility of supporting existing and potential commercial enterprises for the projected population.

Due to the expertise needed for this analysis, staff retained a consultant to complete the study. The consultant reached out to more than 30 business and industry stakeholders over a 6-month period, met with many stakeholders individually, held two group economic forums and coordinated extensively with staff. Seventeen stakeholders participated. Based on the study and the existing growth policy, Staff drafted initial goals and objectives, and these were presented to the Community Development Board along with the report in two separate public meetings - April 18 and June 20 of 2024. Staff asked the Board if they were overall supportive of the report and the goals, and the Board said they were.

Since the time of the presentation of the report and the goals and objectives last year, the Community Development Board has had renewed interest in the economic development goals and objectives, with a considerable amount of discussion about this topic beginning in September of 2024.

At a March 19, 2025 work session intended to discuss the natural resources element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the Board again raised the economic development goals and objectives. The Board moved to put this topic on the agenda for a **May 21, 2025** work session at **6PM**. At least one Board member has noted their intent at this upcoming work session is to give direction to staff regarding whether Whitefish aspires to be a "rapid growth" or "moderate growth" community.

Planning Staff had initially hoped to present this plan element later in the process, while the land use and housing elements were underway. However, staff did not want the upcoming discussion at the work session to occur with limited information or uninformed participation, so we decided to get in front of it, finish the plan element, and get it out for review so all interests were informed equally. Please note the economic development element as prepared by staff does not mention moderate versus rapid growth scenarios – it recommends strategies to increase economic diversity and access to daily goods and services.

If you have any comments on this draft, please submit them to me by **5PM ON FRIDAY, APRIL 18.** After this, revisions will be made, and it will be provided to the general public for review and comment.

HERE is the link to the study that was used as background to prepare the plan element.

If you have not subscribed to the Growth Policy Website, it is highly recommended as all progress is posted and you will receive updates through newsletter alerts.

Gmail

Rhonda Fitzgerald <rhonda@gardenwallinn.com>

FW: Vision Whitefish 2045 Economic Development Element

1 message

Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov> Wed, Apr 9, 2025 at 4:03 PM

Cc: "justin.pearson@bnsf.com" <justin.pearson@bnsf.com>, "Matthew.Jones@bnsf.com" <Matthew.Jones@bnsf.com>, "nicosias@cityofcolumbiafalls.com" <nicosias@cityofcolumbiafalls.com>, "eric@sandssurveying.com" <eric@sandssurveying.com>, "jnygren@kalispell.com" <jnygren@kalispell.com>, "psorensen@kalispell.com" <psorensen@kalispell.com>, "emack@flathead.mt.gov" <emack@flathead.mt.gov>, "KevinAbel@logan.org" <KevinAbel@logan.org>, Giuseppe Caltabiano <gcaltabiano@cityofwhitefish.gov>, "scot@hc.farm" <scot@hc.farm>, "ncostello@argoinvest.com" <ncostello@argoinvest.com>, "dayna@argoinvest.com" <dayna@argoinvest.com>, "christy@dobusinessinmontana.com" <christy@dobusinessinmontana.com>, "justind@AVERILLHOSPITALITY.COM" <justind@averillhospitality.com>, "rhonda@gardenwallinn.com" <rhonda@gardenwallinn.com>, "kevin@whitefishchamber.org" <kevin@whitefishchamber.org>, "mike@twobearcapital.com" <mike@twobearcapital.com>, "jpeters@twobear.org" <jpeters@twobear.org>, "caseym@kcmenterprises.com" <caseym@kcmenterprises.com>, "kate@appcom.net" <kate@appcom.net>, "julie@explorewhitefish.com" <julie@explorewhitefish.com>, "nickp@skiwhitefish.com" <nickp@skiwhitefish.com>, "jeff@nprmt.com" <jeff@nprmt.com>, "henry@zaneray.com" <henry@zaneray.com>, "mjsmith@glacierbank.com" <mjsmith@glacierbank.com>, "meansd@whitefishschools.org" <meansd@whitefishschools.org>, "Arps, Dani" <Dani.Arps@mt.gov>

This is an addendum to the email I just sent regarding the economic development element of Vision Whitefish 2045.

You received the draft for review because you have been identified as someone who is involved in the business community or who participated in the initial economic development study. After we receive review and comments from business community stakeholders, we will make necessary revisions and release for public review.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner

City of Whitefish

418 E. 2nd Street

P.O. Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413

HOUSING
WHITEFISH

1/16/2026

TO: Whitefish City Council

FROM: Daniel Sidder, Housing Whitefish Executive Director

RE: Comments on Economic Development Element

1. **Economic Development Must Account for Workforce Housing Capacity**
    a. **Economic Development Goal 1**
        i. The plan accurately documents that Whitefish's economy relies on a workforce that increasingly cannot afford to live in the community. The fact that between 60 - 76% of people working in Whitefish live elsewhere is not just a housing issue — it is an economic sustainability issue.
        ii. We recommend strengthening Economic Development Goal 1 to explicitly recognize workforce housing availability as a constraint on economic growth. Attracting or expanding employment without corresponding housing capacity increases displacement, commuter traffic, and long-term costs to the community.
        iii. Economic development strategies should be evaluated not only on job creation, but on whether housing exists or can realistically be created, for the workers those jobs require. Specifically, we think more emphasis needs to be made for lower and moderate-wage sectors that are essential to the local economy.
2. **Clarify "Workforce Housing" as a Defined Public Benefit**
    a. **Economic Development Objective 1(c)**
        i. Objective 1(c) correctly identifies workforce housing as a potential public benefit when considering rezoning commercial or industrial land for residential use. However, the term "workforce housing" is not defined, which creates ambiguity.
        ii. We recommend clarifying this language to ensure consistent application early in this element or in beginning of the full document. At a minimum, qualifying workforce housing should include:
            1. Clearly defined income targets tied to local wages or AMI
            2. A minimum duration of affordability

3. Long-term affordability mechanisms that prevent loss of public benefit
4. Clear standards will provide better guidance for administrative review and ensure that “public benefit” is meaningful rather than aspirational.

3. **Reincorporate “Creative Lower Cost Enterprises” and “Small Scall Mixed Use” objectives.**
    a. **Economic Development Goal 2**
        i. We believe that allowing more opportunities for entrepreneurs and low-impact commercial in residential neighborhoods has the potential to add to the overall quality of life in Whitefish and expand economic opportunities.
        ii. We recommend looking at Culdesac, a walkable community in Tempe, AZ as an aspirational model. https://culdesac.com/

Michelle Howke

From: Mackenzie Fai <mackfai@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 12:32 PM
To: Michelle Howke
Subject: Public Comment for 01/20 City Council Meeting

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ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hello,

My name is Mack Fai and I live at [redacted] St. Moritz Dr. Whitefish, MT. This public comment is in regards to the Economic Development Chapter of the Growth Policy.

I would like to ask that the council consider rejecting the current draft of the Economic Development Chapter of the Growth Policy. This current has been heavily influenced by special interest groups and does not have the public's best interest in mind. I would like to request the Council adopts the previous version of the Economic Chapter that was put forth by city staff. This version is much more aligned with the general public opinion.

I would also like to voice my frustrations about the Planning Committee giving so much credence to the opinions of special interest groups despite large amounts of public comment opposing these views. Please listen to the people and not just the few voices that yell the loudest.

Thank you for your time.

Mack

Whitefish City Council
January 20, 2026

Two decades ago, I had the honor of serving on the Whitefish Planning Board. During my tenure, our board was charged with guiding and facilitating what became the current growth plan, the plan our community has operated under for several years and the one we are now updating.

The typical work of reviewing development applications was straightforward. We had clear guidelines to ensure proposals aligned with the community's vision. But facilitating the growth plan itself was different. I recall the gravity of that responsibility—the weight of knowing our decisions would shape Whitefish for years to come. We took this seriously, understanding the lasting implications of our actions.

I cannot imagine then, nor can I accept now, ignoring the community's vision and replacing it with one crafted by special interests.

The true Heart of Whitefish is not a special interest group representing a narrow segment of our population. The Heart of Whitefish is its everyday citizens, especially the hardworking people who make this community function and thrive. It is represented in public comments, grassroots participation, and the ongoing dialogue at public hearings and forums.

The Heart of Whitefish encompasses the full spectrum of our citizens. It must include the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders, aspiring residents who want to build their lives here, and essential service workers who give this community its life and character.

Growth plans are designed to focus on a collective vision of the future while honoring the solid foundations of the past. A healthy growth plan creates a clear pathway forward, illuminated by the shared aspirations of future residents, businesses, and the evolving culture of our growing and changing community.

We owe it to Whitefish to get this right.

Casey Malmquist
Proud Whitefish Resident

Michelle Howke

From: Marti Brandt <mynameismarilyn@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 1:39 PM
To: Michelle Howke
Subject: Comment + Report for the Work Session
Attachments: Mixed Use.pdf

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Michelle,

I apologize. I have a lot of information here, including an attached report. I'd planned to space these comments between sessions but it now seems like the right time to send the report. Could you please forward this comment and the attached document to council for their work session tonight? Hopefully the report is still legible when submitted as a PDF.

Thank you!

Marti Brandt

Dear City Council,

I'm submitting the following comment and report as a member of the public. Please consider the following issues when reviewing the economic chapter of the growth policy.

The August line-by-line review of the Heart of Whitefish draft didn't allow for other public comments—particularly those from the initial May discussion—to receive equal treatment. Because this conversation was "choose A or B," ideas that didn't fit that framework weren't considered equally.

A theoretical example might clarify this point. If a person brought their draft of the housing element to the housing work session, the Commission read and listened to all public comment, but only discussed that one draft v the staff draft, this wouldn't be equal treatment for everyone else's comments.

The Heart of Whitefish draft shouldn't be elevated over other public comments. The following justifications need to be scrutinized.

The Heart of Whitefish draft was supported by three organizations, implying that all 1,000 + members of these organizations approved of this draft. But how is membership defined? Do members support these organizations in all issues, especially groups that cover an array of topics? How do we know members aren't double counted? These groups frequently align. The only clear way to track people's sentiments is through a petition or comment, something people sign personally. An organization's public comment should be valued for expertise, not the assumed support of members.

During the August meeting, the Planning Commission stated that the Heart of Whitefish draft should be approved because the consultant report informing the staff draft is inaccurate. Supposedly, GSBS–the firm that wrote the report–can't be trusted. It's unclear why this changed from earlier meetings–including one in June 2024–when the Commission generally approved of the GSBS report and told staff to proceed with the economic element.

GSBS worked with Whitefish for the economic development chapters of the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan and the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan. Without knowing specifics, it's unclear why their data can't be trusted. GSBS also can't respond and provide their supporting information.

To contrast, Shelter WF raised concerns about consultant data for the Housing Needs Assessment. They wrote a report for City Council. The consultants responded. Council will deliberate and address the concern.

Issues with consultant data should be handled with the structured process applied to the Housing Needs Assessment. This is the most ethically sound, unbiased way to handle these issues.

There shouldn't be a two-tier system with different standards for commenters. Please revert to the staff draft of the Economic Element.

Please also accept the attached report on mixed-use development. I intended to submit this document for the Transportation chapter. However, I finished it over the weekend so it could complement the Heart of Whitefish mixed-use consultant report. Because of the tight timeline, please excuse any formatting errors. I intended to have a designer review the document to make it more professional quality but couldn't because of timing. If the graphic is illegible it's easy to view it online through the footnote link.

Best,
Marti Brandt

Dear City Council,

Mixed-use development–in which commercial and residential are combined–is a concept contained in the original growth policy drafts. It was removed by the Planning Commission for the Economic and Transportation chapters.

Mixed-use development is beneficial for our community and environment. There's a wealth of research supporting these connections. Here are a few examples.

Community Benefits

Older Residents

According to Whitefish's Community Housing Needs Assessment 23% of our population is aged 65+ and this "is the fastest growing age cohort in the region."[1] Those with limited mobility–including elderly and disabled residents–need mixed-use development to access goods, services, and community connections, especially considering our limited public transportation.

Locally focused research supports this connection. Flathead County's Agency on Aging performs a Community Assessment Survey of Older Adults, which assesses livability across six dimensions. In this assessment mixed-use development is a key component for the Community Design dimension:

> Livable communities (which include those with mixed-use neighborhoods, higher-density development, increased connections, shared community spaces and more human-scale design) will become a necessity for communities to age successfully. Communities that have planned and been designed for older adults tend to emphasize access, helping to facilitate movement and participation.[2]

This Assessment also found insufficient mixed-use development locally, with only 18% of survey respondents reporting a positive rating, for "availability of mixed-use neighborhoods where people live close to places where they can eat, shop, work, and receive services."[3]

On a national scale, AARP has published extensively on the topic of Livability, measuring whether people of all ages can thrive in a neighborhood. The features of mixed-use development are described as elements of their Livability index:

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[1] City of Whitefish, "City of Whitefish 2025 Housing Needs Assessment" (Whitefish, Montana, August 2025), 11.
[2] Area IX - Flathead County Agency on Aging, "Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults" (Flathead County, Montana, 2022), 7.
[3] Area IX - Flathead County Agency on Aging, "Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults," 27.

> The AARP Livability Index platform measures diverse, walkable neighborhoods with access to jobs, shops, restaurants, and gathering places. Neighborhoods should support daily living that adds value to people's lives and connects residents to places.[4]

In AARP's Roadmap to Livability Economic Development Workbook, mixed-use development is featured throughout the introductory graphic for the workbook.[5]

Infographic reproduced from *The Livability Economy: People, Places and Prosperity*, AARP (2015), *AARP.org/Livability-Economy*

"Communities with integrated live, work and play opportunities create strong market demand. Just as people are attracted to places close to work, recreation, entertainment and transit options, employers are learning that the same quality of life benefits enhance their business's competitive position. As people and businesses make livable communities their home, these places become strong economic centers."

— The Livability Economy: People, Places and Prosperity (AARP)

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[4] "Neighborhood: The AARP Livability Index Categories Explained," AARP. 2025. https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/topics/livable-communities/2024-livability-index-fact-sheets/neighborhood-AARP-livability-index-categories-explained.doi.10.26419-2fppi.00230.002.pdf.

[5] Roadmap to Livability Economic Development Workbook," AARP, 2018, https://www.northreadingma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif3591/f/pages/book-6-roadmap-eco-dev-120718-lr_0.pdf

For more information on mixed-use development, livability, and accessibility, see “Is Your City Age Friendly” from the Municipal Research Services Center of Washington–a nonprofit organization that provides legal and policy guidance to help local governments across Washington State better serve their communities.[6]

Additional Community Benefits

Mixed-use zoning promotes physical activity and interpersonal connections, generally improving community health.

Washington State’s Department of Health specifically lists “mixed use zoning and buildings” as a feature of healthy community design, beneficial for health and the environment. Healthy community design features, “nearby places—such as schools, workplaces, faith centers, parks, stores, and hospitals—where people can easily walk, roll, or bike to.”[7]

In the book *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt discusses the mental health crisis resulting from a screen-based childhood, as opposed to a play-based childhood. Though not the focus of the book, Haidt discusses how city planning can promote play and independence for children through mixed-use.

> A world designed for automobiles is often not one that children find accessible. Cities and towns can do more to be sure that they have good sidewalks, crosswalks, and traffic lights. They can install traffic calming measures, and they can change their zoning to allow more mixed-use development. When commercial, recreational, and residential establishments are more mashed up together, there is more activity on the street and more places that children can get to on foot or by bike.[8]

People of all ages enjoy walking to a local coffee shop, recreational facility, or general store. AARP conducted a nationwide survey of adults ages 18+ and–across all ages and demographics–65% of respondents felt that “housing that is located near activities and key services, such as grocery stores, recreation facilities, and healthcare facilities” is extremely important.[9]

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[6] Lisa Pool, “Is Your Community Age Friendly?”, January 31, 2024, *MRSC Insight Blog*, https://mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight/january-2024/is-your-community-age-friendly.
[7] “Healthy Community Design and Climate Change,” Washington State Department of Health,” accessed January 18, 2026, https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/climate-and-health/take-action/community-design-and-efforts.
[8] Haidt, Jonathan, *The Anxious Generation*, (New York: Penguin, 2024), 242.
[9] *2024 Home and Community Preferences Among Adults 18 and Older Chartbook*, AARP, November 2025, https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/topics/livable-communities/housing/2024-home-community-preferences-all-adults-chartbook.doi.10.26419-2fres.00831.005.pdf.

Environmental Health

Mixed-use benefits the environment, as discussed in the Washington State Department of Health article referenced above. In addition, the EPA developed a list of Smart Growth development and conservation strategies, "that can help protect our health and natural environment and make our communities more attractive, economically stronger and resilient to climate change." The first principle listed for Smart Growth development is "mix land uses."[10]

The meaning of "mix land uses" is explained throughout the Smart Growth materials. However, the EPA's guide *Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns* seems most applicable to our city. Under the heading "allow a mix of land uses in appropriate locations" the following description is provided:

> Districts with homes, stores and services, civic places, and other land uses put residents closer to jobs and their daily needs, allowing them to walk, bike, or drive shorter distances. This convenience is particularly important for people who do not have cars. The varied uses create lively neighborhoods with a sense of place. Adjusting zoning codes to allow mixed-use districts is often a critical first step in developing these areas.[11]

Throughout this document mixed-use zoning is encouraged, generally and as a policy tool and action. There are also suggestions for revitalizing downtowns, showing that residential and downtown commercial can coexist when managed appropriately.

For more information on mixed-use and the environment, see the blog post "Dense Mixed-Use Development is Vital to Reducing Transportation Emissions" from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.[12]

This is a small selection of sources, but there are many articles discussing the benefits of mixed-use for the environment and community.

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[10] "About Smart Growth," United States Environmental Protection Agency, February 14, 2025, https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/about-smart-growth.
[11] United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns*, (Washington DC, Office of Sustainable Communities, January 2016), https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-01/documents/small_town_econ_dev_tool_010516.pdf.
[12] Alexander Jarrah, "Dense, Mixed-Use Development Is Vital to Reducing Transportation Emissions," *ACEEE Blog*, March 20, 2023, https://www.aceee.org/blog-post/2023/03/dense-mixed-use-development-vital-reducing-transportation-emissions.

Mixed-Use FAQs:

During Planning Commission discussions there have been a few recurring questions and concerns about mixed-use. Our planning staff has the most knowledge on these topics and should be consulted to provide accurate answers.

Q: Will adding mixed-use to the growth policy result in mixed-use in every location?

Q: Will mixed-use undermine “small town character”?

Q: What happens if a neighborhood business fails?

Q: Has anyone made public comments in support of mixed-use?

Q: Can we just have mixed-use in Land Use? Does it belong in the Economic and Transportation chapters?

Q: Will allowing mixed-use place big box stores or franchises in neighborhoods?

In Conclusion

Mixed-use development benefits our community, both for community members and the environment. I provided a small sample of articles on this topic but many more are available.

By adding mixed-use to the drafts, we can still use this tool judiciously. Mixed-use can be incorporated in specific locations, in ways that feel appropriate for those spots and that enhance our community.

Please note that I’m submitting this document as a member of the public.

Marti Brandt

Michelle Howke

From: Velvet Phillips-Sullivan <velvet59937@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 11:23 AM
To: Michelle Howke
Subject: Public Input

You don't often get email from velvet59937@yahoo.com. Learn why this is important

ATTENTION: ***External Email*** **-** This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the IT Helpdesk if in doubt.

Hi Michelle,
Could you please forward this to the Planning Commission and the Whitefish City Council.
Thank you. Hope you are enjoying the sun!
Sincerely Velvet
Neighborhood defender, that is what I used to think of myself.

When I served on city council in from 2004-2007, I believed my role was to protect neighborhoods, and the people I considered my neighbors, from change and discomfort. This was during a major housing boom, when my community was changing rapidly. I grew up here. My dad worked on the railroad for more than 40 years. This was a blue collar town where wealth was never a requirement to call this place home. Even then, we felt the early pressures of wealth inequality.

At the time, my solution was to prevent more housing. I believed that preserving "neighborhood integrity" would protect families who had lived here for generations. What I failed to understand was how that instinct, however well-intentioned, would shape the future of this community, including the future of my own children, who were in middle school at the time.

Rapid change can feel traumatic. Just as individuals respond to trauma with fight or flight, communities experiencing rapid cultural or physical change often do the same. My dad responded with grief and anger and eventually moved to Florence, where change felt slower. I went into fight mode.

Decisions made from fight or flight are often short sighted. The preserve and protect mindset that emerged from that era has contributed to much needed housing not being built. I repeated this pattern again in 2013 when a development was proposed on the open field at the bottom of East Second Street. It was a beautiful property with views of Big Mountain and regular visits from local deer. My husband and I opposed the project, citing traffic and concerns about neighborhood character.

The original proposal included 174 homes, most of them apartments. It was ultimately reduced to 54 single family homes and eight townhomes. That outcome, shaped in part by my own neighborhood defense, resulted in housing far out of reach for most people who work in Whitefish. Had the original plan been approved, it could have provided walkable housing for people earning local wages. Now as I walk through that neighborhood, at least 10 percent of the homes sit empty more than 50% of the time. In hindsight, I would rather see a more densely populated development full of families, elders and young adults. In the part of the development where the homes are smaller and lived in year round, I feel the soul of the neighborhood. Where the homes are bigger there is a lifeless feeling…not community.

We also need to look to the past, before zoning in Whitefish. In many of the neighborhoods there were grocery stores that served their neighborhoods. These small businesses provided not only food but a place where neighbors could interact. Only the long time locals remember when Markuses was on Central Ave., that there was a little grocery store on Sommers Ave., Tom's grocery store, where the Community Center is now, or Snappy's right across the viaduct. Fewer people remember that there used to be a drive-in theater near Bay Point. These small businesses provided services to neighbors before zoning, before those who felt the only place for businesses was on Central and Highway 93.

Though I can see the value of zoning to protect land and water, I now fail to see the value of zoning as a system of social engineering. I now understand that zoning has racist and classist origins. I also see that people who think zoning protects "community" are ignorant of the results: a breakdown of true community.

Neighborhood defenders often focus on what we might lose by allowing density. We talk far less about what a community loses when we fail to build mixed use development that includes housing that working class people can afford.

As the Planning Commission and City Council shape Whitefish's Growth Policy, it is time to recognize that while neighborhood defenders often have good intentions and deserve a voice, we must also look to the future. We must ask how today's decisions will impact the child sitting in middle school right now, and whether they will still have a place in Whitefish tomorrow.

Dear Mayor Muhlfeld and City Council Members,

On behalf of ShelterWF and the community members we represent, I am writing to formally urge the City Council to **reject the Planning Commission's draft of the Economic Development Chapter of the Growth Policy.** The document that you will review tonight is not a product of balanced, professional planning. Instead, ShelterWF believes this draft has significant issues of **both policy and process.** We ask that the Council instead **adopt the original, data-driven draft prepared by City Staff and consultants.**

Process

We are not asking that City Council change their view on this matter. Council's actions last year requested that the planning commission revisit the *Heart of Whitefish* draft line-by-line. Unfortunately, **the planning commission ignored your concerns,** adopting virtually every redline in the *Heart of Whitefish* draft. Not only did they approve entire pages so heavily red-marked that a line-by-line review was admitted to be impossible, they repeatedly referred to the final document as the "Heart of Whitefish" draft, revealing the true author of the final document.

The countervailing narrative promoted by *Heart of Whitefish* is that they simply incorporated all public comment out of goodwill to help the planning commission and the city. This narrative is very easily refuted by reading their document. The *Heart of Whitefish* draft incorporates all public comment– as long as it agrees with their views and their interests.

The selective incorporation of "public comment" by Heart of Whitefish is an example of **regulatory capture**-- when a government agency created to serve the public interest instead advances the commercial, ideological, or political goals of the special interest group or industry that it's supposed to regulate.

If the City Council finds it prudent to go back through every biased edit in the draft, ShelterWF supports your work. Given the limited time that council has, however, our recommendation is to adopt the original draft prepared by city staff. On balance, **the original staff draft represents more public opinion, more forward-looking economic analysis, and a more legally defensible final document** than the final, *Heart of Whitefish* draft.

Policy

The compromised process that created this economic development chapter is reflected in the policies and narrative contained within. Below, we highlight the most significant harms of the revised draft and the goals and narrative sections that we find the most significant removals.

1. Protectionism of the Downtown Core at the expense of city-wide economic growth

By removing the potential of mixed-use developments (such as those currently at Alpine 93/40), the draft stifles economic vitality in other areas of the city.

Mixed-use is valuable because it allows people throughout Whitefish to have easy access to goods, services, and jobs. It reduces traffic, increases walkability, cross-subsidizes housing projects, and creates more areas that build community.

- Removes the goal of *"Consider future zoning amendments to allow small-scale neighborhood-serving light commercial or mixed-use in appropriate areas."*

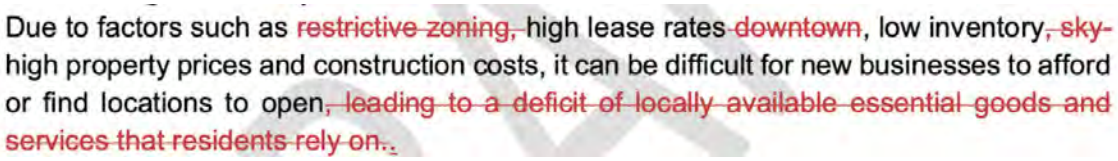
2. Systematic Removal of Economic Diversification Strategies

The Planning Commission's draft actively prevents Whitefish from building a resilient, local-serving economy. The following critical goals were removed or struck from the original staff draft to protect existing business interests:

- Removes the goal of *"Diversifying businesses and encouraging necessary local serving goods and services near local population centers."*
- Removes the goal of *"Supporting creative lower-cost enterprises that cater to locals, such as food trucks or temporary "pop-up shops" using existing under-utilized buildings, facilities or outdoor spaces."*
- Removes the goal of *"Consider a program for the downtown area that can evaluate and determine a limit of certain prolific business types."*
- Removes references to real estate costs, land costs, and expensive rent as factors affecting business viability.

Figure 1: Rewriting vision statement to center existing businesses over needs of local residents and workers

Figure 2: Locally Available Goods and Services Deletion



3. Erasure of the Resident Experience

The final draft attempts to "whitewash" the economic realities facing Whitefish locals. The Planning Commission's version deletes narrative discussions regarding the negative impacts of tourism. The draft **deletes or outright falsifies community feedback** gathered during the Visioning Sessions of the past several years. Residents clearly asked for more local goods and services and expressed deep concern over housing. The *Heart of Whitefish* draft scrubbed these voices from the document to present a narrative that flatters the status quo.

Figure 3: Rewriting recession narrative to flatter businesses

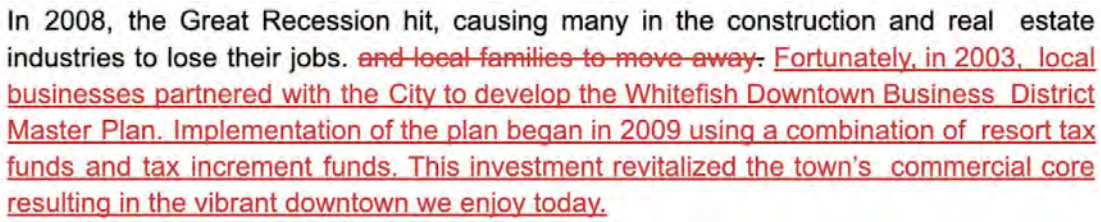
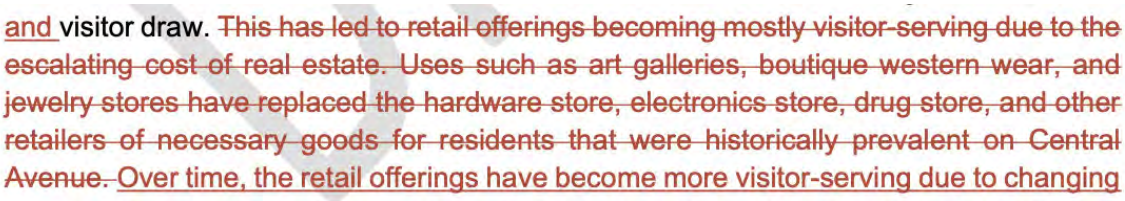

In 2008, the Great Recession hit, causing many in the construction and real estate industries to lose their jobs. ~~and local families to move away~~. Fortunately, in 2003, local businesses partnered with the City to develop the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan. Implementation of the plan began in 2009 using a combination of resort tax funds and tax increment funds. This investment revitalized the town's commercial core resulting in the vibrant downtown we enjoy today.

Figure 4: Whitewashing problems with tourism

~~Local~~ Public support for tourism declined following the ~~significant uptick in visits~~surge in visitation during the 2020 pandemic. According to the Whitefish Community Tourism Survey (developed by the STMP committee), tourism sentiment has evolved significantly since 2023. In that year, only 30% of respondents agreed with the statement, "The overall benefits of tourism in Whitefish outweigh the negative impacts," while 47% disagreed. By 2025, over 50% of respondents agreed with that statement, and more than 69% agreed that tourism benefits the community via resort tax collections: "Resort tax revenue generated supports vital city infrastructure and residential tax credits."~~Results from a survey conducted by the Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2018 showed 69% of residents agreed with the statement that tourism makes Whitefish a good place to live. This dropped to only 22% of residents in 2023. Visitor spending has declined since 2021 and is now at pre-pandemic levels.~~

Figure 5: Deleting facts about local-serving businesses leaving downtown


and visitor draw. ~~This has led to retail offerings becoming mostly visitor-serving due to the escalating cost of real estate. Uses such as art galleries, boutique western wear, and jewelry stores have replaced the hardware store, electronics store, drug store, and other retailers of necessary goods for residents that were historically prevalent on Central Avenue.~~ Over time, the retail offerings have become more visitor-serving due to changing

By deleting facts about the housing crisis and the exodus of local-serving businesses from downtown, this draft fails to provide a roadmap for solving our community's most pressing problems.

Conclusion

A Growth Policy is meant to be a vision for the future of the *entire* community, not a shield for a few powerful business owners. The original staff document was factual, representative, and forward-looking. The Planning Commission's version is an ethical and procedural failure.

We cannot plan for a sustainable future if we are unwilling to acknowledge our present challenges. We trust the Council will choose transparency and community-wide resilience over the narrow interests reflected in this draft.

Sincerely,

Keegan Siebenaler

ShelterWF

Michelle Howke

From: Mayre Flowers <Mayre@Flatheadcitizens.org>
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 3:59 PM
To: Michelle Howke
Cc: Mayre Flowers
Subject: As Flathead County Begins Update to Lakeshore Protection Rules, Public Urges Stronger Enforcement and Review - Flathead Beacon
Attachments: To_ Whitefish City Council Facts, Not Theory_ Why Our Growth Policy Must Protect Downtown.pdf; 2026-1-14 CBF Comments for FC PBoard Workshop Amend FC LLP Regs.docx(1).pdf

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Please provide these document to the council for their meeting tonight.

https://flatheadbeacon.com/2026/01/19/as-flathead-county-begins-update-to-lakeshore-protection-rules-public-urges-stronger-enforcement-and-review/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Daily Roundup for January 20&utm_campaign=Newsletter: The Daily Roundup - 2026-01-19 (Copy) (Copy)

Mayre Flowers,
Citizens for a Better Flathead
406-756-8993 (W), 406-253-0872 (Cell)
PO Box 2198, Kalispell, MT 59903
Mayre@flatheadcitizens.org
www.flatheadcitizens.org

Choose Hope…hope is a defiant way of being in the world: ever on the lookout for what is, but always alert to what might be…

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To: Whitefish City Council 1-20-2026

Facts, Not Theory: Why Our Growth Policy Must Protect Downtown

As the City of Whitefish prepares its 2045 Growth Policy, it is critical that our long-term planning is based on economic data and technical expertise rather than well-meaning but flawed theory. Citizens for a Better Flathead stands in strong support of the position advocated by Heart of Whitefish for future commercial development in the City, which we believe is grounded in the economic realities of our community and supported by the professional analysis of Crandall Arambula.

We wish to specifically validate and draw attention to the formal comments submitted on behalf of Heart of Whitefish by the urban design firm Crandall Arambula. Their professional assessment provides critical technical merit to these arguments. It is important for the public to remember that Crandall Arambula is the firm that worked with the Whitefish community to develop the existing, highly successful Downtown Business District Master Plan. Their expertise in what makes a downtown successful is unparalleled. Their warning should be taken seriously: introducing retail into residential "Neighborhood Centers" and “Mixed-Use Neighborhoods” as proposed lacks any data-backed rationale and poses a direct threat to our downtown’s vitality.

The central debate in this update is the proposal to allow "Neighborhood Centers" and/or mixed-use commercial development throughout all residential neighborhoods. While proponents like Shelter WF suggest this will improve walkability, the facts demonstrate that this policy would be a "slippery slope" for our community character and a direct threat to our economic core.
Why the Facts Support Protecting the Downtown Core of Whitefish:

1) Protecting the Economic Engine: Whitefish's vitality depends on a strong Downtown Business District. Currently, there are 89,750 square feet of vacant storefronts and retail sites available downtown. Expanding retail into outlying residential areas as called for by city planning consultants in three future neighborhood centers, Crandall Arambula finds would "cannibalize" existing downtown businesses, leading to increased vacancies and ultimately a loss in the resort tax revenue that funds our city services. Note that prior city councils thoughtfully customized and restricted B-1 commercial uses on Wisconsin and similarly they specifically limited B-2 commercial uses on Hwy 93 south to meet some large footprint commercial use needs like furniture stores and car dealerships outside of the downtown core. The viability or need for more such commercial uses outside of the downtown core at this time has not been factually established, and is not supported by Crandall Arambula.

2) Prioritizing Homes over Commercial Encroachment: Every square foot of a residential zone should be prioritized for housing, walkability, and retention of neighborhood character, not commercial. Proponents often use the image of a quiet neighborhood coffee shop to sell this policy, but the draft growth policy lacks any clear definitions or tools to prevent these "centers" from becoming high-traffic commercial hubs. In a town with an acute housing shortage, we should not be trading bedrooms for speculative storefronts that the market cannot support.

3) The Risk of "Ghost" Storefronts: Professional analysis by Crandall Arambula confirms that most Whitefish neighborhoods lack the population density (typically 2,000 units within a 5-minute walk) to support local shops. Without these fundamentals, well-intended retail policies will result in failed businesses and vacant "ghost storefronts" that become an economic burden and visual blight on our streets.

4) **Infrastructure over Sprawl:** We believe in a robust town-wide active transportation network. Rather than bringing commercial noise and traffic into quiet residential blocks, we should invest in safe, direct pedestrian and bike connections that allow residents to access the existing goods and services in our downtown core.

Crandall Arambula's expertise is proven by the success of our current downtown. They warn that creating unwarranted retail destinations outside the core will weaken our community's unique character. We urge the Planning Commission and City Council to adopt the edits compiled by Heart of Whitefish, which include comments we and others have made at hearings to date, to ensure a growth policy that is bold, realistic, and protective of our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,
Mayre Flowers, Executive Director, Citizens for a Better Flathead

To: Whitefish

Facts, Not Theory: Why Our Growth Policy Must Protect Downtown

As the City of Whitefish prepares its 2045 Growth Policy, it is critical that our long-term planning is based on economic data and technical expertise rather than well-meaning but flawed theory. Citizens for a Better Flathead stands in strong support of the position advocated by Heart of Whitefish for future commercial development in the City, which we believe is grounded in the economic realities of our community and supported by the professional analysis of Crandall Arambula.

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The central debate in this update is the proposal to allow "Neighborhood Centers" and/or mixed-use commercial development throughout all residential neighborhoods. While proponents like Shelter WF suggest this will improve walkability, the facts demonstrate that this policy would be a "slippery slope" for our community character and a direct threat to our economic core.
Why the Facts Support Protecting the Downtown Core of Whitefish:

1) Protecting the Economic Engine: Whitefish's vitality depends on a strong Downtown Business District. Currently, there are 89,750 square feet of vacant storefronts and retail sites available downtown. Expanding retail into outlying residential areas as called for by city planning consultants in three future neighborhood centers, Crandall Arambula finds would "cannibalize" existing downtown businesses, leading to increased vacancies and ultimately a loss in the resort tax revenue that funds our city services. Note that prior city councils thoughtfully customized and restricted B-1 commercial uses on Wisconsin and similarly they specifically limited B-2 commercial uses on Hwy 93 south to meet some large footprint commercial use needs like furniture stores and car dealerships outside of the downtown core. The viability or need for more such commercial uses outside of the downtown core at this time has not been factually established, and is not supported by Crandall Arambula.

2) Prioritizing Homes over Commercial Encroachment: Every square foot of a residential zone should be prioritized for housing, walkability, and retention of neighborhood character, not commercial. Proponents often use the image of a quiet neighborhood coffee shop to sell this policy, but the draft growth policy lacks any clear definitions or tools to prevent these "centers" from becoming high-traffic commercial hubs. In a town with an acute housing shortage, we should not be trading bedrooms for speculative storefronts that the market cannot support.

3) The Risk of "Ghost" Storefronts: Professional analysis by Crandall Arambula confirms that most Whitefish neighborhoods lack the population density (typically 2,000 units within a 5-minute walk) to support local shops. Without these fundamentals, well-intended retail policies will result in failed businesses and vacant "ghost storefronts" that become an economic burden and visual blight on our streets.

4) **Infrastructure over Sprawl:** We believe in a robust town-wide active transportation network. Rather than bringing commercial noise and traffic into quiet residential blocks, we should invest in safe, direct pedestrian and bike connections that allow residents to access the existing goods and services in our downtown core.

Crandall Arambula's expertise is proven by the success of our current downtown. They warn that creating unwarranted retail destinations outside the core will weaken our community's unique character. We urge the Planning Commission and City Council to adopt the edits compiled by Heart of Whitefish, which include comments we and others have made at hearings to date, to ensure a growth policy that is bold, realistic, and protective of our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,
Mayre Flowers, Executive Director, Citizens for a Better Flathead

FROM: Mayre Flowers, Citizens for a Better Flathead
PO Box 2198, Kalispell, MT 59903

TO: Flathead County Planning Board
DATE: January 14, 2026
RE: *Flathead County Lakeshore Protection Regs.; Possible Revisions*

Citizens for a Better Flathead applauds the county's staff and the planning board's decision to host this workshop and to consider public input on proposed changes to the Flathead Lake and Lakeshore Protection Regulations (LLPR).

As the revisions will likely consider a number of technical revisions, like the proposal to add "dynamic equilibrium beach" provisions, we respectfully request that this workshop be an opportunity for all to learn from each other and to have a follow up workshop with continued public comment so that we can take what we learn tonight and provide more informed and final comment at a subsequent public workshop, before this board compiles final recommendations for a required public hearing on proposed changes and before your recommendations go to the Flathead County Commissioners.

As your time for public comment is limited this evening we will summarize central points in our comments and submit for your review and consideration more detailed comments. **In summary, we ask that you:**

1. **Strengthen provisions that address planning board review/public participation.** This is addressed in Sec. 3.2. Sec 3.2C(a) FC LLPR as implemented by the staff currently allows for summary approval of any project that complies with design standards without regard to how impactful it might be. This is the "process" that I think is used for almost all permits. To encourage and allow for public comment we ask that a provision be added that requires the planning staff to make and document an analysis of why the impacts of a proposed project would be "minimal or insignificant" or significant before proceeding with a permit application under the summary review process. We know from a long history of the County's administration of the *Lakeshore Protection Act* ("*Act*") that the county staff or commissioners rarely refers an application to the Planning Board for review. This in turn means no public participation, since in this context, Planning Board review is the only mechanism available for public input on a permit application. We believe that it was intended by the Legislature that Planning Board review would be the rule rather than the exception; however, as the permitting process is currently administered by the County, the reverse is true and the public rarely has an opportunity to be involved in the process.

2. **Provide an annual or bi-annual certification process for contractor to acknowledge that they have reviewed and had any questions answered before they are certified to work on Lakeshore properties covered by these regulations in the County. Additionally hold both contractors and property owners responsible** for work done without a permit or without compliance with a permit. This is currently addressed in Sec. 2.1. FC LLPR , which requires contractors to post and display the permit before work begins. Given the "demographics" of lakefront owners and their contractors, compliance by builders, excavators, landscapers, landscape architects, etc., is critical. Their awareness of the laws and regulations that protect our lakes and our streams and rivers is important, and to expect them to have that awareness is not unreasonable. Given that most of these contractors are "local," whereas many owners are not, especially the owners that undertake the more impactful projects, having builders and contractors who are knowledgeable, responsible and accountable is imperative.

3. **Add a technical staff person.** Administering the Regs. is a big job for the Planning Office. That office could benefit from an additional staff person who could assist with administering the Regs. An example would be the Conservation District's Samantha Tappenbeck who plays a substantial role in the FCD's administration of the *Streambed Protection Act*). Increased fines for violations could help defray the cost of such a staff person. Additionally, the significant funds the county receives in taxes from Lakeshore properties should warrant additional and greater protection and enforcement of LLPR for these properties and Flathead County Lakes which are such an important part of the Flathead's economic engine and strength.

4. **Create a "Lakeshore Protection Advisory Committee."** Similar to the land use advisory committees we have operating now in different areas of the County. Could be one for all county lakes or could be a separate one for each lake that generates a significant number of permit applications. We urge you to revisit transferring the administration of the LLPR for all of Whitefish Lake back to the City of Whitefish.

5. **Restoration.** Strengthen this provision on restoration, Sec. 2.2, so that restoration is the "default" response to work done without (or in excess of) a valid permit. Since the County currently has discretion when it comes to restoration, if the County elects ***not*** to require full restoration, require the PZO to make specific written findings setting forth the County's rationale for not requiring full restoration. Better yet, we would urge removal of discretion by the county when a violation occurs without (or in excess of) a valid permit and would urge full restoration of the site before additional permits can be considered.

6. **Moratorium for "open" violations.** Add a regulation that precludes the County from considering any new permit applications/amendments from an owner who has an outstanding violation that has not been fully remediated.

7. **Revise statement of authority.** Sec. 1.2 right at the beginning of the document gives the entire body of regulations the "feeling" that it is first and foremost a permitting process. The way we look at it, the "authority" that was given to the counties under the *Act* was the authority to implement the intent of the Legislature, which was that the counties would serve as the stewards of our precious lakes and that the Act would give them the tools they would need to fulfill that role. The policy statement in the *Act* provides: "The legislature further declares that local governments should play the

primary public roles in establishing policies to conserve and protect lakes. Local governments do not have adequate statutory powers to protect their lake areas, and it is the purpose of this part to confer such powers on local governments . . ." Section 75-7-201, MCA. The establishment of a permitting process was secondary – a tool to be utilized to ensure that lakes were protected and preserved in their natural state for the benefit of the public. The authority to implement a permitting process was a means to that end, whereas the way it is structured and administered by Flathead County the permitting system is the end in itself. And the way Sec. 1.2 reads, it fosters this "permit system philosophy."

8. **Applications for dynamic equilibrium beaches.** This is a concept that we have seen done well on some lakes, but we are concerned that such permits may not be appropriate for some lakes like Whitefish Lake where we are hearing significant reservations about their use from lake property owners given the significant changes in lake levels that occur on the Lake. We ask that this issue be kept open for us and the public to learn more about it and where it is best most successfully applied.

9.Define "Lakeshore." Chapter 6 has many definitions, but "Lakeshore" is not defined. This may be because it is defined in the *Act* and the County would thus conclude it lacks the authority to adopt or utilize a more expansive definition.

10. **Expand the LPZ.** The 20-foot LPZ is just too limited[1]. It could simply be made larger by changing the 20 feet to 30 feet or 50 feet (or more). Or there could be a "primary" and "secondary" protection zone with different levels of protection. Or the 20-foot LPZ could be made a minimum and the County given discretion to address matters farther landward in cases in which impacts on the lake were identifiable, etc. Again, the County might feel constrained by the 20-foot language that appears in the *Act*.

11. **Limit impervious surfaces especially on narrow lots.** Examples of such lots occur on both Whitefish Lake and Flathead Lake and likely others as well. As noted in footnote one the best science shows that much greater setbacks are needed to address water quality and other resource protection. Limiting impervious surfaces on narrow lots would make the limited protection provided within 20 feet significantly more protective when lots are narrow.

12. **Interpretation.** Sec. 1.6 addresses the "interpretation" of the Regs. We recommend it be strengthened and supplemented with language, a) requiring a liberal/broad interpretation in furtherance of the highly beneficent objectives of the *Act* (mirrored in the Regs.) to preserve and protect Montana's lakes for the benefit of the

[1] **The best science for Montana lakes suggests setbacks vary but a minimum of 100 feet is often recommended for general water quality, with 200 feet or more being better for robust protection, especially considering factors like slope, soil, and land use intensity.** While 100 feet offers good sediment filtering, buffers need to extend to the 100-year floodplain for full aquatic health, with wider setbacks (up to 200+ ft) better for minimizing human disturbance, protecting fish habitat (like large woody debris), and managing runoff from steep slopes or intensive development.

public; and b) requiring an interpretation that fostered participation by the public (". . . the State's residents and visitors who use and enjoy them." Sec. 1.3D).

13. **"Property Rights."** Sec. 2.3A provides: "Work or development approved by permit under these regulations shall not create a vested property right in the permitted development, other than in the physical structure, if any, so developed." What does this mean? This created a lot of uncertainty in the bridge case and was discussed by the Montana Supreme Court, but they did not have to interpret it, and they didn't.

14. **The "Policy Criteria."** These often get glossed over, especially the last two. They are listed in Sec. 4.1, as follows:

4.1 POLICY CRITERIA FOR ISSUANCE OF A PERMIT

The proposed action shall not, during either its construction or its utilization:

A. Materially diminish water quality;

B. Materially diminish habitat for fish or wildlife;

C. Interfere with navigation or other lawful recreation;

D. Create a public nuisance;

E. Create a visual impact discordant with natural scenic values, as determined by the governing body, where such values form the predominant landscape elements; and,

F. Alter the characteristics of the shoreline.

Ensure that all criteria are carefully considered and amend this section to better ensure this.

15. **Penalties for violations.** Sec. 5.2 addresses penalties for violations. Obviously, this needs to be "beefed up" to ensure there is a genuine and effective deterrent to violations.

16. **Appeals.** Sec. 5.4 provides for an appeal. At the very least, the typo in this section needs to be corrected. It would also be appropriate to address the availability of the appeal right. The County has placed specific limits the right to appeal under this section (although there are no such limits stated in the regulation). (See related comment under #1)

17. **Moored houseboats and Marinas.** So far, as we understand it, houseboats (some are rentals) are unregulated. My concern is the potential for sewage leaks. There should be some language about safely disposing of houseboat sewage to prevent pollution. Marinas should be required to provide sewage pump out stations to again prevent pollution.

18. **The Permit Application forms** should be updated to require a factual basis or professional review for completion of the the application sections that ask the property

owner or person completing the application what environmental impacts are anticipated from the permit work they are seeking approval for.

19. **County regulations do not establish a Mean High Water elevation for the majority lakes other than Flathead Lake,** which is dam controlled for a MHW=2893'. The DEFINITIONS (Chapter 6) only define Mean High Water as the average of the highest elevation of a lake during the past 5 years, which leaves interpretation open to extreme variation, and makes enforcement almost impossible. Whitefish regulations specify actual levels based on survey data (NAVD 1988) for Whitefish Lake, Lost Coon Lake, and Blanchard Lake. These can be used by contractors, surveyors, and property owners to accurately determine their mean high water elevation from benchmark survey pins that have been set on the shoreline for all three lakes. [NOTE: This is important because Whitefish Lake typically experiences 54" variation from high to low water every summer which can translate up to 20 feet or more of horizontal shoreline.]Whitefish regulations have a diagram for easier visualization of the lakeshore protection zone.

16. **Require certified survey to establish LPZ.** In order to ensure that the Owners are complying with the LLPRs with respect to all work occurring within the LPZ, it is imperative that the County Regulations require that the LPZ be legally established requiring an engineer to certify how the LPZ for the permit requested was established. The survey reports that support the Owners' demarcation of the LPZ should be made available to the public. Without analyzing the survey reports or conducting an independent survey, we do not believe the County can uphold its statutory duty to protect the LPZ.

17. **Herbicides and pesticide applications.** Clearly establish that such uses are not allowed in the LPZ and ideally for a greater distance than the LPZ.

18. **Aquatic invasive species**.We support new regulations needed to be protective of aquatic invasive species.

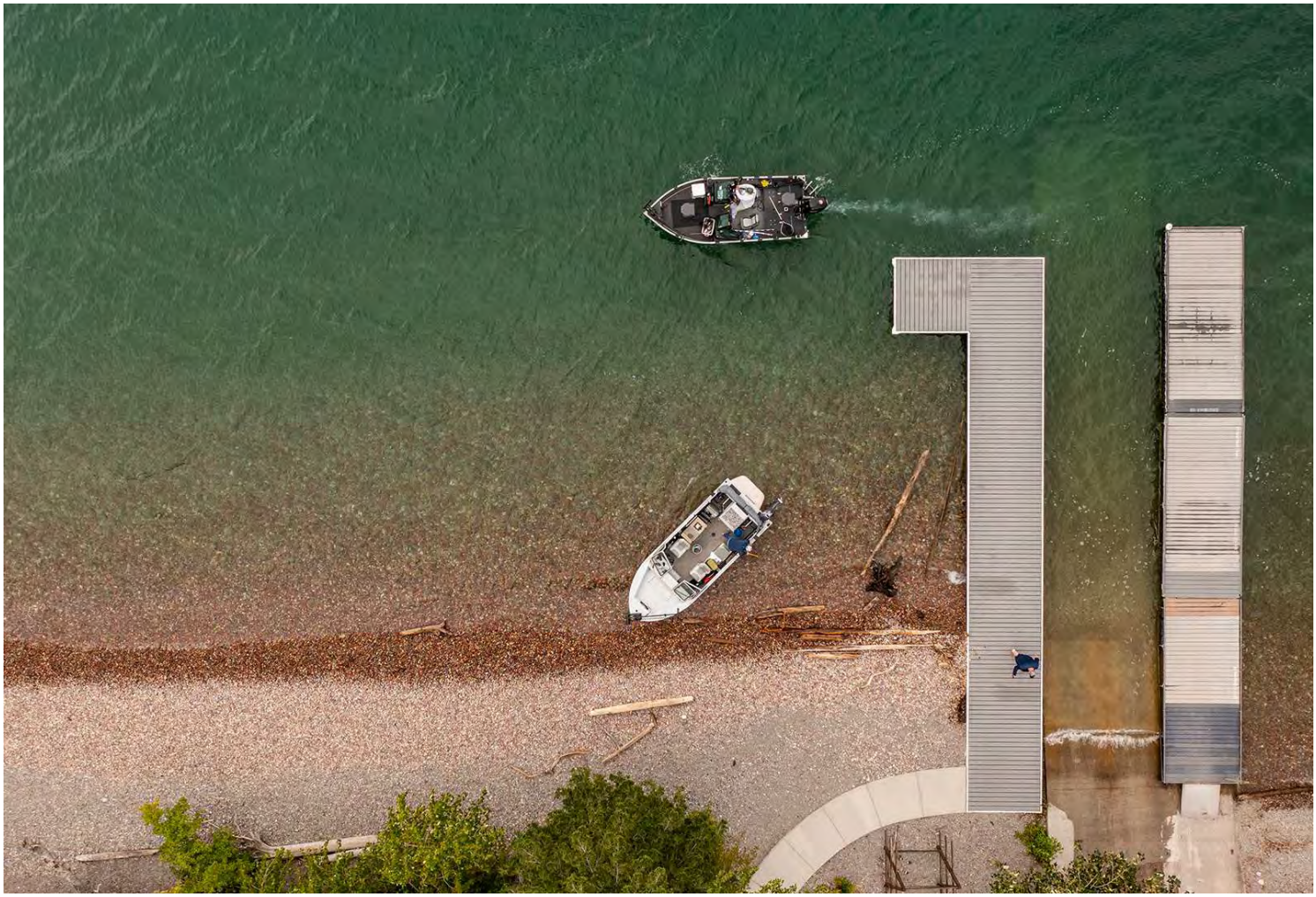
19. **Water Toys and no wake zones**. We support the need for greater regulation of Water Toys and no wake zones.

FLATHEAD COUNTY

As Flathead County Begins Update to Lakeshore Protection Rules, Public Urges Stronger Enforcement and Review

Several recent high-profile construction projects and a host of new land-use trends prompted a workshop to modernize lakeshore protection regulations last updated a decade ago

BY TRISTAN SCOTT
JANUARY 19, 2026



Boaters beach in the gravel at Yellow Bay State Park on Flathead Lake on Aug. 8, 2025. Photo by Hunter D'Antuono

As Flathead County's population grows, so does the amount of development on its lakes and lakeshores, where some residents and land-use advocates say county rules aimed at protecting lake resources have gone unheeded or unenforced.

To help keep pace with the growth and the wide range of construction activities and property uses occurring on Flathead County's lakes, planning officials recently hosted a public workshop to begin the process of amending its lake and lakeshore protection regulations last updated in 2016. The regulations govern "any work which alters the character of any lake," including the process for issuing work permits authorizing construction projects in designated lakeshore protection zones, such as docks, retaining walls, buildings, beaches, vegetation removal, and shoreline restoration.

At a Jan. 14 hearing and public workshop before the Flathead County Planning Board, county planning and zoning staff presented draft amendments to the lake and lakeshore protection regulations, proposing new restoration standards when

lakeshore violations do occur, and outlining new rules for boathouses, boat lifts, docks, buoys, and aquatic toys.

During a lengthy public comment period, residents advocated for stricter enforcement of lakeshore violations by county code technicians and urged county leaders to strike a cooperative agreement with the city of Whitefish, where city-county jurisdiction on Whitefish Lake is divided.

Others implored planning board members to exert greater influence over the regulatory review process so that projects that run counter to the regulations are not approved in the first place.

Calling for more sunlight and procedural review, Kalispell attorney Don Murray raised as a cautionary tale the costly demolition of a vehicular bridge connecting the north shore of Flathead Lake to Dockstader Island, which was the subject of litigation for eight years before the Montana Supreme Court ordered its removal. Murray, who represented the plaintiffs in that case, said the Flathead County commissioners issued a permit for the construction of the 481-foot bridge without hearing public comment or requiring planning board review.

“That case started because that permit was issued without ever having come before the planning board,” Murray told board members last week, explaining that Montana’s 1975 Lakeshore Protection Act that requires local governments to adopt regulations to protect their lakeshores demands review. “When it comes in front of you, that’s the window, and the only window, through which the public has an opportunity to be heard on these matters. So while I’ve got lots of ideas about changes that could be made to the Lakeshore Protection Regulations, I just wanted to bring up the point that, under the Act, it should be the rule and not the exception that permit applications are reviewed by you. But I think they rarely are, and I think that’s become a matter of course. And I don’t fault anybody for that, but I just think it’s worth emphasizing that the default process under the Act is planning board review.”

The bridge to Dockstader Island in Bigfork on the north shore of Flathead Lake on March 5, 2022. Hunter D'Antuono | Flathead Beacon

Flathead County Planning and Zoning Director Erik Mack said the county last updated its lake and lakeshore protection regulations in 2016. Administrators began the process of updating the regulations two years ago, but staffing turnover and other challenges stalled progress.

"There's a lot that has come up since then," Mack said

Since taking over as planning director in 2021, Mack said the county has doubled its code enforcement staff to two full-time employees; even so, the department is stretched thin responding to complaints across a sprawling jurisdiction.

"It comes back to our complaint-driven enforcement system. We have a huge county; it is the size of Connecticut, and we have two code enforcement technicians," Mack said. "We have a lot of area to cover, and we can't go out and patrol every lake all summer long. We just don't have the resources to do that. So we do rely on the public to let us know when violations are happening."

Mack emphasized that complaints from the public don't have to be submitted in writing if they relate to active work in a lakeshore protection zone, which is defined as activities within 20 feet of the lake's mean annual high-water mark.

“If it’s active work, you don’t need to sign a complaint,” Mack said. “You can just call us, let us know, and we will go and look at it. We just had one today where there was some work occurring on Flathead Lake, where they had a backhoe in the water, so we went out there and looked at it to see if they were in violation.”

Still, some frustrated residents described feeling helpless as their complaints fall on deaf ears, either due to jurisdictional tensions or a prevailing culture in which wealthy property owners shrug off punitive fines for lakeshore violations as “the cost of doing business.”

“If someone is building a $25 million house, they will ask for forgiveness later and pay the $500 fine,” Jamie Goguen, a Whitefish resident who said “the quality of life on our lake has gotten to the point of mental exhaustion” due to years-long construction projects creating disturbances and transforming the landscape.

Beth Sobba lives near a multi-year construction project on Whitefish Lake’s Beaver Bay, where a rock blasting operation in May 2024 triggered an inadvertent landslide into the lakeshore protection zone. She said her complaints to the county made no difference before the blasting incident; since the landslide occurred, builders have cleared away the rubble and resumed work.

“Rules don’t matter if they’re not enforced, and in this case, nothing has been enforced,” Sobba said. “The most unbelievable means of construction have been used on this project, which is now entering its fourth year, with no end in sight. It’s unbelievable to me that work wasn’t stopped immediately until the circumstances surrounding this project and the scope and magnitude of it were resolved.”

A paddler assesses the site of a custom home build on Whitefish Lake's Beaver Bay. Photo courtesy of Beth Sobba

Because the county doesn't have a building department, however, it does not regulate any activity that occurs outside of either the lakeshore protection zone or the floodplain. Its jurisdiction of rural properties on Whitefish Lake, including the one under construction on Beaver Bay, extends up from the low water mark, while parcels within city limits fall under Whitefish's building permit jurisdiction.

Toby Scott, who serves on the Whitefish Lake and Lakeshore Protection Committee, said he'd like to see "a little better alignment" between Whitefish's regulations governing lakeshore development and the county's.

"Or at least some agreement so that lakeshore regulations are uniformly administered between the city of Whitefish and the county," Scott said. "Otherwise, we'd be happy to have jurisdiction over the entire lake."

Following a long-running legal battle over control of the planning "doughnut" ringing Whitefish, the Montana Supreme Court in 2014 ceded control of the lakeshore protection zone on Whitefish Lake from the city and assigned it to the

county. Since then, both the county and the city have administered lakeshore regulations depending on jurisdiction.

Mack, the planning director, encouraged Scott to "go talk to your city council about annexing it. We will not put up a fight."

Mike Koopal, director of the Whitefish Lake Institute, said he and other water quality advocates would like to craft an interlocal agreement between the city and county to administer Whitefish Lake regulations more fairly, while a county-wide lakeshore protection committee could assist planning staff with reviewing applications for lakeshore work permits.

"Basically, we're at a point where we need to find a way for the county and Whitefish to start playing in the same sandbox together," Koopal said. "Your staff has a lot of work to do. Flathead County has had a huge population increase. Unless we staff our departments commensurate with our population growth, we're going to start missing things. So I like the idea of having another layer of review and another set of eyes on these permit applications."

To establish a clearer framework for development and other activities on Whitefish Lake, as well as other lakes in Montana, state Sen. Dave Fern, D-Whitefish, in 2025 introduced Senate Bill 304, "An Act Revising the Lakeshore Protection Act," which provides for stop-work orders, surety bonds and liens for unauthorized lakeshore work. The bill was tabled in Senate Natural Resources Committee.

But Fern renewed his call for regulations to be administered "jointly" in cases where there's jurisdictional overlap.

"I do think that it's been a long time since the doughnut issue occurred," Fern said, "and it would make a lot of sense not to have some sort of turf war" over amenities that serve as an economic boon in the region while benefiting local governments.

"Obviously the county is very good with its money. It's very careful about looking out for the taxpayers," Fern said. "But it's also obvious that with the increase in tourism, the increase in building, that we probably need to have more feet on the ground. It's necessary to make sure we're following through on the regulations that we have. I think this [workshop] is a great place to start."

But Whitefish Lake is just one of 269 lakes in Flathead County, where Flathead Lake is by far the largest. Residents also discussed amendments they'd like to see on waterbodies ranging from Little Bitterroot Lake to Ashley Lake. Other themes that emerged at the workshop was an increase of people requesting variances to extend their docks, which in recent low-water seasons haven't extended far enough to

safely launch a boat, and the need for eco-friendly strategies for shoreline erosion prevention and restoration.

“The big one that comes up a lot is the use of dynamic equilibrium beaches,” Mack said, describing an innovative erosion control technique gaining popularity on Flathead Lake. “We’ve had a lot of variances for that, sometimes major, sometimes minor variances, and that really helps restore the ecosystem of the shoreline.”

“That’s one of the things that we wanted to address, too,” Mack said of the proposed regulatory amendments. “Maybe you don’t need a variance to do that, and it’s something that is allowed because it’s actually better than doing rip rap or a retaining wall.”

A young girl enjoys the elements at Somers Beach State Park on Flathead Lake on Aug. 14, 2025. Photo by Hunter D’Antuono

Dr. Mark Lorang grew up on Flathead Lake, where as a kid he recalls watching his neighbor build a seawall. Ever since, he’s dedicated most of his time to studying and designing new solutions to shoreline erosion, including a Ph.D. dissertation on the subject followed with a postdoc into wave dynamics and geology.

That expertise allowed him to design dynamic equilibrium beaches that absorb and disperse waves and their destructive force by simulating the lake’s natural shoreline

processes.

On Flathead Lake alone, Lorang has designed nearly two miles of gravel beaches, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has employed his designs at Woods Bay Fishing Access Site near Bigfork, which Lorang said absorbs "the most energetic waves in the U.S.," earning it the nickname "Storm Beach," as well as at the Yellow Bay Unit of Flathead Lake State Park and Somers Beach State Park. The agency said it plans to protect all its sites on Flathead Lake with dynamic equilibrium beaches.

"We're trying to recreate nature's drain field," Lorang told planning board members during the workshop. "The north shore of Flathead Lake had one of the highest rates of erosion globally. We've stopped all erosion."

Lorang offered to participate in the county's process to update its lake and lakeshore regulations, which Mack described as a long process that will include additional workshops and opportunities for public comment.

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BRIDGING THE GAP

Housing Whitefish Impact Report

HOUSING WHITEFISH

103 Approved Applicants | **185** Individuals Served | **36** Households with Kids | **25** Single Parent Households | **$316,317** Distributed in Rental Assistance

Preventing Displacement

71% % of program participants that now feel more confident in their financial situation

1.7 Average number of **moves in the last 3 years**

65% % of participants at **risk of losing housing** due to the ability to pay rent and utilities

9.8 years Average length of time participants have **lived in Whitefish**

"The only reason I have been able to remain in Whitefish and work here is thanks to this program. Finding affordable housing is practically impossible otherwise."

Supporting Local Businesses

72 **employers** with employees receiving assistance

"The program has helped several prospective tenants become qualified to rent apartments, when otherwise they would not meet the application income requirements."

Top 5 Industries Participants Work In

1. Hospitality
2. Professional Services
3. Social Services (Education/Healthcare)
4. Retail
5. Media and Communication

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS

Strengthening Families

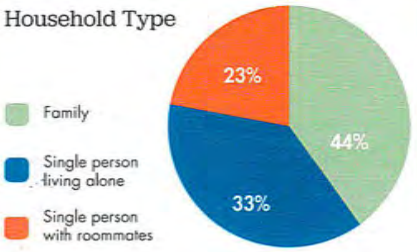
$38,591 average household **income** of approved households

"My stress has gone down, and my kids have noticed."

35% Households with kids

24% Single parent households

Household Type



1.8 average household **size**

Data collected from March 2024 - December 2025

www.housingwhitefish.org | PO Box 4421 | Whitefish, MT 59937 | 406-318-6890