AGENDA
HIGHWAY 93 SOUTH CORRIDOR PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE
October 19, 2020

The Whitefish City Council Approved Emergency Ordinance No. 20-14 to provide for remote meetings of the City Council, City Boards and Committees to protect the health and wellbeing of all attendees, practice social distancing and to continue to have public meetings to serve the community during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the regular meeting of the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan Steering Committee will be held on Monday, October 19, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. via Webex.

To register to attend the Meeting and provide live comment via WebEx on your computer, tablet, or smartphone, go to the following web address and register:

https://cityofwhitefish.webex.com/cityofwhitefish/onstage/g.php?MTID=e63367fbc6419686b60b4994ea6453e49

Event Number: **146 731 9784**

- *Once registered, you will receive a calendar invite; in most cases it will automatically be added to your email calendar. The calendar invite contains the information needed to join the meeting via WebEx on your smartphone or computer. Attendees will not be able to join the meeting until approximately 5 minutes prior to the meeting time.*

- ***For the Audio Conference Call option:*** *call one of the numbers below and enter the access code.*

    - *United States Toll call-in number:* ***1-408-418-9388***
    - *United States Toll Free: (From a land line phone)* ***1-844-992-4726***
    - ***Access code: 146 731 9784***

- ***For the Audio Conference Call Back option****: register your phone number to receive a WebEx system call back when the meeting is set to begin. You will need to provide your phone number when you join the event or call one of the numbers above and enter the access code.*

We encourage individuals to provide written public comment to the Planning & Building Department hlindh@cityofwhitefish.org or deliver by 12:00 p.m. October 19, at City Hall in the Utility Drop Box. Written comments should include name and address, and be short, concise, courteous, and polite. All written comments received by 12:00 p.m. will be provided to the Committee members. At the end of "live" public comment, city staff will read the name and address of individuals providing written comments and their comments.

The agenda for the meeting will be:

A. Call to Order and Roll Call

B. Discussion, Public Comment, and Action to Move the Regular Highway 93 South Corridor Plan Steering Committee Meetings Online Until Further Notice

C. Approval of Minutes from August 17, 2020 Meeting

D. Review Draft Plan Chapters 4-5

E. Public Comment

F. Next Meeting

G. Adjournment

Principles for Civil Dialogue

- 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.

Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

DRAFT Meeting #19 Minutes

August 17, 2020
2:30 pm, 2nd Floor City Hall, Council Chambers Conference room

In Attendance:
Committee Members: Mark Pascoli, John Muhlfeld, June Hanson, Steve Kane, Ryan Hennen (Justin Lawrence, Marilyn Nelson, Roger Sherman absent)

Staff: Dave Taylor, Hilary Lindh

Public: Rhonda Fitzgerald, Mayre Flowers, Don Kaltschmidt

A. Meeting called to order at 2:30 pm
B. Approval of January 21, 2020 meeting minutes
C. Appointment of New Committee Chair and Vice Chair
Previous Chair John Middleton resigned from his Planning Board position and committee membership in July. June Hanson was elected Chair in his place, and Mark Pascoli was elected Vice Chair.

D. Review Draft Plan Chapters 1-3 (Committee Discussion with Public Comment)
M. Pascoli asked about the plan's target audience and suggested inclusion of a glossary of terms used that might be unfamiliar to lay people.
M. Nelson submitted her comments via email (attached to minutes) and thought there needs to be some acknowledgement or consideration of the fact that the background statistics related to employment, economic diversity and vitality, tourism and visitor spending, permanent versus seasonal residents, etc. have all been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that we can't measure now and may not know for some time.
M. Pascoli, with agreement from J. Hanson and S. Kane, suggested the narrative acknowledge the uncertainty in how the past economic trends will relate to the future and include some caveats.
In Chapter 1, S. Kane thought while the writing style could use some edits, the chapter covers everything it should.
M. Pascoli thought there might be some leading language regarding, for example, the description of the 5- lane corridor with "no medians to soften the expanse of asphalt". Suggests removing such language and sticking with what is there.
In Chapter 2, J. Hanson and the committee thought the quote about roundabouts used on page 10 was not appropriate and should be replaced with something more neutral.
In Chapter 3, more narrative should be included in the Growth Policy and Downtown Master Plan summaries to capture the desired relationship between the downtown business center and the corridor.
J. Hanson also though some context should be included to illustrate own the Growth Policy, the Corridor Plan and the Downtown Master Plan are related to each other. This may also be appropriate to add to Chapter 1.
S. Kane thought that the transportation facilities write up and associated photos are good.
M. Pascoli noted some cut-off text in the pie charts on page 11.

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S. Kane asked about the lack of discussion of climate action in the plan. He suggested, and the committee agreed, the goals of the City-adopted Climate Action Plan could be better incorporated into this plan.

E. Timeline and Next Steps

H. Lindh reviewed an optimistic path to completing the plan and City Council adoption.

F. Next Meeting

Tentatively scheduled for September 21, but a Doodle Poll will be circulated to determine the day most committee members can attend.

G. Public Comment

M. Flowers had questions about the Transportation Plan update the City is undertaking. Will it inform this plan, or will this plan inform it? She thinks the consultants developing the Transportation Plan could be used to identify tools and alternatives to installing medians, for example. And she asked for the scope of the consultant's work. She noted two Planning Board items this week (zoning text amendments) will affect the corridor and do not have Steering Committee input. She asked about the goals and policies on the plan website and wanted to know when they had been updated. She asked that the economic report completed as part of the Corridor Plan process and a referenced report by the Jobs for Whitefish Task Force be made available on the website. She said that public comment during the Steering Committee meeting, and not just at the end, should be allowed. She suggested that a quote from the online survey about roundabouts be balanced with some useful information about roundabouts. She agreed that the description of the Downtown Master Plan and its relatedness to this and other plans be strengthened. She agreed the climate issues should be better integrated. She asked for tools the city can use to implement an expanded road network be included as part of the Plan. She would appreciate an option to attend the Steering Committee remotely, by phone or web.

D. Kaltschmidt asked that any plan for adding medians be reconsidered given the need for semi-truck access to his property (Don K) and adjacent Wright's Furniture. He asked about the Baker Avenue extension to JP Road and potential zoning along it through the Eagle Enterprises property.

During the committee discussion, R. Fitzgerald emphasized the long-held wishes of the community for the corridor aesthetic have not changed, but the economic trends and the types of businesses the community has the capacity to support have all changed. She thought maybe the whole economic section should be removed from the plan. She also agreed the hierarchy of plans should be discussed and noted that the 2006 Downtown Master Plan (replaced with the 2015 update) included areas within Segment A of the Corridor Plan.

During public comment R. Fitzgerald reiterated the Planning Board items M. Flowers mentioned do reference this Committee's work, so the Committee should see them. In the Public Involvement chapter, she suggested that the main themes identified by the public should be called out and emphasized more clearly. For example, there is a great deal of support for removing the Whitefish River culverts and replacing with a bridge to improve the visibility of and access to the river; there is a desire for protected bikeways and pedestrian ways; and there is a need to emphasize the natural environment, increase the tree canopy, and improve landscaping in the corridor. She also asked about the inclusion of light

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Draft 9.14.20
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Highway 93 South Corridor Plan

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City of Whitefish

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4. ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & VISION BY SEGMENT

4.0 Land Use, Transportation, Environment and Open Space

The community input gathered at the public outreach meetings, visioning exercises, and from the online survey helped identify issues and opportunities throughout the Highway 93 South corridor and within each segment. That information was used to develop a vision for the future of each segment of the corridor. Topics include zoning and appropriate land uses, corridor aesthetics and functions, vehicle and non-motorized transportation systems, and the environment.

Throughout the development of this plan, several corridor-wide themes emerged and are described more fully by segment in the following pages. The corridor is an entrance to town that should better represent what residents think of as the "character of Whitefish". Community members do not want the first view visitors have of Whitefish to be a highway strip that looks like it could be anywhere in the country; they want the corridor to be attractive, welcoming, and an exciting transition to the downtown Whitefish core. Ultimately, the corridor should allow for vehicle traffic, bicyclists, and pedestrians in a safe and efficient manner. There should also be abundant green space, trees, and other amenities making it an enjoyable place to bike and walk. Corridor businesses should serve locals and visitors alike, but without competing with or detracting from the retail core of downtown Whitefish. Ultimately, the community wants a clear distinction between the developed commercial areas within city limits and the more rural and agricultural feel south of the City. In that regard, corridor infill is preferred over expansion of commercial development outside City limits.

4.1 Segment A

Background

Segment A extends from 6th Street to the Whitefish River and includes both Spokane Avenue and Baker Avenue. On Spokane Avenue, the segment serves as a transition between the highway commercial district to the south and the downtown business district to the north. Zoning is Secondary Business (WB-2), but lot sizes are more similar to downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods than to commercial lots south of the river. On Baker Avenue, zoning is primarily Two-Family Residential (WR-2), with a short section of Low Density Multi-Family Residential (WR-3) between the Whitefish River and West 6th Street west of Baker Avenue, and then Secondary Business east of Baker Avenue between 8th and 10th Streets. The road right-of-way on Spokane Avenue varies between 80 and 120 feet wide, while on Baker Avenue it is between 65 and 70 feet wide, and there is just one driving lane in each direction on both streets. Bikes are accommodated on the narrow roadway shoulder with a single painted line as a buffer from vehicles. The sidewalk is five feet wide and directly adjacent to the shoulder along most of Spokane Avenue. On Baker

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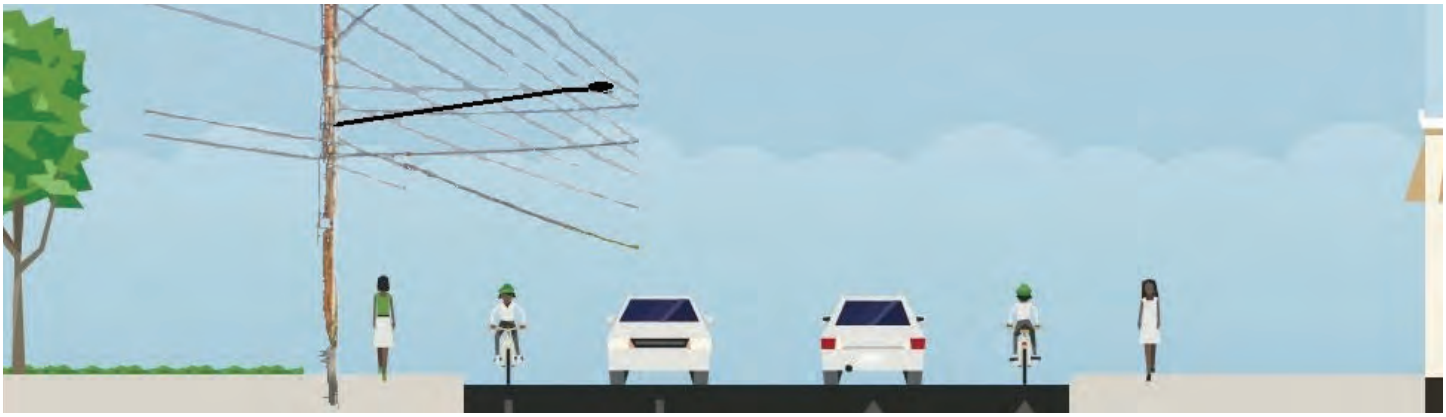

Approximate road configuration on Spokane Avenue between 6th Street and 8th Street, Segment A.

Avenue much of the sidewalk is separated from the curb by a five foot wide strip of grass. Between East 7th and East 8th Streets, the west side of Highway 93 (Spokane Avenue) is undeveloped riparian riverbank. Spokane Avenue in this segment is in poor condition and needs resurfacing.

Where the highway crosses the Whitefish River, there are three culverts for the river rather than a bridge. Culverts are notorious for getting clogged with debris as well as degrading water quality and impeding navigation and the movement of aquatic organisms between upstream and downstream habitat, including fish.

MDT's 2010 Whitefish Urban Corridor Study of US 93 settled on two different highway configuration options for future reconstruction to improve Highway 93 traffic flow. Rather than just widening Highway 93/Spokane Avenue to four lanes through downtown Whitefish, alternatives were considered that added Baker Avenue to the highway system with an additional traffic lane on each road.

The Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration (shown on page 24) includes the following:

- two lanes northbound and one lane southbound on Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 between 2nd and 13th Streets;
- two lanes southbound and one lane northbound on Baker Avenue;
- a wider Baker Avenue bridge to accommodate three lanes of traffic;
- two lanes eastbound and one lane westbound on 13th Street; and
- a new traffic signal at the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street to accommodate the additional traffic heading south from Baker.

While the second configuration, the Contra-Flow Configuration on page 24, provides improved east-west connectivity via a new crossing of the Whitefish River at 7th Street, the Modified Alternative C Configuration is considered the preferred alternative by MDT due to practicality and reduced cost (MDT estimated a bridge about 575 feet long at a cost of over $10 million in 2010 dollars would be required to cross the river at 7th Street).

The 2015 Downtown Business District Master Plan Update recommended Spokane Avenue remain two lanes (one in each direction) to accommodate both a protected two-way bike lane on the east side of the roadway and preserve existing mature boulevard trees. However, MDT indicated the two-way bike

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Zoning Districts in Segment A

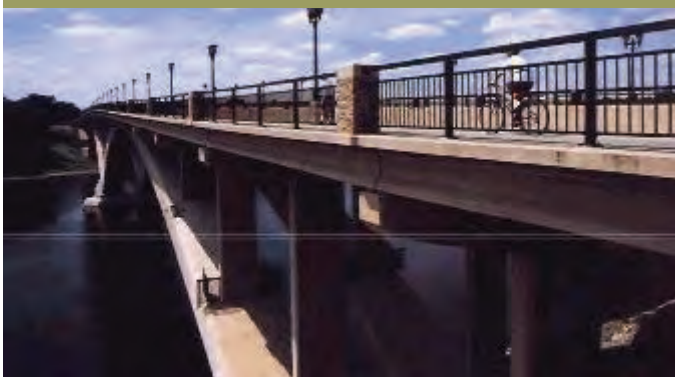
Span of Whitefish River to be Crossed by Potential 7th Street Bridge

Bridge Design

There are two or three locations in the corridor planning area where an existing bridge could be widened or a new bridge installed.

The design of any new bridges should ensure pedestrian and bicycle needs are accommodated, river access and river views are facilitated, and design features with visual interest that make the bridge compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and its role as an entrance or gateway to downtown Whitefish are included.

Pedestrian-scale ornamental lighting, separate finish colors for the structure and railing, railings that allow drivers to see the river, parapets with ornamental railings, and relief in the concrete for decoration are some of the design features that can help improve the visual interest of a bridge.



lane may be unsafe and not practical given the number of intersections it would cross. One-way bike lanes on either side of the highway may be preferred. Additionally, ongoing City arborist assessments indicate some of the mature boulevard trees may need replacement in the next 5-10 years due to poor tree health, regardless of road improvements.

A

Segment A Issues

The following issues in Segment A were highlighted by the public during public outreach, open houses, steering committee meetings, and the online survey.

1.Land Use Issues

- The zoning in the northern part of Segment A on Spokane Avenue and Baker Avenue is not consistent with the lot sizes and some of the existing land uses. It is a transitional area between the highway commercial area and where the zoning becomes high density residential/light commercial, with slower speed limits.
- The zoning and Growth Policy future land use map have inconsistencies, such as properties zoned commercial in areas designated Urban (residential) on the future land use map.
- The portion of Segment A on Baker Avenue is in the Highway sign district, allowing large signs designed for highway speeds, even though Baker currently has a 25-mph speed limit.

2.Transportation Issues

- The 2009 Transportation Plan calls for 7th Street to be extended between Baker, Spokane, and Kalispell Avenues with a potential new bridge across the Whitefish River. While this would improve east-west connectivity, constructing a bridge where the river is its widest could be cost prohibitive. Additionally, property on the west side of the river would need to be acquired for a bridge. East of Spokane Avenue there are existing buildings abutting the undeveloped City-owned East 7th Street right-of-way that would lose some of their parking. An existing stormwater retention pond, sewer lift station, and steep slopes add to the challenge of extending East 7th Street east.
- During busy summer months traffic constricted by downtown signals may back up from East 2nd Street as far south as East 9th Street or Riverside Avenue.
- Permanent easements for a public trail along the river have not been obtained from all parcels, although some revocable easements exist. Trail access across the highway is

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Conceptual plan for how an undeveloped parcel in the floodplain and encumbered by the City sewer main could be purchased and developed into a City riverside park and how a temporary bike path easement could become permanent.

difficult as the trail itself is significantly lower than the highway grade.
- Pedestrian sidewalks are narrow and not separated from highway traffic on Spokane Avenue.
- There is no protected bike lane on Spokane Avenue and the bike lane on Baker Avenue is separated from traffic by a painted line.
- The Downtown Master Plan calls for a two-way protected bike lane along the Whitefish Promenade between East 2nd and East 7th Streets, but MDT has indicated a two-way lane is unsafe and not practical given the amount of intersections to be crossed. Instead two, one-way separated bike lanes could potentially be accommodated.
- Boulevard landscaping and street trees are discontinuous or absent in certain stretches of Spokane Avenue.

3.Environment and Open Space Issues
- Whitefish River flow is restricted by three culverts under Spokane Avenue.
- Access to the Whitefish River to put in and take out watercraft is limited. Canoe Park on Riverside Avenue is small, difficult to access, not well signed, and has limited parking.
- The Highway 93/Spokane Avenue and Baker Avenue rights-of-way are narrow, and several buildings encroach. There is limited space for road expansion or landscaping improvements in certain sections.
- Floodplain and water quality ordinance setbacks limit development opportunities along river.
- There is limited opportunity for open space.

Segment A Opportunities

The following opportunities were highlighted during the planning process:

1.Land Use Opportunities
- Update or create transitional zoning to recognize smaller lots, more pedestrian scale access and architecture; prohibit non-compatible uses currently allowed in the Secondary Business district, allow mixed uses.
- Review sign districts and standards for slower speed limits.

2.Transportation Opportunities
- Design road profile for Spokane and Baker that would accommodate three lane "couplet" design with protected bike paths and wider sidewalks while retaining or adding more street trees and landscaping.
- Purchase/obtain permanent trail easements for properties along river trail.
- Improve public access to river for launching and taking out watercraft.
- Reduce commercial truck traffic through downtown Whitefish by routing trucks on an alternate route.

3.Environmental and Open Space Opportunities
- Identify funding source to purchase available open space and improve public access to the river; see previous page for a conceptual rendering of a potential riverside park.
- Replace culverts at Highway 93 river crossing with a bridge, which would also provide an opportunity to extend the Whitefish River Trail under the highway and to connect existing sections of trail.
- Improve public access to Whitefish River.

A

Segment A Vision

Segment A serves as a Gateway to downtown Whitefish, a commercial district transition between highway commercial uses and residential and light commercial uses as one approaches the downtown core. The built environment will remain small-scale with mixed uses and unique architecture. The corridor will be pedestrian and bike friendly while maintaining efficient traffic flows. The urban tree canopy will be maintained and expanded where lacking, and public green spaces and recreation areas will be abundant. The Whitefish River is a valued component of the corridor and maintaining and enhancing views of the river and public access are high priorities.

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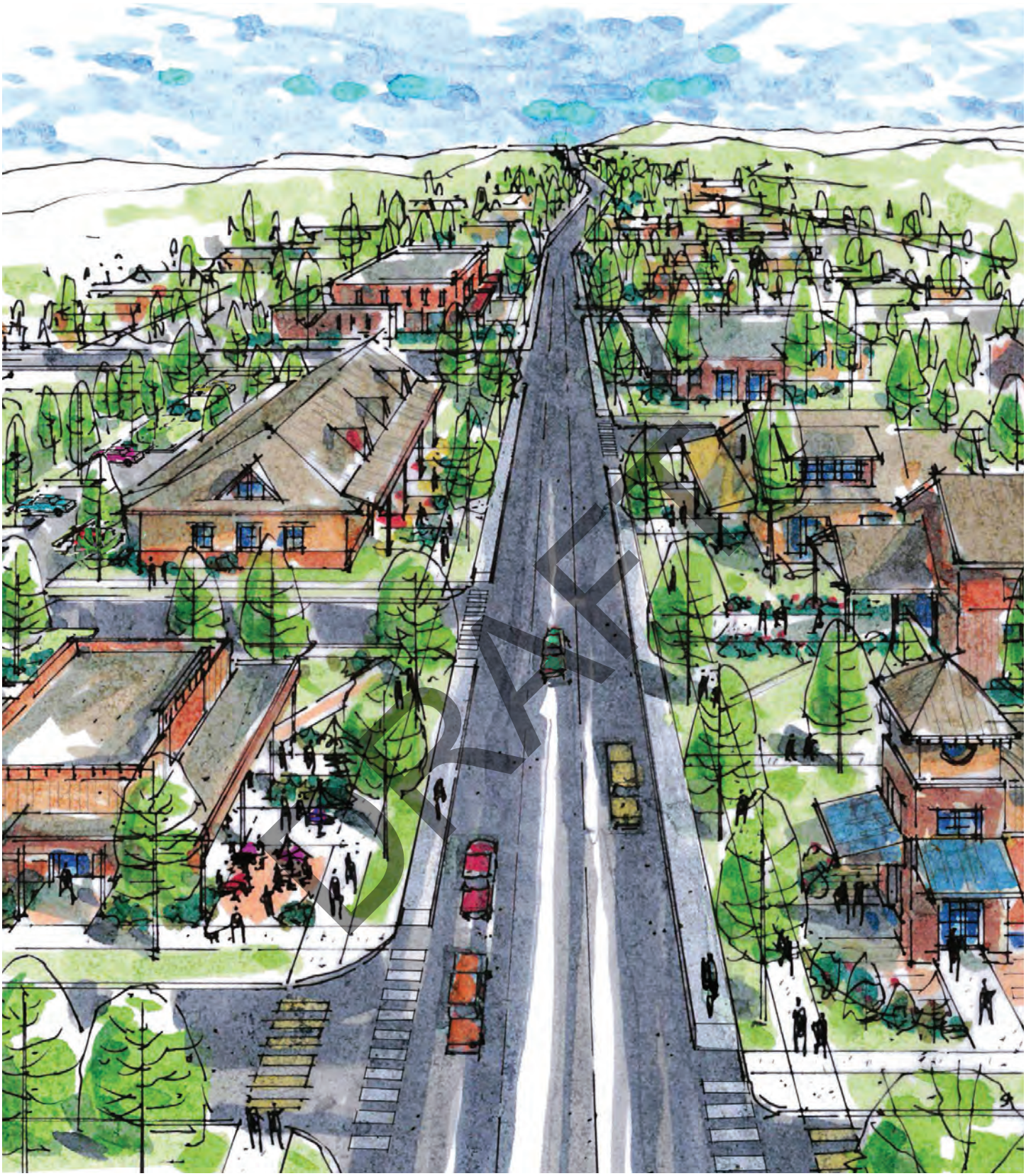
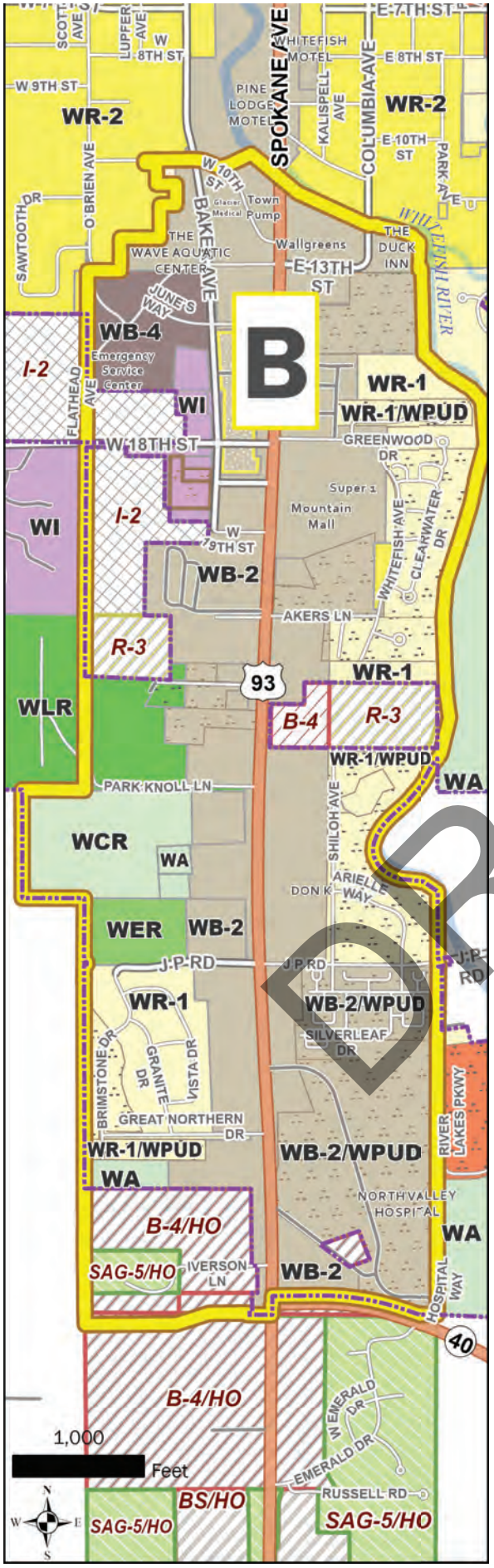


A vision for Segment A: conceptual rendering of potential redevelopment on Spokane Avenue looking south from 8th Street. The public right-of-way includes two lanes northbound, one lane southbound, boulevard trees, sidewalks, and curb-protected bike lanes. Adjoining properties are developed with buildings oriented to the street with parking behind, landscaping and public amenities between the sidewalk and buildings, and pedestrian access to buildings from the sidewalk.



Zoning Districts in Segment B

4.2 Segment B

Background

Segment B of the corridor study area extends south along Highway 93 from the Whitefish River crossing to City limits near the Highway 40 intersection. It also includes Baker Avenue to the west and Whitefish Avenue, Shiloh Avenue and River Lakes Parkway to the east. The segment along the highway and Baker Avenue is characterized by large commercial lots with easy access for vehicles. Buildings are relatively large and have abundant parking, typically provided in front of the building near the highway. This segment of the corridor has been developed primarily for commercial land uses with single-family residential in areas well removed from the highway. In the last decade, several multi-family apartment projects and attached single-family townhouses have been developed on parcels closer to the highway. Commercial development of grocery stores, hotels, automobile sales, and service stations is broken up by vacant or undeveloped lots, multi-family and attached single-family residential adjacent to the highway.

The highway has five lanes, with two travel lanes northbound, two travel lanes southbound, and a center two-way left-turn lane. The right-of-way in this segment varies but is consistently over 150 feet wide. There is a 10-foot-wide shoulder on each side of the highway which could be used by bicyclists but rarely is due to lack of separation from the high volume of vehicles traveling at high speed. Instead, most bicyclists choose to ride on the sidewalk with pedestrians. The sidewalk parallels the highway and is located within five feet of the curb along much of the segment, but there are also sections where the sidewalk is sinuous and more than 25 feet from the curb.

Segment B Issues

The following issues in Segment B were highlighted during public outreach, open houses, steering committee meetings, and the online survey:

1.Land Use issues

- There are inconsistencies between zoning and the Growth Policy future land use map (urban, commercial, and rural zoning in areas designated Suburban Residential).
- The commercial strip is unattractive and does not the reflect unique character of Whitefish, the built environment lacks visual interest.
- Low and moderate density residential is

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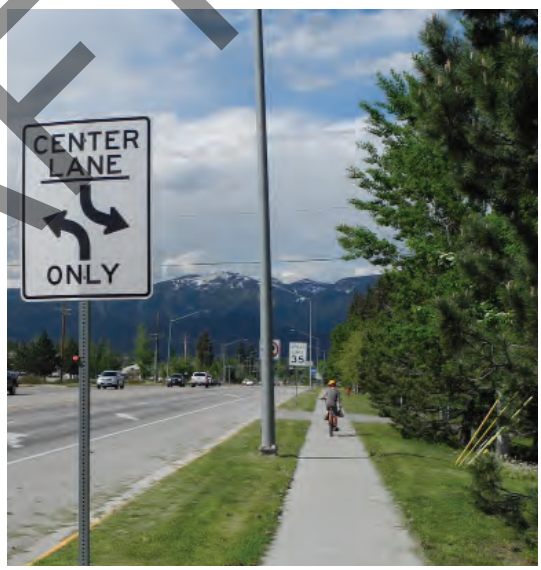
The public right-of-way in Segment B currently has two driving lanes northbound, two driving lanes southbound, a center two-way left-turn lane, narrow road shoulders, cobra-style highway lighting, overhead utilities and sidewalks.

frequently located directly adjacent to high intensity commercial uses with no transitional or buffering land uses.

- The corridor lacks entertainment and recreation options, local and hotel guest serving businesses, cultural and educational facilities, restaurants, and public places.
- There are several legal, non-conforming signs (billboard, excessive size, internally lit, or on one post for example).
- Overhead powerlines and power poles create visual clutter.
- Commercial parking lots are highly visible.
- More screening, landscaping and trees are needed between the highway and adjacent commercial uses.
- There is no cohesive theme to tie everything together (planters, banners, lights, signs etc.).
- Wayfinding signage is minimal.
- Small lease spaces for starter businesses are limited.
- Areas permitting light manufacturing and assembly are limited and these uses are conditionally permitted in the Secondary Business district (obtaining a conditional use permit entails more time, uncertainty, and expense for start-up businesses).

2.Transportation Issues

- There is traffic congestion and vehicle noise, and a reduced level of service and long wait times are predicted to get worse at some intersections when future development projects are constructed and traffic volumes increase (see a description of the 13th Street intersection with Highway 93 next page).
- Highway speeds may be unsafe for the number and spacing of access drives.
- Two-way left-turn lane combined with multiple and frequent access drives provides business access but results in potential vehicle conflicts.
- Roads are primarily designed for automobile traffic and do not adequately accommodate bicyclists or pedestrians.



- Parking lots for adjacent commercial uses lack connectivity, requiring vehicles to re-enter the highway to move to an adjacent business.
- Lack of road network grid connections:
    - Greenwood Drive east to Monegan Road across river;
    - Whitefish Avenue south to Shiloh Avenue;
    - Columbia Avenue south to Greenwood Drive; and
    - Baker Avenue south to JP Road.
- Separated bike and pedestrian paths are discontinuous, including between the river trail and highway sidewalks and bike path, as well as various river trail segments.
- Public river access is minimal.
- There are infrequent and unsafe pedestrian

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13th Street Intersection Improvements

Abelin Traffic Services (Abelin) developed a traffic model for the corridor planning area to compare current and future traffic scenarios with a variety of different roadway and lane configurations (Appendix C). Future traffic volume projections were made using the current population growth rate for the City over the next 20 years. As shown in Table 3.8 Highway 93 Signalized Intersection Level of Service Summary (page 38), several intersections were found to have a poor level of service based on wait times for vehicles in the morning and afternoon measured in seconds per vehicle. When projects approved in the corridor planning area but not yet constructed were considered, those level of service ratings decreased further. Abelin's analysis indicates the major limiting operating factor at the 13th Street traffic signal is the vehicle storage capacity of the single southbound lane on the north side of the intersection.

Existing intersection -
One southbound lane north of 13th

Improved intersection -
Two southbound lanes north of 13th

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One way to improve the operation of the signal is to install a second southbound through-lane. Such a change to the intersection would improve the afternoon level of service with the approved projects from an F to a B and the afternoon wait times from about 78 seconds to less than 20 seconds.

The model was also used to produce simulations of the potential lane configuration change to help visualize the reduced wait times. Simulations of the existing intersection with future approved projects and with a second southbound lane added can be viewed by clicking the images above. The contrast in the vehicle wait times is apparent.

crossing opportunities and a lack of safety islands and other protections.
- There is a lack of tree canopy shade for pedestrians.
- There is a need for more transit options, park & ride lots, bus stops, and bike facilities.
- There is minimal use of orphaned West 10th Street.
- Spacing of existing traffic signals may need adjustment to accommodate installation of future signals.
- The entry/exit for the hospital from the highway across from Western Building Center seems unsafe.
- Lanes are not always well delineated (striping is not well maintained, there are no reflectors).
- The utilitarian "cobra" style highway streetlights lack character.
- The absence of landscaped medians creates a vast expanse of asphalt on highway.

3.Environment and Open Space Issues
- There is dense commercial development in corridor with minimal open space, green space, or public parks.
- Litter accumulates along the side of the road and is not picked up frequently enough.
- Vehicle speed and volume adjacent to deer habitat results in vehicle-wildlife collisions.

Segment B Opportunities

The following opportunities were identified in Segment B:

1.Land Use Opportunities
- There remain several large undeveloped parcels in the segment that could contribute to restructuring the corridor and provide opportunities for increasing economic diversity in Whitefish.
- Several dilapidated and older commercial buildings could be remodeled or redeveloped in the next few years.
- Between 13th and 19th Streets, existing uses west of the highway are denser than uses to the north and south – this higher density commercial area could be extended to the east side of the highway.
- More active residential and mixed-uses could be allowed and encouraged in the Secondary Business District to increase the visual variety and support nearby businesses in the corridor.
- Available underdeveloped or undeveloped land can provide opportunities for affordable housing.

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Segment B Vision

The commercial strip in Segment B will be restructured and the character of the corridor and types of business within it will be diversified. Land uses will continue to be primarily commercial but will not appear as a monotonous or continuous strip. High density uses will be focused around key intersections, and in between there will be pockets of less dense uses such as offices, housing, recreation, entertainment, parks, and open spaces. The corridor will accommodate bicycles, pedestrians, and transit as well as vehicles. Traversing the corridor for all users will be more enjoyable because there will be abundant green space, trees and landscaping with shade, views of the mountains, enhanced pedestrian crossing opportunities, appropriately scaled decorative street lighting, landscaped medians, and an interesting built environment. The Whitefish River will be accessible, and the Whitefish River Trail will be continuous and connected to a separated bike path along the highway. Additionally, traffic will be better managed because there will be multiple routes to get through the corridor, and the number of highway accesses will be reduced. Transit will be available and convenient.

2.Transportation Opportunities

- There remain several large undeveloped parcels in the segment that could contribute to improving road and trail connections when developed.
- The MDT Highway 93 Environmental Impact Statement indicated that when traffic volumes warrant it, a raised median between the four-lane facility in this segment would be appropriate.
- Analysis of a traffic model for the corridor indicates opportunity to improve level of service and reduce vehicle wait times at two intersections: 13th Street and Highway 40.
- There is an opportunity to better accommodate people who want to use modes of transportation other than personal vehicles by adding bike lanes, improving pedestrian crossings and sidewalks, and providing facilities for transit as identified and prioritized in the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan.
- The existing street grid system could be further expanded.

3.Environment and Open Space Opportunities

- There remain several large undeveloped parcels in the segment that could contribute to create additional open space/parks/recreation areas.
- There is an opportunity to bury utilities, add a landscaped median, and improve the boulevard landscaping.
- There is an opportunity to increase landscaping, trees, and vegetative screening and buffering between the highway and commercial uses and between commercial uses and low-density residential areas.

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A vision for Segment B: a conceptual rendering of potential redevelopment along Highway 93 looking north from Greenwood Drive. The public right-of-way includes an intermittent, landscaped center median, curb protected bike lanes, abundant shade trees in the boulevard, and sidewalks with direct access to adjacent buildings. North of Greenwood Drive, the concept shows buildings oriented to the street, landscaping and public spaces between the sidewalk and buildings, parking behind, and an expanded street grid.

4.3 Segment C

C

Background

Segment C of the corridor study area extends south from the four corners of the Highway 93 and Highway 40 intersection for approximately one and a half miles to the extent of the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy planning area. It also extends a quarter of a mile east and west from the highway and includes Emerald Drive, Russell Road, and the section of Highway 40 between Hospital Way and Highway 93. Land use in the segment is under the jurisdiction of Flathead County, but many people who live and work in the corridor affiliate themselves with Whitefish. Adjacent to the highway is a mix of professional offices, light commercial, single-family residential and undeveloped wooded and open spaces. Further from the highway, uses are primarily residential and agricultural. Property owners rely on private wells and septic systems. City water and sewer service are not currently available.

Similar to Segment B, this segment of the highway has five lanes: two driving lanes northbound, two southbound, and a center two-way left-turn lane. The paved shoulder is 10-feet wide but is used infrequently by pedestrians and bicyclists, presumably due to proximity of high volumes of vehicles traveling at high rates of speed. The 1994 Environmental Impact Study for US 93 included a separated shared-use path as a component of all alternatives considered. The speed limit in this segment of the corridor is 65 mph and the annual average daily traffic in 2018 was over 17,000 vehicles per day. As a result, drivers waiting to turn onto the highway have a difficult time judging gaps between cars and may have to wait a long time for enough space. Some drivers will turn onto the two-way left-turn lane and wait for an opening before merging with traffic. The MDT considered crash data at the Blanchard Lake Road intersection and did not identify a trend that qualifies it for safety improvement project funding. However, the Traffic Safety Section for the Missoula District is including the intersection in a Level of Service of Safety analysis expected to be completed in 2020.

City and County Planning

The 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy has long range planning goals and policies for the areas in Segment C outside of city limits. Whitefish's Growth Policy was never formally adopted by Flathead County due to an interlocal agreement with the City. From 2005 to 2014, Whitefish was responsible

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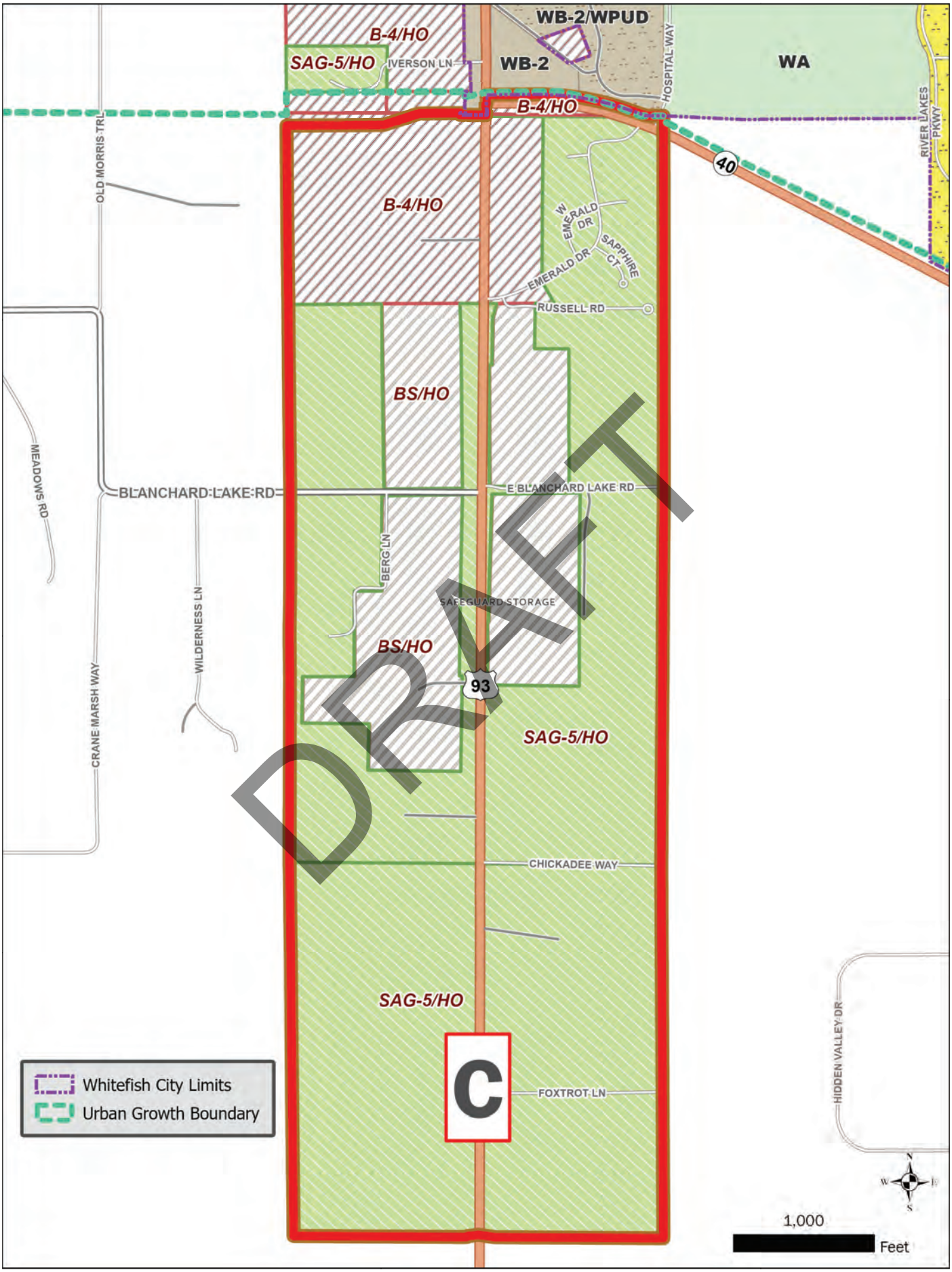

Zoning Districts in Segment C

for administering land use decisions in the Whitefish Planning Jurisdiction, an area extending two miles out in all directions from the City limits that included a mix of City and County zoning districts. In 2014, this extra-territorial zoning jurisdiction went back to Flathead County after the interlocal agreement was rescinded by the County. The County subsequently rescinded the 1996 Whitefish City-County Master Plan and currently bases findings for land use decisions on the 2007 Flathead County Growth Policy (updated 2012), which lacks future land use mapping. In 2015, Flathead County changed Whitefish zoning in the area to County zoning with the new rural Whitefish zoning district. In 2017, Flathead County adopted the South Whitefish Overlay zone (since renamed the Highway Overlay zone), which includes many of Whitefish's standards for signage, landscaping, and dark skies. It also extended commercial zoning south beyond Blanchard Lake Road where it had previously been zoned for Suburban Agriculture and converted the southern portion of the corridor planning area to Suburban Agriculture from Agricultural.

The new zoning for this area has facilitated additional commercial growth along the highway. While the overlay zone has robust standards, the County has limited mechanisms and resources to enforce the standards, including a lack of zoning permit review for new construction or changes of use. Consequently, some development along the highway corridor beyond City limits is occurring in a manner inconsistent with the community vision for the area. As public surveys and outreach show, Whitefish residents are very concerned about protecting the visual appeal of the gateway entrance to the City.

As part of this plan's development, tools available to the City were considered to increase its ability to influence development south of current City limits. Those tools include the following:

- Work with the County to coordinate land use planning. Montana State law allows municipalities to define an urban growth boundary to which city services could be extended, but an interlocal agreement with counties for planning outside city limits is not required. Counties must consider and be consistent with adjacent municipal zoning and follow their own growth policy, but not necessarily comply with the municipal growth policy. For example, the new County zoning in Segment C is consistent with the adjacent Secondary Business zoning in the City but is not consistent with the 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy future land use designation of Rural Residential;
- Purchase vacant or important land to preserve and direct how it is developed. The City may potentially be able to use its bonding authority to fund land purchases. It could also partner with a non-profit land conservation organization to identify and obtain funding, or citizens could lead an initiative to obtain funding. Large areas of undeveloped land are somewhat limited in Segment C, but there are currently properties around the Highway 40 intersection that, if preserved as green space or developed for public use, would help the community realize its vision for that part of the corridor. The feasibility of open space bonding for the City was assessed by the Trust for Public Lands leading up to the Haskill Basin Conservation Easement project. General obligation or revenue bonds are possible, but there is an associated cost to taxpayers. Bond issuance would require a City Council resolution and the question submitted to City voters at a City election. Voters did approve an increase in and use of resort tax funds for land conservation in Haskill Basin, but the resort tax is not up for reconsideration again until 2025. The Trust for Public Lands, Flathead Land Trust, Land and Water Conservation Fund Stateside, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks are among potential partners that could be investigated further; and
- The City could be proactive about annexing land into City limits much like the City of Kalispell. Once annexed, development of these lands would be subject to City zoning and development standards, including architectural review, highway setbacks, landscaping and screening, building and parking orientation, lighting, and signage. Historically, City Council policy and adopted land use plans have set the extent of the urban growth boundary for City services at Highway 40 so as not to encourage additional commercial development south of the intersection.

The extent of the urban growth boundary is a question of policy determined by City Council as part of the Extension of Services Plan. This corridor plan makes no specific recommendation regarding whether the urban growth boundary should be extended. Rather, the goals and policies of this document establish the community vision for this segment of the highway corridor. The tools described above provide some options for

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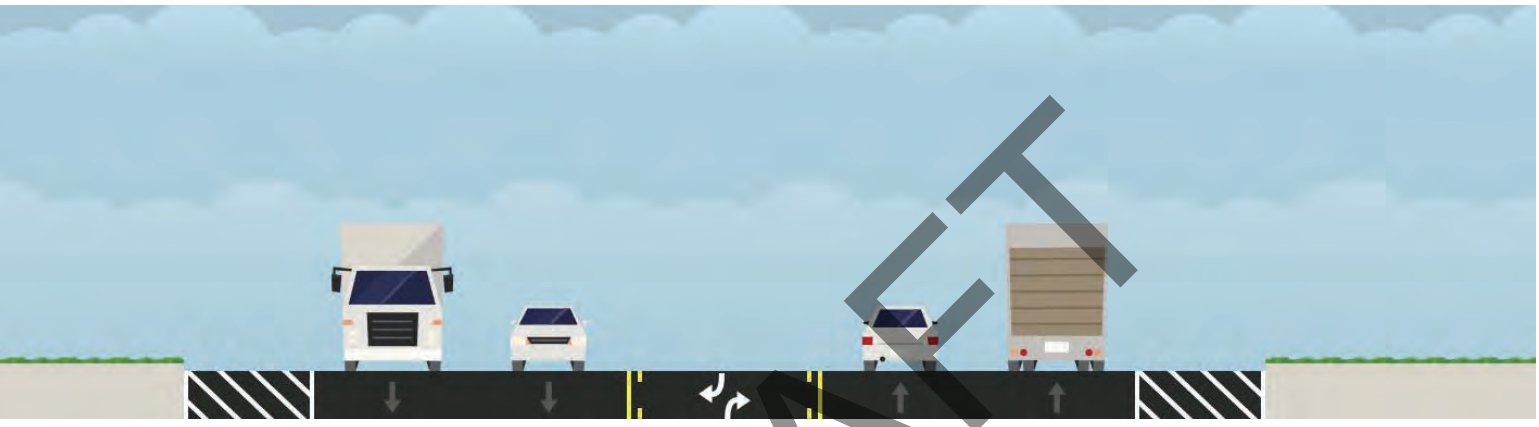

Cross section of the roadway in Segment C with two driving lanes northbound, two driving lanes southbound, a center two-way left-turn lane, and 10-foot wide shoulders.

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achieving this vision. City Council must decide which tools are most palatable and effective to use.

Segment C Issues

The following issues in Segment C were highlighted during public outreach, open houses, steering committee meetings, and the online survey:

1.Land Use Issues

- There are inconsistencies between zoning and Growth Policy future land use designations (commercial zoning in areas designated Suburban and Rural Residential, Suburban Agriculture zoning in areas designated Rural.
- Land use in the corridor is under the jurisdiction of Flathead County; without annexation the City has no authority to direct how development occurs. The segment acts as a gateway to Whitefish; commercial uses are permitted along the highway in this segment of the corridor, and commercial development on lots along the highway is occurring with no oversight from the City.
- The County recently rezoned the corridor in this segment at the request of some landowners; feedback from others who live in the segment indicate not all residents were in favor of the change.
- The County's Highway Overlay zone applies to development in Segment C and has standards for landscaping, screening buffers, signs, architecture, lighting, and orientation of parking consistent with existing standards in the rest of the Highway 93 South corridor, but oversight and enforcement is limited.
- City sewer and water services are only available north of Highway 40; all development south of Highway 40 must currently rely on septic systems and private wells.
- Due to reliance on septic systems, commercial development is somewhat limited to types that can be easily served by individual private well and septic (auto and

boat sales, service, storage; gas station and convenience stores; professional, medical and dental offices); however, it is possible to engineer solutions for more intense water users and wastewater producers such as hotels, bars and restaurants, or gas stations.

- Without changes, commercial development is likely to progress in a linear (strip) fashion, rather than in clusters or nodes of development with less dense uses in between.
- Commercial development in this segment contributes to sprawl south from Whitefish; meanwhile, there is a significant amount of undeveloped and commercially zoned land within City limits that could accommodate additional commercial development.
- Land and development fees are less expensive, and there is less construction and permitting oversight in the County than within City limits.
- Commercial development is at odds with many people's perception (whether accurate or not) that the area south of City limits is more rural and single-family residential in character.

2.Transportation Issues

- Traffic models predict there will be a poor level of service at the intersection of Highway 40 with Highway 93 once approved projects in the City have been constructed.
- Speed on Highway 93 and 40 is perceived to be high considering the number and frequency of access drives.
- There are perceived conflicts between highway through-traffic and vehicles turning at the intersections of Blanchard Lake Road with Highway 93 and of Hospital Way and Emerald Drive with Highway 40.
- There are vehicle conflicts in the two-way left turn lane on Highway 93 given the number and frequency of access driveways .
- There is limited shoulder space and no turning lanes for vehicles slowing down to turn right off the highway, meaning vehicles behind must also slow down.
- There are no bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- There are no alternative driving routes through the corridor in this segment and no way to access businesses other than directly from the highway.
- Transit options (bus service and stops) are limited.
- There is a lack of safe crossings for pedestrians.

3.Environment and Open Space Issues

- Water quality may be negatively impacted by the number and age of septic systems.
- There are no tree retention requirements for parcels along the highway.

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- Land denuded of vegetation can negatively impact water quality.

Segment C Opportunities

The following opportunities in Segment C were identified during the planning process:

1.Land Use Opportunities

- The corridor could better represent the entrance of Whitefish and begin shifting to the Whitefish Gateway:
    - Improve exterior material of buildings; articulation, mass, and scale of buildings;
    - Reduce visibility of parking lots, car & boat storage lots - there is minimal screening, landscaping and trees between the highway and commercial uses; and
    - Bring over-sized commercial signs and off-premise billboards into compliance.
- The City could work with and encourage the County to enforce its own development standards.
- If any properties are annexed into the City in the future there is an opportunity to ensure their development is consistent with the community's vision for the corridor and to discourage uses generating frequent daily vehicle trips.

2.Transportation Opportunities

- Traffic flow, safety, and future level of service, at Highway 40 could be improved by modifying lane configuration, signal timing, or the type of intersection control, potentially replacing the signal with a two-lane roundabout.
- There appears to be enough right-of-way to build a separated shared use path along the highway, which was a component of all alternatives considered in the 1994 Environmental Impact Statement for US 93.
- Right turn lanes could be constructed at identified intersections to improve safety.
- Existing accesses could be combined, and parking lots connected such that moving from one business to another does not require entering/exiting the highway.
- Large undeveloped or underdeveloped lots could accommodate more roads for better circulation. A street grid could be created or frontage or backage roads could be required for new development such that moving between businesses does not require entering/exiting the highway.
- There is an opportunity to better accommodate people with expanded and more convenient transit options; there may be land available to purchase, lease or share for park-and-ride lots.
- Crossing safety for all modes of transportation could be improved.

"This is an ideal location to welcome people into Whitefish...[it is an] important strategic location..." – survey response.

3.Environment and Open Space Opportunities

- There is undeveloped land available near the intersection of Highway 93 with Highway 40 that potentially could be purchased to preserve open space, or easements obtained for greenspace.
- Should City policy change in the future, City services could be extended further south to provide more landowners with an alternative to septic systems.
- Land annexed into the City could be required to retain trees along the highway frontage; County landscaping and buffering regulations could be better enforced.

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Segment C - Vision

Segment C of the corridor will provide a gradual transition from the County rural areas to the highway commercial district in the City. Alternative modes of transportation will be available, useable, and prominent. Traversing the corridor will be safe and pleasant for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles. Where there are commercial uses any parking or storage areas will be well-screened from the highway with existing tree and shrub canopy, added landscaping, and topographic features such as earthen berms. Access to the commercial properties will be from cross or backage roads in addition to the highway. Uses generating frequent daily vehicle trips will be discouraged. Commercial structures will blend well with the natural surroundings as a result of exterior materials, scale, building articulation, with space reserved for open or green space. The area will continue to support a rural residential lifestyle and utilize agriculturally designated lands.

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A vision for Segment C: conceptual cross-section of the right-of-way in Segment C with a separated shared-use path installed.

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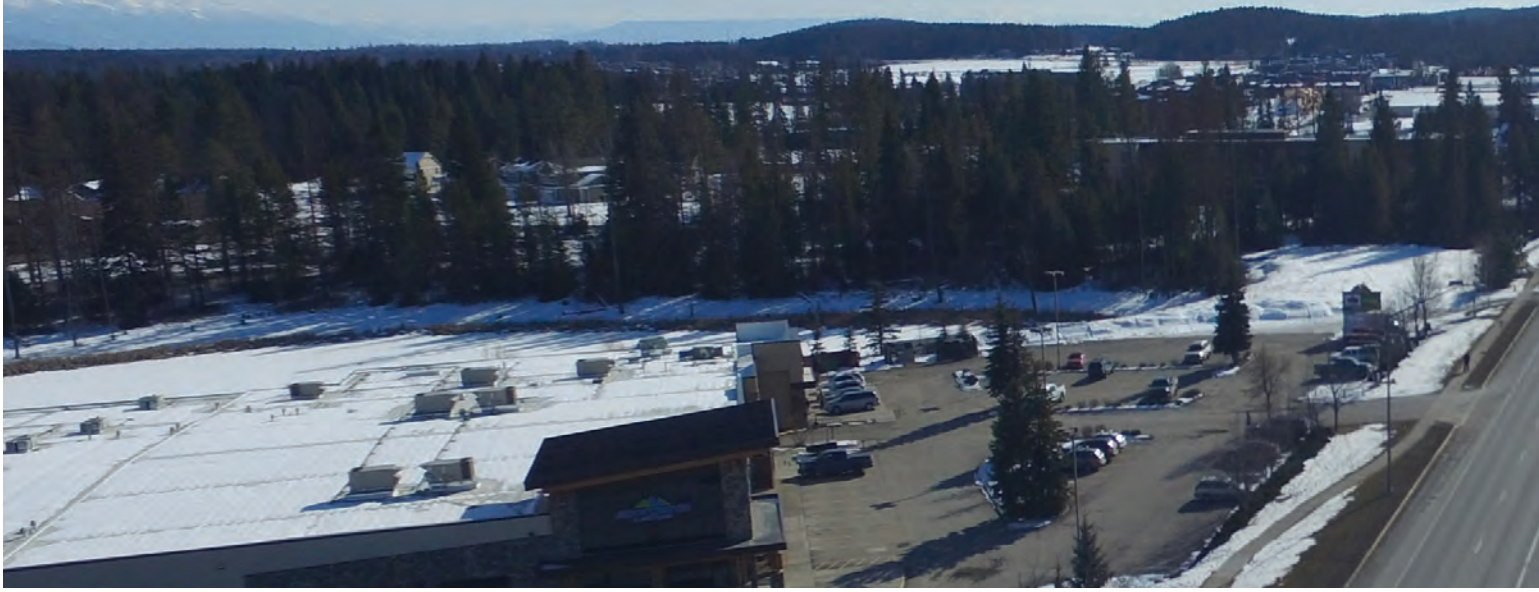

5. RESTRUCTURING HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

5.0 History and Attributes of the "Strip"

Most Americans are familiar with highway commercial districts, commonly referred to as commercial strips (or the "Strip") since they are linear in nature. They are lined with free-standing stores, often built inexpensively and with minimal visual distinctiveness, surrounded by asphalt parking lots, accessed by many driveways, advertised with large pole signs more noticeable than their associated buildings, generally with very little landscaping. The properties sit on wide, multilane roadways with curb-gutter and narrow sidewalks. Intersections have multi-phased signals with left turn pockets which means wide crossing distances and long waits between crossing opportunities for pedestrians. The long, undifferentiated corridors can be congested, unsightly places.

Highway commercial strips developed nationwide after World War II following the introduction of federal home mortgage

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"Stretching for miles in what seems to be an undifferentiated landscape of signs, driveways, parking lots, and cheap buildings, the American commercial strip is one of the most exasperating and yet ubiquitous urban forms ever created. Occurring in nearly every settlement of any size in the country, the strip is everywhere the same and everywhere an eyesore"
– Brenda Case Scheer
Professor and Former Dean of Architecture and City and Metropolitan Planning at the University of Utah

subsidies and expansion of the interstate highway system. These nationwide programs stimulated relocation of households to the suburbs and driving became the primary way of getting around. Commercial zoning was applied nationwide along miles of roadways. Abundant, cheap land meant inexpensive, single-story buildings could be developed at low densities. Buildings were placed to the rear of lots to accommodate parking and signs in front. The layouts tend to be unfriendly to pedestrians and bicyclists.

In Whitefish the commercial corridor developed over time. As large lots south of downtown were annexed into the city, water and sewer services were also extended. The types of businesses that located in the corridor needed large lots for display and parking and were not dependent on walk-in customers or presence of nearby stores. The corridor serves motorists and travelers but is also a recreation destination (including a bowling alley, a nine-hole golf course at one time, a climbing gym, and fitness centers). Initially constructed as a two-lane highway, the roadway was expanded to five lanes in 1998 to accommodate increased traffic volume.

Highway commercial districts serve a useful purpose. They provide necessary qualities some businesses need such as high visibility for passing motorists (service stations, automotive repair) and travelers (restaurants, motels

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and hotels), and easy access for customers. They typically have abundant show space (automotive or equipment sales) or loading space (warehouse businesses, supermarkets, large department stores, home and garden, lumber yards) at relatively low cost. According to real estate professionals, there is about a 20 percent cost savings for a business to lease space in the corridor compared to spaces downtown in the General Business District.

The purpose and intent of the Secondary Business zoning district in the corridor is to provide for retail sales and services which typically need large display or parking areas, large storage areas, and outdoor commercial amusement or recreational activities. Mixed-use and multi-family development is also appropriate. The district depends on proximity to highways or arterial streets and may be located in business corridors or islands.

The Secondary Business Distict has always intended to complement, but not compete with the downtown General Business District. Because the cost of commercial space in the corridor is somewhat less expensive than downtown, there is the potential incentive for businesses to relocate from downtown to the corridor or to locate in the corridor initially. To support the downtown business district, the City has limited permitted retail uses in the Secondary Business district to those that need outdoor display space, abundant parking, or visibility and direct access to motorists. Personal services and retail sales and services such as delivery and pick up, catering, event planning, recreational guiding and outfitting, personal training, tattoo, personal spa services, shoe stores, general merchandise, clothing, flower shops, book stores, and sporting goods, among others, are not permitted. The exception is the Mountain Mall in which these uses and services are permitted as legal non-conforming uses. Currently, the mall has few of these types of businesses and is struggling to survive. It recently lost two anchor tenants: a low-cost general merchandise department store closed its Whitefish store in 2019, and the movie theater closed in March 2020 in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic and will not re-open its doors. A large sporting goods store remains as a solid anchor.

Zoning limiting retail uses in the corridor was established to help support a high rate of occupancy in downtown commercial spaces. Downtown retail business rely heavily on customers who are visitors to Whitefish and perhaps more willing than residents to make large or non-essential purchases. Downtown retail tends to offer goods that are one-time novelty purchases rather than household necessities residents would be more likely to purchase. Some of the businesses that would serve resident needs are unable to locate in the corridor due to current zoning regulations.

5.1 Tools to Improve Form and Function of the "Strip"

Communities need a district that serves the intent and purpose of highway commercial, but often these districts come with the undesirable aspects of the "Strip". There are several measures that should be implemented to improve the corridor form and function. They fall into two categories: tools to improve the public right-of-way and tools to improve private land use beyond the public right-of-way. The public right-of-way includes the driving and turning lanes of Highway 93, its shoulders, curb and gutter, sidewalks, and landscaped boulevards. Private land use occurs on properties to either side of the right-of-way zoned primarily for commercial uses.

Public Right-of-Way Tools

The form, or the look, of the public right-of-way can be improved by breaking up the wide expanse of asphalt that five driving lanes and ten-foot shoulders entail. An intermittent raised median with landscaping and additional boulevard trees and shrubs would introduce more color and vegetation to increase visual interest. The utilitarian cobra-style lights should be replaced with a more decorative light such as those used on Highway 93 West and at some point the overhead utility lines should be buried. The look of the public right-of-way should also be improved with the addition of amenities for pedestrians, such as benches, shade trees, public art, gateway components, and pedestrian-scale lighting.

As part of identifying tools to improve the function of the public right-of-way, Abelin Traffic Solutions, Inc (Abelin) evaluated current and projected traffic volumes and operational characteristics of the corridor and considered different roadway and lane configurations, raised medians, and intersection control including traffic signal spacing and potential use of roundabouts. The full report is included in Appendix C.
Abelin found in addition to improving the look of the corridor, the installation of an

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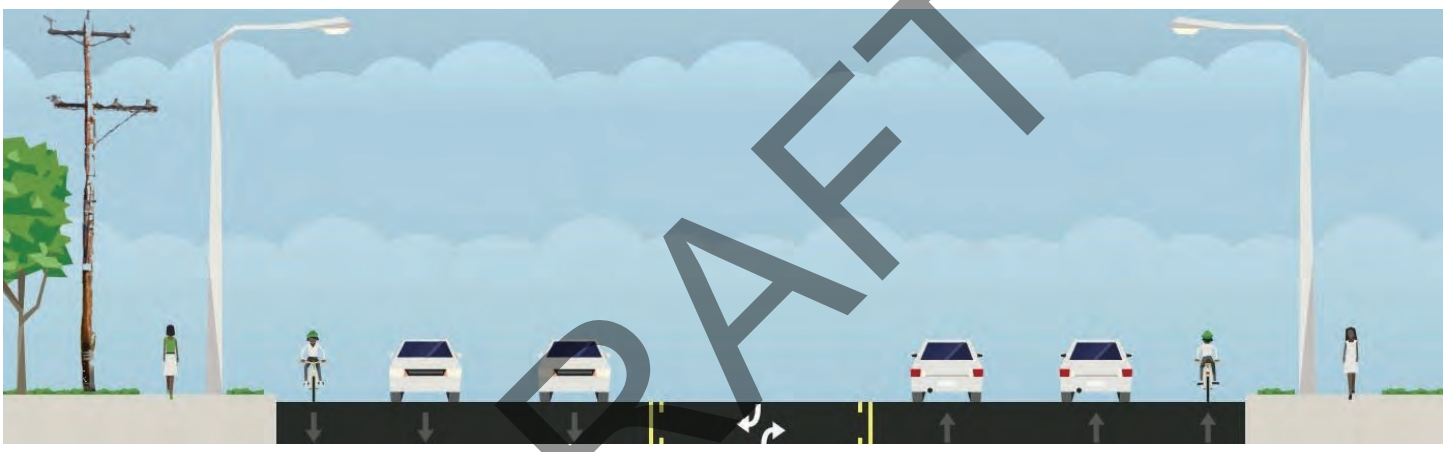
intermittent raised median with turning bays and management of access to the highway in Segment B would also improve the function of the public right-of-way. Compared to two-way left turn lanes, raised medians can improve corridor safety and increase vehicle capacity. Benefits include the following:

- Prevent crashes from vehicles simultaneously merging from two direstions into the center two-way left-turn lane. These crashes can happen quickly and be severe due to the closing speeds of the two vehicles. Raised medians largely eliminate this type of accident;
- Reduce the overall rate of vehicle crashes;
- Provide better pedestrian protection than undivided roadways. Medians break up crossing distance and providing a center median refuge for pedestrians. Although mid-block pedestrian crossings are not encouraged at this time, the distances between protected traffic signals crosswalks results in pedestrians crossing the road at mid-block locations anyway;
- Decrease vehicle delay and increase roadway capacity by providing better access control and consolidating left-turns;
- Provide space for landscaping and other aesthetic treatments; and
- Provide space for additional roadway lighting, signs and roadway guidance

A full conceptual plan for raised medians and access management is available in an



Existing Segment B right-of-way above, and potential for the segment below. The breadth of asphalt can be broken up with an intermittent, landscaped median. Curb-protected bike lanes could be added to both sides, cobra lighting replaced with decorative lighting like that used on Highway 93 West, overhead utility lines buried, pedestrian scale lighting and shade trees added, and sidewalks widened to at least six feet.

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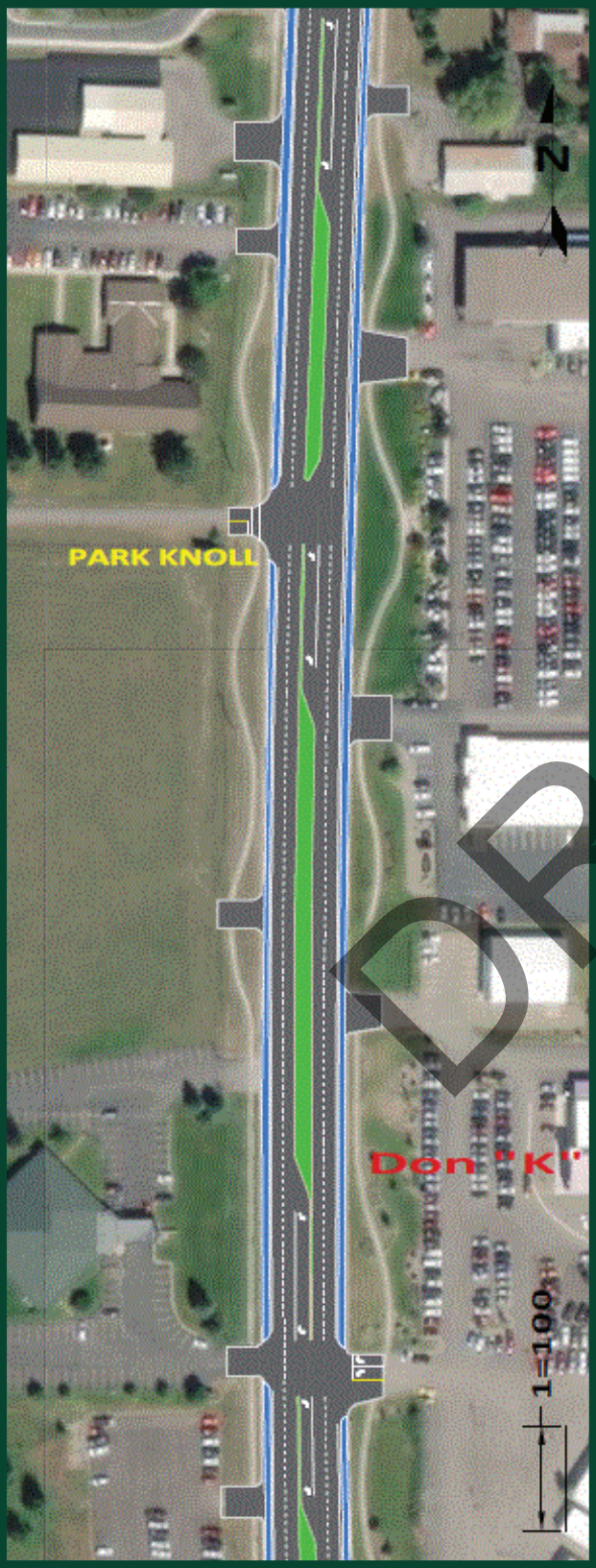
Access Management and Raised Medians



Excerpt from Abelin's conceptual raised median plan north of JP Road– see Appendix C for full plan.

attachment to the traffic report in Appendix C. The concept for a raised median and access management north of JP Road is shown left.

Further analysis will be needed on a property-by-property basis to determine where medians are appropriate and to preserve adequate access to corridor businesses. The conceptual median plan does not account for new projects approved and developed in 2020.

Raised median on Highway 93 North of Whitefish

To complement installation of medians, connectivity between adjacent properties would need to be enhanced and highway access shared. The number and frequency of access driveways must be reduced to limit the number of turning movements onto and off the highway. The parking lot at the southwest corner of 13th Street and Highway 93 (next page) is a good example of access that benefits thoroughfare capacity and traffic flows. Access is primarily from two cross streets with highway access limited to right-in, right-out traffic.

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Parking lot at the southwest corner of 13th Street and Highway 93, with two-way access from 13th and 15th Streets and right-in, right-out access from the highway.

Adding or lengthening existing acceleration and deceleration lanes may also help improve function on the highway. Increasing the number of crossing opportunities, adding mid-crossing pedestrian refuges, and providing designated and protected bike lanes could imporove function for pedestrians and bicyclists. Expanding the street network to provide alternative routes can also help alleviate congestion.

Intersection Control: Signal Spacing

Abelin recommended a future traffic control pattern that ideally would include traffic control (signals or potentially roundabouts) at quarter-mile intervals at Highway 40 (existing), Great Northern Drive (new), JP Road (existing), Park Knoll Lane (new), Akers Lane (new), Greenwood Drive (new), and 13th Street (existing). It also would involve the removal of the existing signal at Commerce Street. Removal of that signal could negatively affect access to Mountain Mall, so future analyses of traffic control locations should more thoroughly consider public access needs.

Signal Spacing Plan from Abelin Traffic Evaluation Appendix C.

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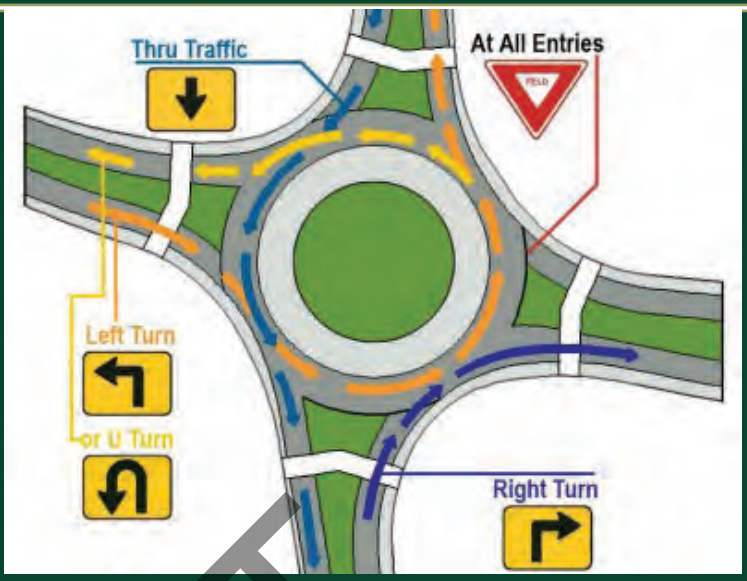
Intersection Control: Roundabouts

What is a Roundabout?

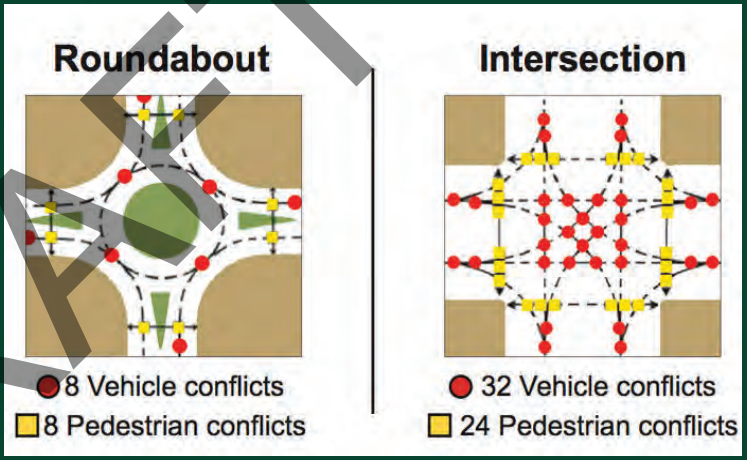
Roundabouts are circular intersections that reduce traffic accidents, traffic delays and traffic speeds. According to MDT, roundabouts are installed at selected state roadway intersections to improve safety and mobility. Driving in roundabouts is easy and follows many of the same principles of other traffic intersections. Roundabouts do not use stop signs but often use yield signs to notify drivers to yield to approaching vehicles already in the roundabout.



Why a Roundabout?

A well-designed, strategically placed roundabout improves

- *safety: slower speeds and less conflict points reduces the frequency and severity of accidents (see conflict points in a roundabout and a traditional intersection to the right);*
- *operations: delays are reduced due to the smooth flow of vehicle traffic rather than the stop-and-go traffic of normal intersections; and*
- *aesthetics: the central island can be landscaped to help beautify the intersection.*



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Abelin found roundabouts at 13th Street and JP Road would improve future level of service (LOS) in the morning, but they would decrease future level of service in the afternoon and as a result are not recommended. Both morning and afternoon future level of service would be improved by installation of a roundabout at the Highway 40 intersection and should be analyzed further as part of any future MDT projects involving this part of the corridor planning area.

Location on Highway 93	Morning - Future		Afternoon - Future		Morning With Roundabout		Afternoon With Roundabout	
	Sec/Veh	LOS	Sec/Veh	LOS	Sec/Veh	LOS	Sec/Veh	LOS
Highway 40	25.7	C	35.5	D	10.9	B	15.8	C
JP Road	10.4	B	17.2	B	8.1	A	28.4	C
13th Street	44.0	D	19.7*	B*	9.9	A	28.4	C

Simulations of the existing configuration with planned projects and a potential roundabout configuration are consistent with the modeling analysis in the table above. Click on the links below to view simulations of traffic flow through the Highway 40 intersection with planned projects and the existing signal or a roundabout.

Highway 40 Signalized Intersection **Highway 40 Roundabout Intersection**

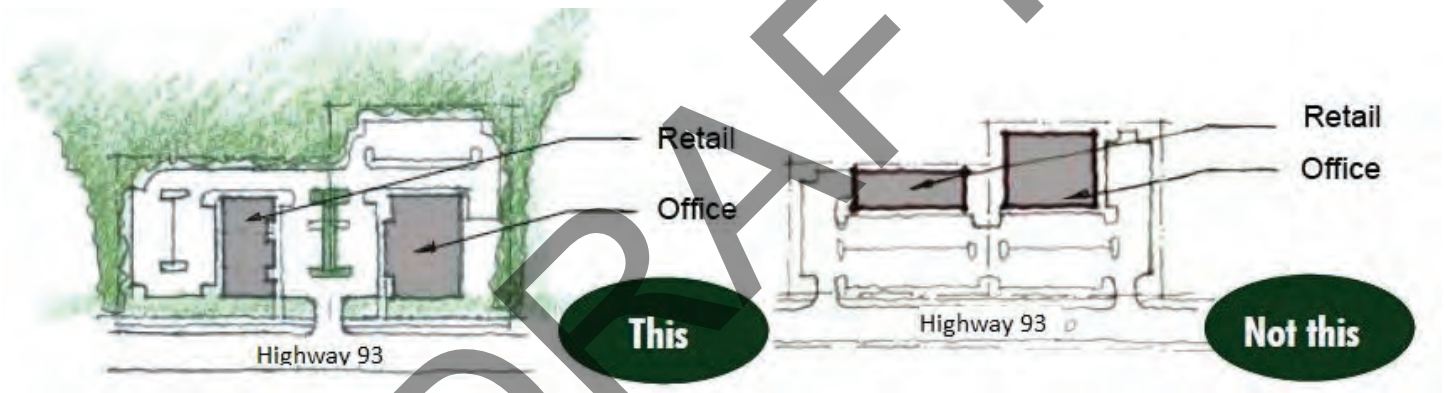
Land Use Tools

Regulatory tools could be used to improve the land use components of commercial strips people find unappealing including the following:

- large expanses of paved parking lots;
- seas of cars but few people;
- low rise buildings with cold or monotone color for siding and no visual breaks in the wall faces;
- large and distracting signage; and
- a lack of open space or vegetation.

Standards already exist In Whitefish for building and parking orientation, architecture, signage, landscaping, open space, setbacks, and lighting. These should be reviewed and potentially modified to effect desired change in the corridor over time. Currently vacant properties would be developed under the revised standards from the start. As uses change in existing development, the new standards would apply to expansions, remodels, and replacement structures.

To reduce the visual impact of large parking lots in front of buildings set back far from the highway, the zoning regulations require new multi-family and commercial buildings be oriented to the street with parking to the rear or side. In Whitefish City Code, the special provisions for mixed use and nonresidential building development standards (§11-3-43, WCC) require buildings to be oriented towards the primary street frontage. Parking lots must not be located between the building and the primary street frontage. Buildings must be setback a minimum of 20-feet and a maximum of 25-feet from the right-of-way. When buildings are further than 20-feet from the right-of-way, the space beyond the minimum setback must be landscaped or provide public amenities such as plazas, benches, bicycle racks, pedestrian access, garbage cans or other amenities for pedestrians. These regulations did not come into effect until mid-2019 and to date there are few examples of properties



These sketches adapted from the City of Steamboat Springs, Colroado Urban Design Standards and Entry Corridor Concepts (2008) illustrate how buildings should be oriented to the street and to each other and how parking can be easily accesible but have minimal visual impact.

The Food Coop in Bozeman, Montana uses planter boxes to provide screening and visual interest around its parking lot.

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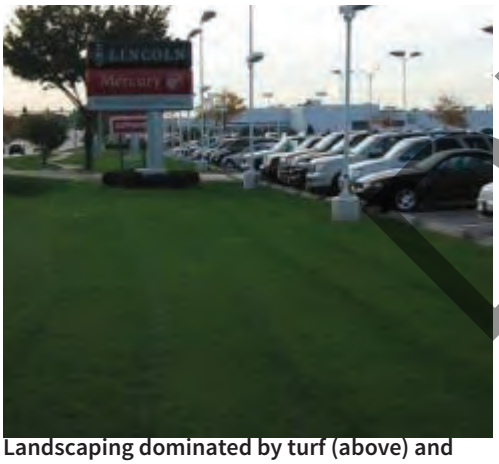
Parkside Credit Union before (above) and after (below) landscaping completed.



Landscaping dominated by turf (above) and with abundant shrubs and trees (below).

in the corridor developed in compliance with these regulations. They should be modified to encourage preservation of healthy, mature trees when they occur along the highway. The space between the minimum setback and the building should be greenspace or open space with public amenities.

To mitigate the visual impacts of existing parking lots located between the right-of-way and the building, the updated regulations should be applied as uses changes or as improvements are proposed. When no new uses or upgrades are planned, property owners should be encouraged to improve the aesthetics of parking lots by installing planter boxes, for example, through creation of a corridor business association.

The improvements to Parkside Credit Union at the corner of Baker Avenue with 13th Street shown (left) demonstrate the value of good landscaping. Revisions to the landscaping regulations should also help break up the monotony of the commercial strip by requiring a variety of heights, masses, and colors of plants used, or by limiting the proportion of turf or grass used. Limiting the amount of Kentucky blue grass and other species that require a lot of irrigation could also help achieve water conservation goals. Incorporating public amenities (seating, access, connectivity, open spaces) within the landscaping along highway frontage would increase pedestrian activity, which also adds to visual interest.

When landscaping is primarily turf or grass, visual interest is limited (left). In contrast, use of shrubs and small trees in landscaping provides visual interest and screening around parking lots (left).

Currently the landscaping required of parking lots does not apply to automotive sales lots. This exemption should be removed and use of planter boxes should be allowed for automotive sale lots as a way to break up visual monotony without the necessity of tearing up existing pavement.

Whitefish Architectural Review Standards are written to encourage or discourage rather than require or prohibit certain features and materials that affect the visual interest of buildings. For example, vision glass for windows is currently encouraged along public streets but it is not required within the Secondary Business district. This leaves the Architectural Review Committee with

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Examples of non-compliant signage in the Highway 93 South corridor.

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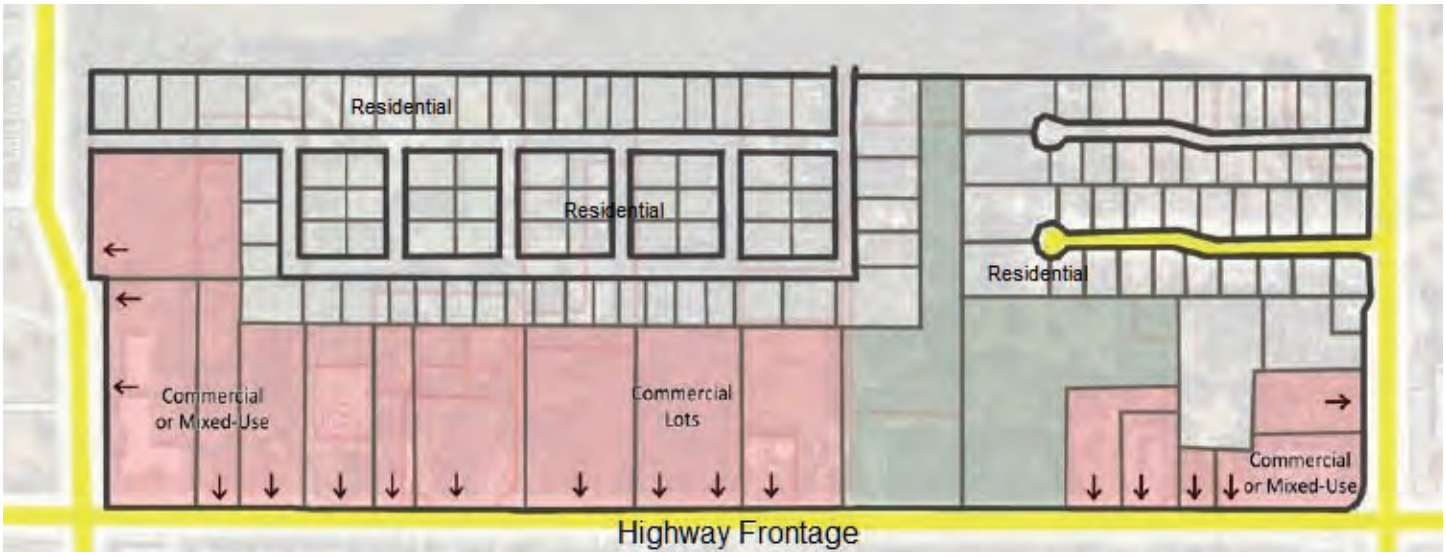
a somewhat reduced ability to ensure new structures best represent the character of Whitefish and are compatible with the community vision for the corridor. As it stands now, new commercial buildings must have a shape and form that relates to the surrounding buildings and neighborhood, regardless of whether those existing structures reflect the desired Whitefish character. The architectural standards were recenlty revised to require a range of features and materials, prohibit other features, and new buildings to relate only to surrounding buildings constructed in compliance with Architectural Review Standards. In this way, the review committee should be better positioned to deny projects which lack visual interest and compatibility while still allowing for creativity and unique design by architects.

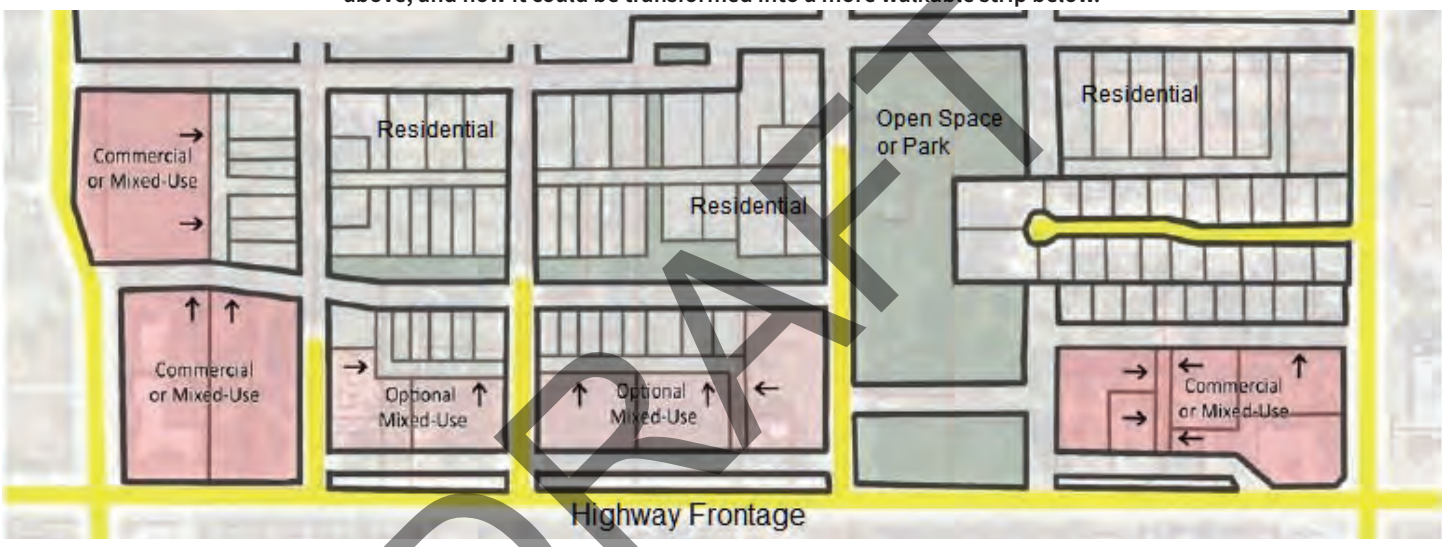
The Highway Commercial sign district does a good job of regulating the visual impacts of signage in most of the corridor. A small area of Segment A and all of Baker Avenue is included in the Highway Commercial district, but these areas have relatively lower vehicle speeds and smaller lots with buildings set closer to the street than the remainder of Segment B. It is more appropriate for all of Segment A to be incorporated into the Resort Community Business or Old Town sign districts (or within a new sign district) that considers vehicle speed and lot size. Additionally, there remain non-conforming billboards and single-post monument signs in Segment B and Segment C (photos this page) that should be brought into compliance as part of implementing this plan.

Converting large “super” blocks to several smaller blocks with a finer grain street network can help create visual interest as well as increases street frontage for businesses. It can also provide a more walkable area and connect neighborhoods to commercial areas.

A typical commercial strip has deep lots and individual accesses from the highway. Pedestrian access is difficult, and vehicles must re-enter the highway to visit adjacent businesses. Nearby neighborhoods have no



These illustrations from *Strip Commercial and Mixed-Use Development* (Hillsborough County, Florida 2014) show a typical commercial strip above, and how it could be transformed into a more walkable strip below.



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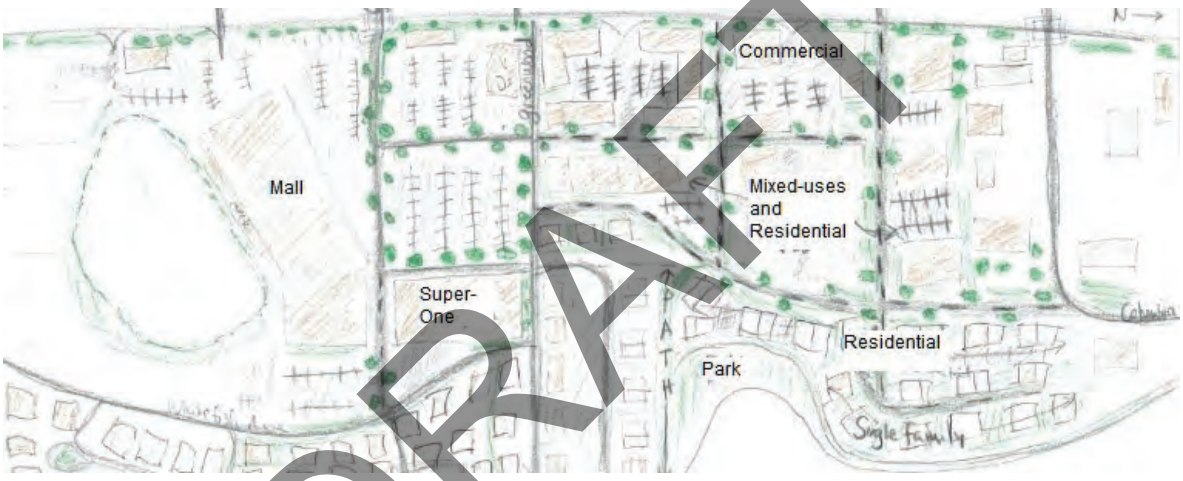
direct connection to the commercial lots. When blocks are broken up with a finer grain street network, access to the commercial properties is from the side or rear, neighborhoods are connected, pedestrians are able to access businesses, and congestion on the highway is reduced because vehicles do not need to re-enter the highway to get to multiple businesses.

On the Highway 93 South corridor there is already a fine grain street network and dense development between Commerce Street and 13th Street west of the highway. The same type of dense and active development could be encouraged on the east side of the highway between the Mountain Mall and 13th Street (sketches next page). An extension of Columbia Avenue south to Greenwood Drive is already envisioned as part of the Whitefish Transportation Plan. A further expanded street network with mixed uses, abundant street trees, landscaping and green spaces, buildings oriented to the streets, and less prominent parking lots are recommended to create an active and vibrant commercial area on both sides of the highway.

There are also tools to help improve the function of commercial development lining the highway. Right now each place of business largely functions independent of adjacent uses. By connecting parking lots and pedestrian routes, customers would not need to re-enter the highway to visit a second place of business directly adjacent to the place of business first visited. Large lot sizes and a tendency for only one commercial use per lot produces low density development or sprawl. If multiple buildings were permitted on a single lot with internal sidewalk connections, a customer would be encouraged to park once and walk between businesses.

The current zoning regulation §11-3-14B Multiple Uses Same Lot requires a conditional

A sketch of the large, undeveloped parcels east of the highway is shown above, and a concept for smaller blocks developed with a mix of uses in the same area below.



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use permit to develop a property with multiple buildings. To encourage multiple buildings on large lots, the regulation should be revised for the Secondary Business District such that multiple buildings are allowed with an administrative conditional use permit.

While strip malls with multiple tenants are notoriously unattractive, well designed modest multi-tenant buildings are better for the environment than multiple single-use buildings. A proximity of uses makes it possible to reduce vehicle trips and provides more opportunites for pedestrian access. Multi-tenant buildings can also share sewer infrastructure costs, as well as heating and cooling costs.

Parking may be shared between uses with different peak hours on the same or adjacent lots. This would result in smaller areas of asphalt and shared stormwater facilities. The amount of parking required for some commercial uses could also be reduced to minimize paved surface area and cost of development. Medical offices in Whitefish, for example, require almost seven off-street parking spaces per 1,000 squre feet of gross floor area while in Missoula, the same use requires only four off-street parking spaces for the same area. Whitefish parking requirements should be reviewed for potential reductions in some commercial uses.

Combined or shared driveway access between parcels and better defined driveways would also help improve the function of the corridor by making movement into and out of those parcels simpler and safer. Preference for these types of configurations is found in the Mixed-Use and Non-Residential Building Development Standards (§11-3-43) adopted in June 2019. Modifying the language in the regulation to be a requirement rather than a preference would make it more likely to see

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assembly/light manufacturing in the zoning text amendments going before Planning Board this week, as she thought the feedback on that topic from the Steering Committee was that use should continue to be a conditional use.

H. Adjournment – 4:05pm

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