



Whitefish, Montana

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# WISCONSIN AVENUE CORRIDOR PLAN

(Edgewood Place to Big Mountain Road)

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Adopted 4-16-18

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# I. PROJECT OVERVIEW



## A. Background

In 2007, the City of Whitefish adopted a Growth Policy with the following description of a corridor plan for Wisconsin Avenue.

*“This plan must address the mix of uses and the transition to residential both east and west of the roadway. It must also address connections to the adjacent residential neighborhoods, orientation and connections to the new bike route, scale issues, landscaping/screening, and circulation/access.”*

Wisconsin Avenue is the primary link between downtown and two major recreational destinations -- Whitefish Lake and Whitefish Mountain Resort. This two-lane, state-maintained, secondary highway includes a paved, separated bike and pedestrian path. The average annual daily traffic count for 2016 was 11,500 vehicles, but traffic volumes are only expected to increase as the corridor continues to grow, raising concerns that congestion and public safety issues will become more pronounced.

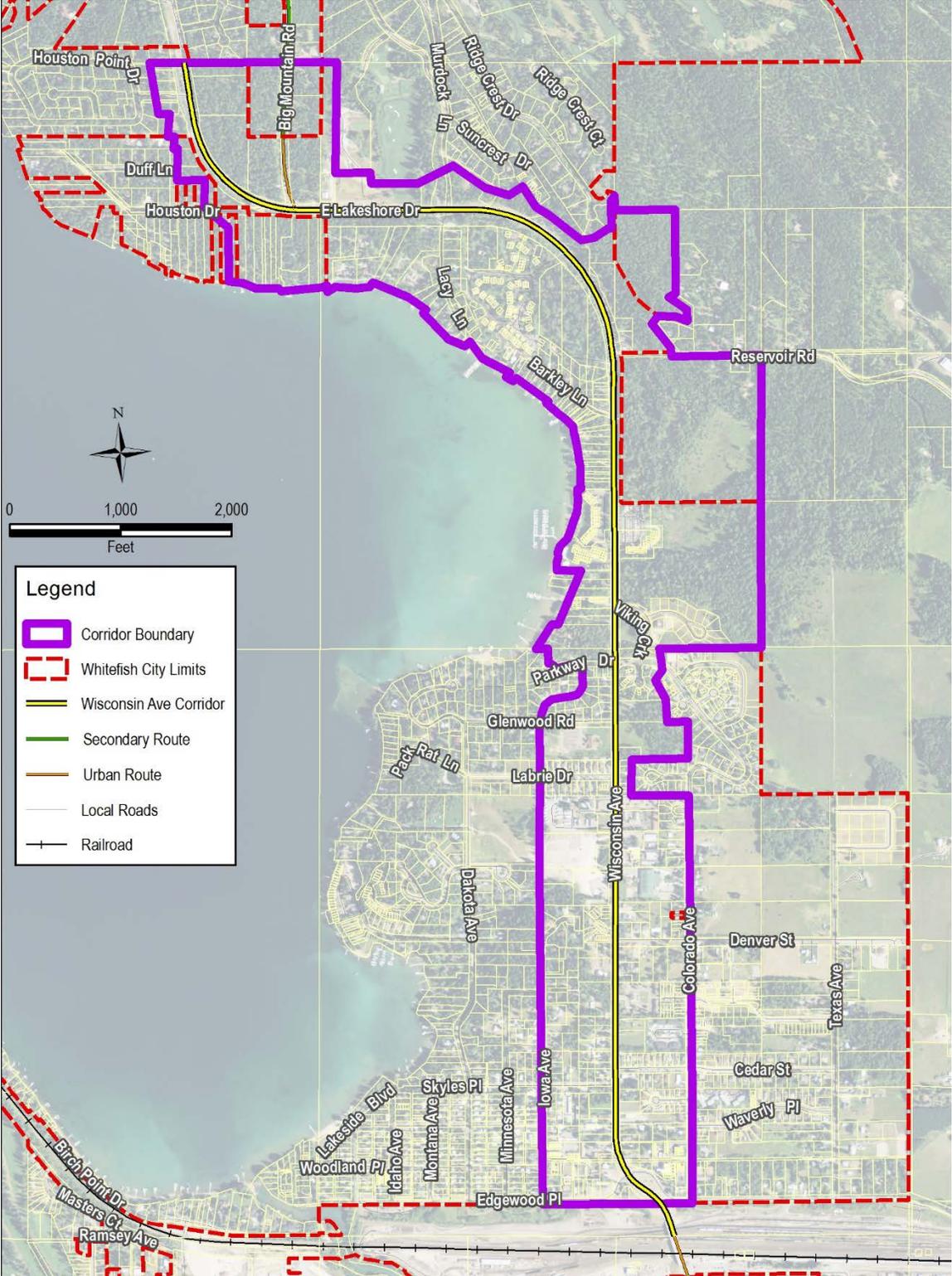
Land use within the study area is a mix of neighborhood commercial, offices, multi-family, single-family, resort residential, resort business and institutional uses. The southern portion of the corridor is transitioning from single-family to office and multi-family uses. In addition, there is significant potential for development of large vacant tracts and redevelopment of residential lots that are being assembled into larger parcels. The northern portion of the corridor is characterized by low-density development and open space. This plan encourages development that is complementary to the existing mix of uses while maintaining the neighborhood scale and character in different parts of the corridor.

Just as important is the study area’s location within the Whitefish Lake watershed. As storm water and snow melt run-off within the study area flows into Whitefish Lake, it is critical that development does not diminish water quality. The creation of a wetland preserve around Viking Creek and the establishment of a major conservation easement adjacent to the corridor are examples of efforts to improve the overall ecological function of the watershed.

The purpose of this corridor plan is to provide a decision framework that harnesses market forces, maximizes the City’s infrastructure investment, protects the environment, helps meet the city’s housing needs and maintains community character. The planning horizon is 10 to 20 years.

## B. Study Area

Map 1.1: Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Boundary

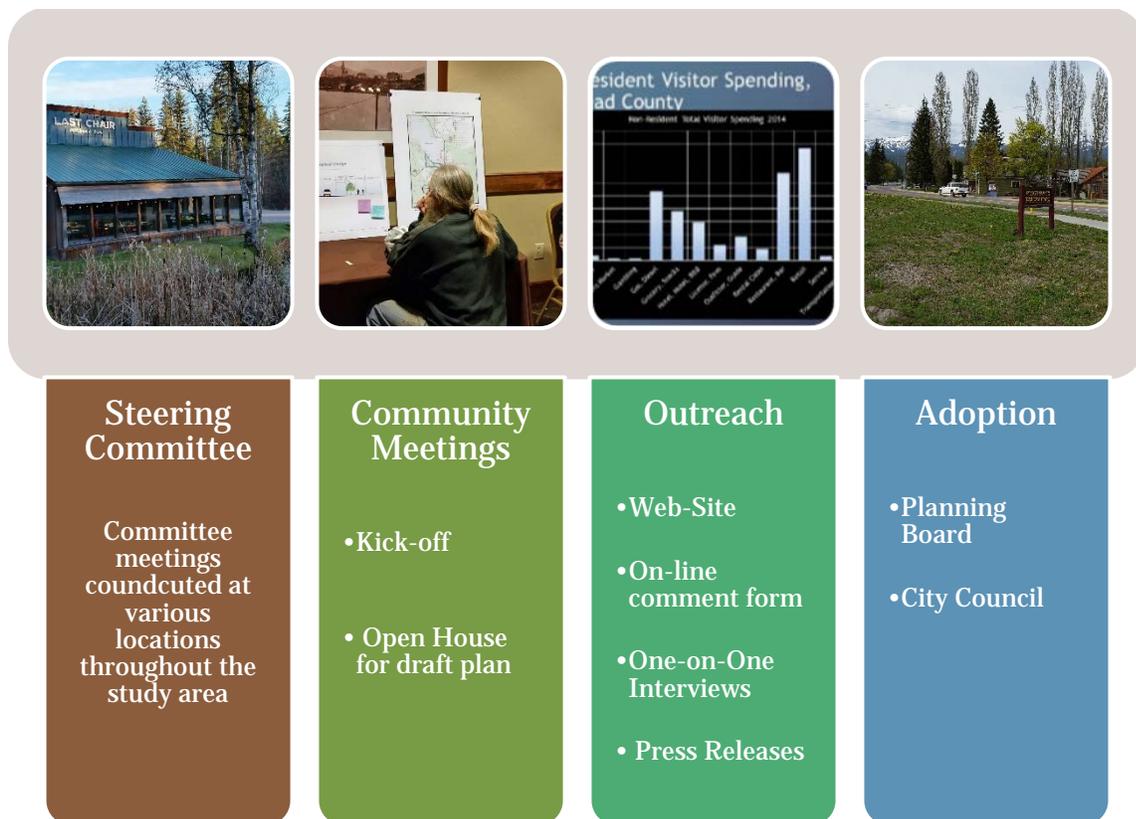


## C. Planning Process

This corridor plan was developed through a community driven process designed to engage citizens, homeowners, business owners, public agencies, and other stakeholders in the planning effort. Throughout the process, the community was involved in formulating the vision for the corridor and in developing the goals, policies, and actions to guide future development along Wisconsin Avenue. Public participation strategies included the following:

- City Council appointed a Steering Committee of community members to oversee development of the plan. The Committee held monthly meetings to provide overall guidance to the project team.
- To facilitate public involvement, meetings were conducted at various locations within the study area.
- Meeting notices, minutes, and draft documents were posted to the city’s web site.
- A list-serve was maintained to provide regular updates to the public via e-mail.
- Citizens were invited to attend and participate in the Steering Committee discussions.
- Two community meetings were conducted as part of the planning process.
- An on-line comment form was developed to supplement input from meetings sessions.

Figure 1.1: Public Input



## D. Related Planning Documents

Montana law requires that a neighborhood plan be consistent with the growth policy. Additionally, there are multiple planning documents, analyses, infrastructure plans, and special studies that lay the foundation for successful neighborhood plans. Long-range plans can be downloaded from the city web site at <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/planning-and-building/long-range-plans.php> . Documents relevant to planning policy and actions in the Wisconsin Corridor include:

### 1. Growth Policy - 2007

Below are relevant goals and polices as excerpted from the 2007 Growth Policy:

#### **“Future Land Use Goals:**

1. Preserve and enhance the character, qualities, and small town feel and ambience of the Whitefish community through an innovative and comprehensive growth management system.
2. Preserve, enhance, and manage environmentally sensitive areas such as river and stream banks, steep slopes, wetlands, forested areas, and critical wildlife habitat.
4. Preserve and protect scenic vistas and view sheds. *(Note: No work has been done to date to specifically identify important or “image setting” view sheds.)*
5. Protect and preserve the special character, scale, and qualities of existing neighborhoods while supporting and encouraging attractive, well-designed, neighborhood compatible infill development.”

#### **“Future Land Use Policies:**

- 3G. Plan for healthy, efficient, and visually attractive corridors along major transportation routes through the community.
5. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to encourage and support sustainability in land use planning so that the needs of the present are met while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities.
6. The City of Whitefish shall give priority to infill development over Growth Policy amendments that would redesignate land to Urban or Suburban.
7. Waterfront development, including roads, utilities, and trails, shall not be allowed to degrade water quality, illegally or otherwise improperly alter natural streambanks and lakeshores, destroy riparian vegetation, degrade riparian wildlife habitat.
10. The City of Whitefish shall facilitate the formulation of corridor plans for all major transportation corridors in the community.
12. Encourage land owners to consult with professional foresters on the proper silvicultural and forest management techniques for hillsides and environmentally sensitive areas.

**13.** All waterfront structures shall be appropriately set back from the waterfront to preserve views, minimize adverse environmental impacts, preserve the aesthetic qualities of the lake or river front, meet sanitation requirements, and protect water quality.

**14.** All road construction associated with waterfront development and/or occurring in waterfront areas shall be monitored. Excessive clearing, hillside cutting, and the creation of spoil banks, which adversely affect views, destabilize hillsides, cause erosion, or increase surface runoff, shall be avoided or effectively mitigated.”

**2. Whitefish Transportation Plan – 2009**

The Transportation Plan guides decisions about future improvements for the transportation network. The plan recommends a typical multi-modal cross-section for Wisconsin Avenue but notes, “Due to inherent funding limitations, long-term prospects for complete reconstruction is somewhat limited. A series of smaller scale, incremental projects are warranted. This typically would involve the addition of left-turn bays, bus pullouts, pedestrian crossings and future traffic signals.”

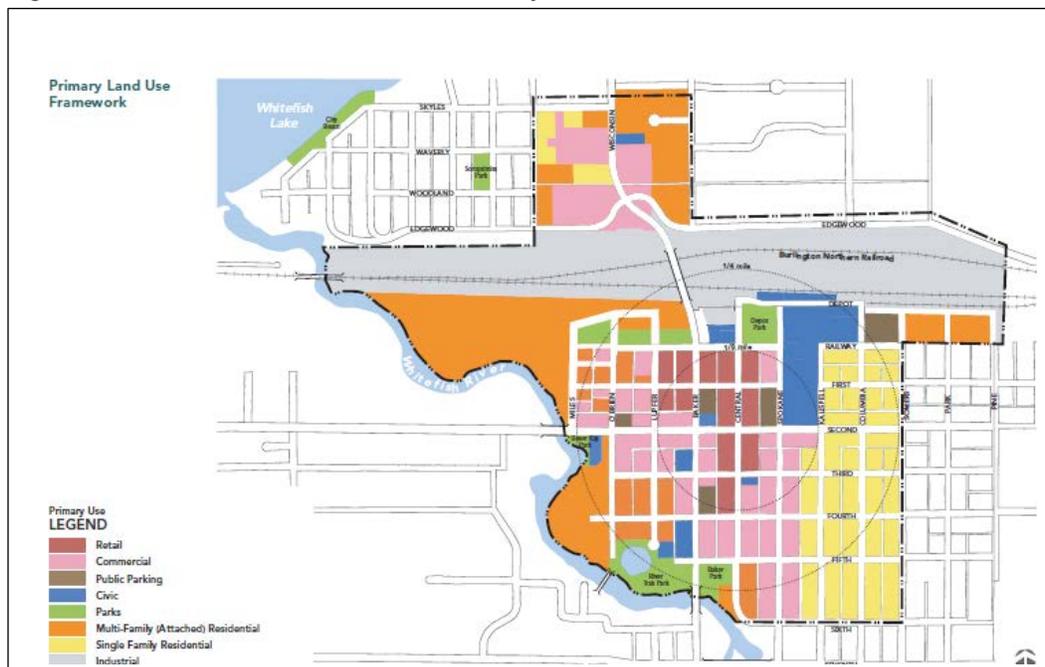
**3. Connect Whitefish, Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan - 2016**

The plan recommends a network of trails and other improvements to achieve a connected system of well-maintained bicycle and pedestrian facilities. According to the plan, “These facilities will link key destinations inside and outside of town and will be safe, convenient and comfortable for both recreation and active transportation.” Within the study area, the plan proposes wayfinding signs and three interconnected network routes (Wisconsin Ave. Trail, City Beach Loop, and Edgewood Loop). The plan also recommends safety improvements at various crossings along Wisconsin Ave.

**4. Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan - 2015**

The 2015 Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan updates the original plan adopted in 2006. Among the key purposes of the plan is to, “Strengthen the connection between commercial parcels along Wisconsin Avenue and north of the railyard with the downtown core.” The master plan study area extends north of the railroad tracks along Wisconsin Ave. to Skyles Place and recommends a land use mix that, with a few modifications, is generally consistent with this Wisconsin Corridor plan. The proposed Whitefish Promenade connects the study area to the downtown through signage, landscaping, and trail/pedestrian improvements.

Figure 1.2: Downtown Master Plan – Whitefish Land Use Framework



## 5. Neighborhood Plans

The following neighborhood plans were adopted by reference in the Growth Policy and may provide additional guidance for development in those areas.

- Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan (2006) - Big Mountain Ski Resort has since been renamed Whitefish Mountain Resort. It is a privately owned, full-service, ski resort and provides an important recreational amenity for the community. Winter recreation primarily includes alpine skiing and cross-country skiing. Summer recreation includes hiking, bicycling, and new attractions such as an alpine slide and zip lines.
- Iron Horse Resort Neighborhood Plan (1996) - The Iron Horse Resort encompasses 826 acres located approximately two miles north of Edgewood on the east side of Wisconsin Ave. The neighborhood plan includes a private 18-hole golf course, clubhouse, residential units, and conservation/open space. At build-out the neighborhood plan allows for approximately 350 dwelling units. As part of the plan a 60-acre conservation easement and trail easement in the southeast portion of the property was created in lieu of parkland dedication.

## 6. Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: A Status of Whitefish Lake Watershed & Surrounding Area-2015 (<http://www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php> )

This report was prepared by the Whitefish Lake Institute and was funded through a grant from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). It describes the watershed, compiles data and benchmarks for planning, and includes a watershed restoration plan. The plan recommends new policies, local government action, research, education, and habitat protection. Included are specific recommendations for Viking Creek, which is in the Wisconsin Corridor study area.

## 7. Whitefish Area Workforce Housing Needs Assessment - 2016 (<http://whitefishhousing.com/> )

This study was part one of an effort to address affordable housing needs in the community. Phase one documented the local housing needs while phase two will use this information to develop specific housing goals, priorities, and programs. The report concluded that due to a number of factors typical in resort communities, there is an inadequate supply of affordable rental housing and homeownership opportunities to meet the housing needs of the local workforce.

## 8. Whitefish Highway 93 West – Corridor Plan

This plan for the U.S. Highway 93 corridor west of downtown Whitefish was adopted in 2015. It includes the following new land use designation that can also be applied in the Wisconsin Corridor study area.

- Resort – Commercial

## 9. Community Wildfire Protection Plan – Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan (<http://flathead.mt.gov/oes/> )

The study area for this plan is within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) in and around Whitefish. Recommendations include fuel reduction, education regarding “Firewise” practices, improvement of fire fighting capabilities, and identification of WUI issues during subdivision review.

## 10. Regulatory/Design Standards

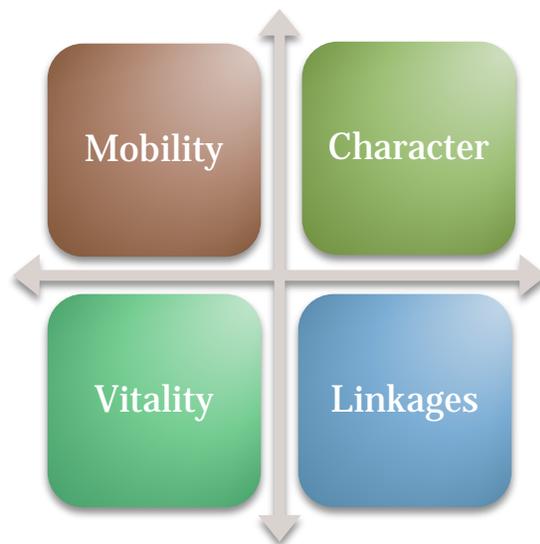
In addition to the planning documents, the Whitefish Zoning Regulations, Whitefish Building Code, and Whitefish Architectural Review Standards were reviewed as part of the planning process.

## E. Guiding Principles

Guiding principles represent overarching values that provide direction to public officials throughout the 20-year planning horizon. The guiding principles recognize that community systems are interdependent and often have mutual goals. Identifying these common principles facilitates coordination among agencies so they can develop integrated solutions that result in a functional and vibrant corridor. The guiding principles for this corridor plan are:

1. **Neighborhood Character** – The design of new development, transportation improvements, signage, and other construction should be consistent with the unique scale and architectural style of the corridor and surrounding neighborhood. Urban design features should enhance vistas, reflect local culture, and should be scaled to pedestrians.
2. **Mobility** – The corridor should have safe and efficient mobility options for all modes of transportation and for citizens and visitors of all physical abilities. Optimizing mobility should be an integral component of both transportation and site planning for the corridor.
3. **Vitality** – Create an environment where local businesses and entrepreneurs thrive and that encourages pedestrian activity, social interaction, and a variety of activities, shopping and dining opportunities, and events. Foster safe and vital residential areas that provide year-round housing to meet the needs of the Whitefish work force.
4. **Linkages** – Provide visual and transportation linkages to downtown, Whitefish Lake, Whitefish Mountain Resort and the new Haskill Basin Trailhead. Recognize the linkage between the corridor to environmentally sensitive areas and water quality as well as linkages to the broader transportation and economic systems in the community.

Figure 1.3: Guiding Principles



## II. EXISTING CONDITIONS



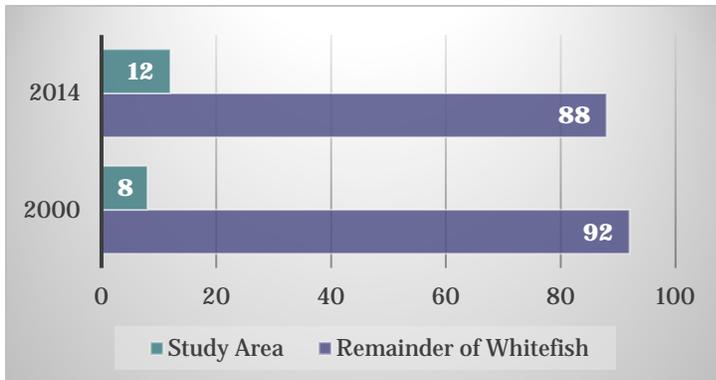
### A. Economic Performance

The Wisconsin Avenue Corridor is located within the City of Whitefish in Flathead County Montana. Economic performance of the corridor is dependent upon the economic performance of Whitefish and Flathead County. The analysis of the current and historical economic performance of the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor, within the overall context of the Whitefish and Flathead County economy, provides guidance for understanding land use and development choices in planning the corridor. As indicated from the analysis in this section, the Wisconsin Ave. corridor has become more important as the corridor's share of population, jobs and housing has increased over the last 14 years

#### 1. Population & Employment

The population in the corridor increased by 100% from 403 people according to 2000 Census to 805 people in 2014. During this same period, the City of Whitefish population increased by 30% from 5,032 in 2000 to 6,542 in 2014. With the Wisconsin Avenue study area doubling in population size, the proportion of the city population that resides in the Wisconsin corridor increased from 8% of the city's population in 2000 to 12% of the population in 2014.

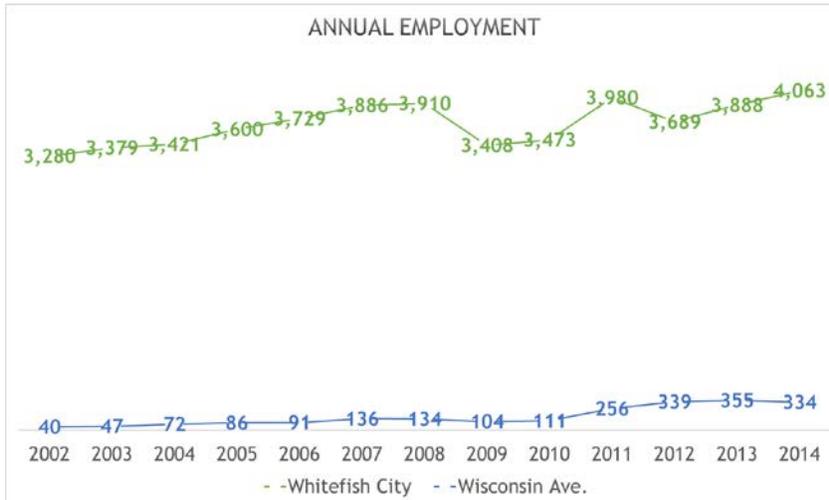
Figure 2.1: Percentage of Whitefish Population Residing in Study Area



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Likewise, there was significant growth in employment in the study area during this same period. From the year 2002 the employment in the study area grew from 40 jobs to 334 jobs in 2014. During this same period, the employment citywide increased by 783 jobs from 3,280 in 2002 to 4,063 jobs in 2014. The Wisconsin Avenue corridor represented 38% of this job increase. The proportion of jobs in the corridor increased from just 1% of employment in the City in 2002 to 8% of employment in 2014.

Figure 2.2: Employment Growth



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2014)

## 2. Housing

The increasing importance of the corridor can also be seen in the number and types of housing units found along the corridor. The number of housing units increased by more than 150 percent in the 14-year period. The composition and type of housing changed during the same time frame. Owner-occupied units increased by 210 percent while at the same time renter-occupied units, which used to dominate the corridor, increased by only 27 percent. Table 1 illustrates the change in housing unit types along the corridor between 2000 and 2014.

Table 2.1: Wisconsin Avenue Housing Units

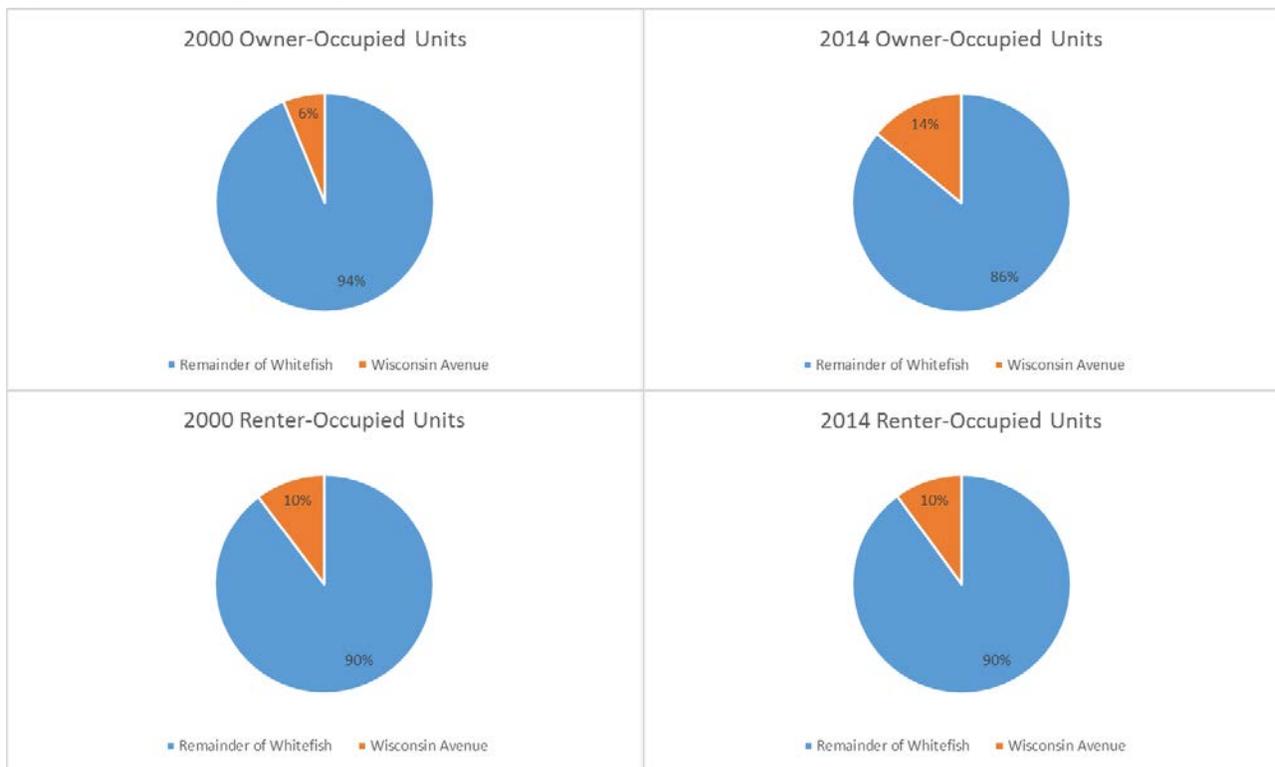
	2000	2014	% Change
Housing Units	273	702	157%
Occupied	179	367	105%
Owner Occupied	76	236	210%
Renter Occupied	103	131	27%
Vacant	94	335	256%
Seasonal, recreational, occasional use	78	258	230%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census; 2014 ACS

The corridor appears to be undergoing a transformation from a source of rental housing for relatively permanent residents to an area dominated by Whitefish’s tourist economy. This can be seen in the composition of the corridor’s vacant housing stock. In 2000 the number of housing units on the corridor held vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use represented 29 percent of the total number of units on the corridor. In 2014 this had increased to 36 percent representing a 230 percent increase in these types of units. Additionally, many of the “owner-occupied” units are occupied seasonally but not identified in the “held vacant” number because they are not available for rental.

Although Wisconsin Avenue seasonal rental units as a percent of all similar Whitefish seasonal units is essentially unchanged from 2000, the importance of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor to the various types of housing available in Whitefish can be seen in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Housing Units by Tenure



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & American Community Survey

While the total number of housing units in the Wisconsin Avenue corridor grew significantly, the majority of these units are owner-occupied or seasonal rentals. This is a trend seen throughout Whitefish. The increasing percentage of the housing stock available for purchase or seasonal rental has put pressure on the rental market in the corridor and throughout the City.

Figure 2.4: % of Seasonal Vacant Units



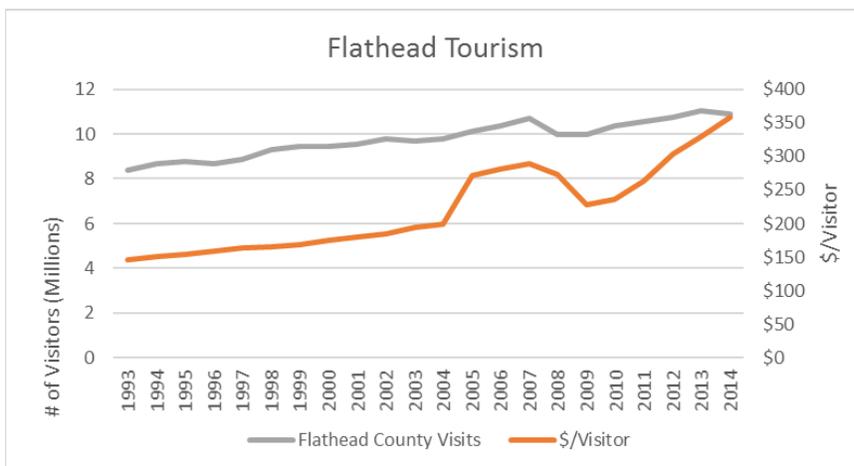
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census & American Community Survey

### 3. Tourism

#### A. County Tourism Trends

The pressures seen in the housing market in Whitefish and within the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor are a result of the increasing importance of tourism for the Whitefish economy. Figure 2.5 illustrates the growth in tourism and dollars spent by tourists in the Flathead County economy. In the twenty-one-year period from 1993 through 2014 the number of visitors to Flathead County increased by 30 percent. At the same time, the dollars spent per visitor increased by more than 140 percent.

Figure 25: Flathead Tourism

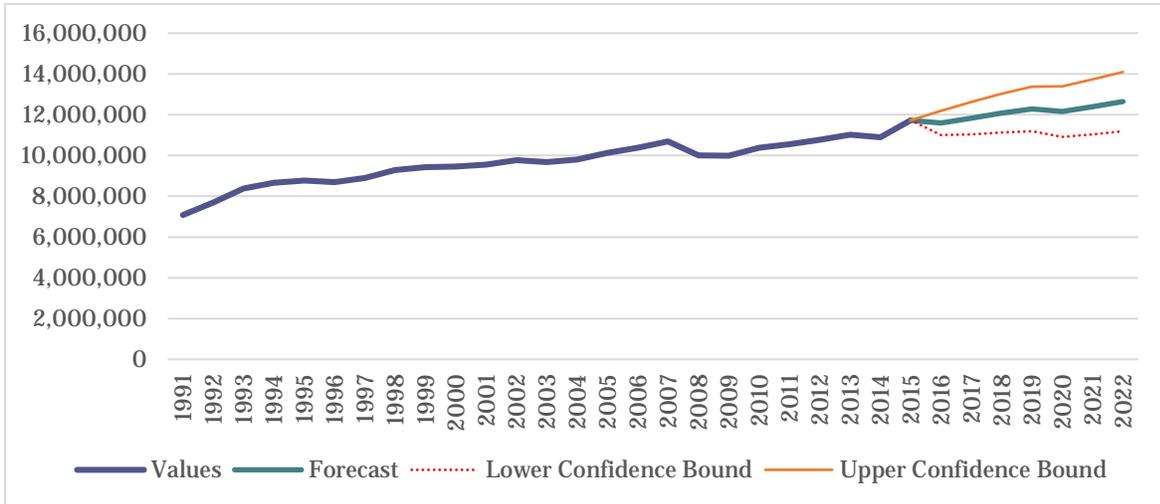


Source: University of Montana Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

Note: University of Montana tourism data available only at the County level

According to the Institute for Travel and Recreational Research at the University of Montana, “The growth in Montana’s travel and tourism continues at a slow, predictable rate. Data from 2016 will likely show a stable, but good year for Montana’s nonresident travel industry. Preliminary nonresident visitor numbers indicate a 2 percent increase in 2016, on par with preliminary numbers nationwide. According to the US Travel Association, projections for 2017 suggest a steady 2% increase over 2016.” In Flathead County average growth has been 1.5% annually. If this trend is extended to 2041, it would result in an increase of 2.1 million new visitors to the County.

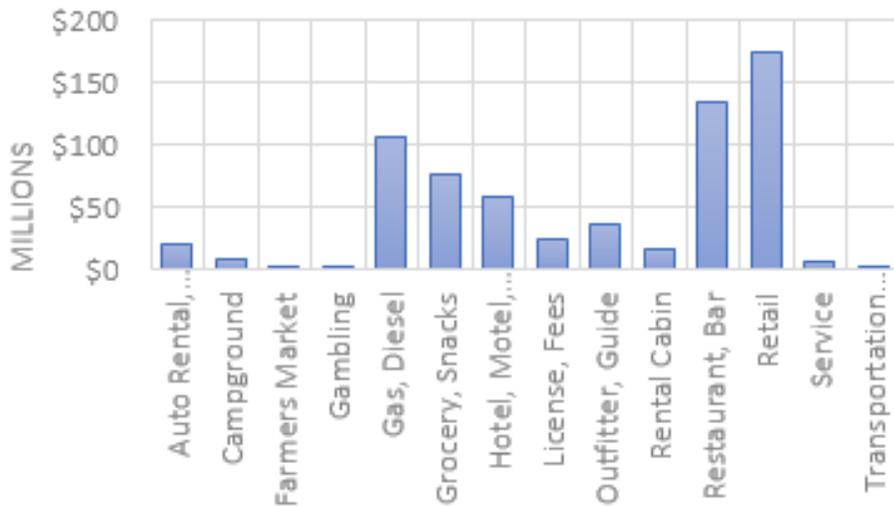
Figure 2.6: Visitor Projections



Source: University of Montana, Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research – Historic Data

As indicated in Figure 2.7, the visitors largest share of visitor spending was in the retail category followed by spending at restaurants and bars. Spending on gas was the third largest category of visitor spending in the County.

Figure 2.7: Visitor Spending by Category - 2014

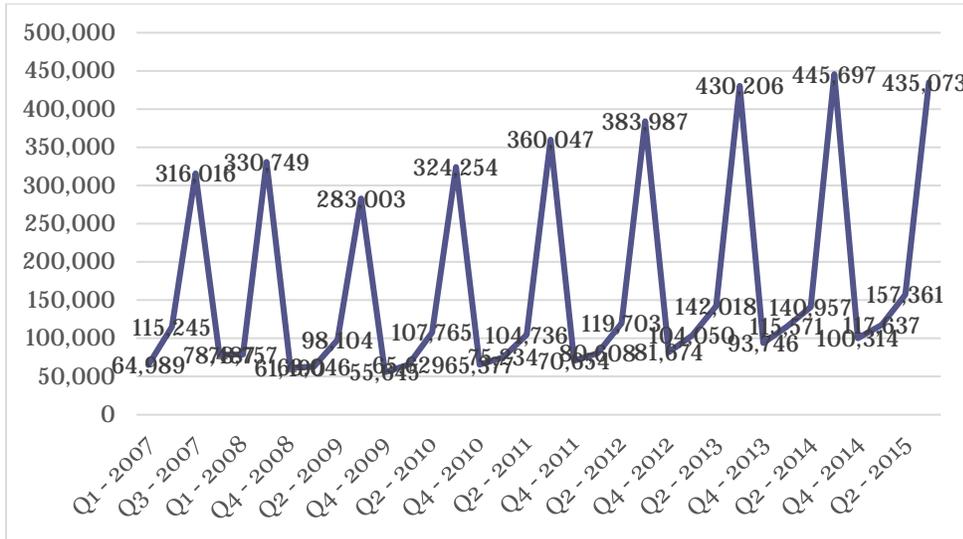


Source: University of Montana, Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

**B. Local Tourism Data**

According to Whitefish lodging tax revenue collected by the State of Montana, the peak season for lodging revenue in Whitefish are the months from July through September. Although there are fluctuations from year-to-year, between 2007 and 2016, the total amount of lodging tax collected increased by 70%. This is a result of increased inventory, increased room rates and increased visitation.

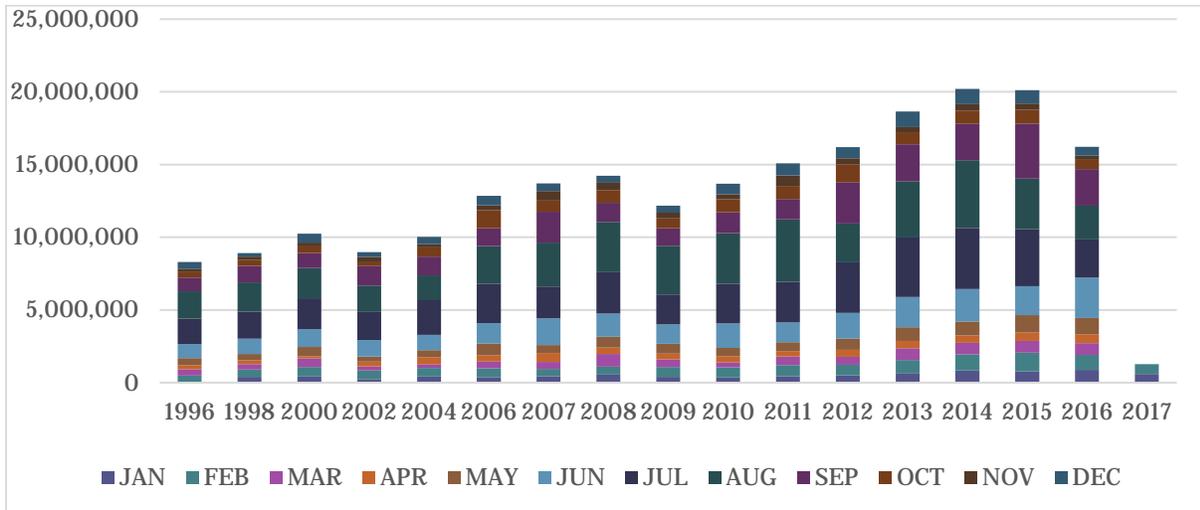
Figure 2.8: State Lodging Tax Collections – Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau Service Area



Source: <http://marketmt.com/Resources/LodgingFacilityUseTax>

The City of Whitefish collects a resort tax for retail sales, lodging, and eating/drinking establishments. As illustrated below, resort tax collections fluctuate but overall have increased over the last 20-years. Most of the tax is collected from June through September.

Figure 2.9: Whitefish Resort Tax Collections



Source: City of Whitefish Finance Dept.

Whitefish and the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor have experienced significant growth in the tourism sector over the last 15 years. Although the area was impacted by the national economic downturn of 2008, visitation and per visitor spending has recovered to above pre-recession levels indicating an ability to weather larger economic cycles.

**C. Skier Visits**

The number of skier visits fluctuates from year-to-year depending on the economy as well as whether it’s a good snow year. As indicated in the table below, however, over the last ten-years, the number of skier visits is generally trending up. The busiest week is between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day when skier visits range between 4,000 and upwards of 8,600 (record for busiest day set in 2016.) Aside from the holiday week, Saturdays are typically the busiest day with about 4,500-6,000 skiers per day in January-February. The number of skier visits has a direct impact on traffic in the Wisconsin Avenue corridor.

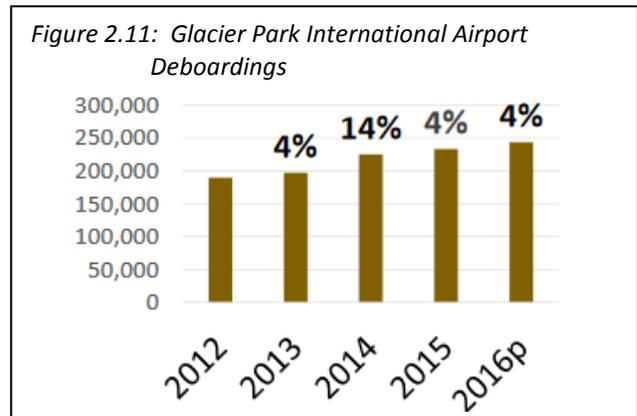
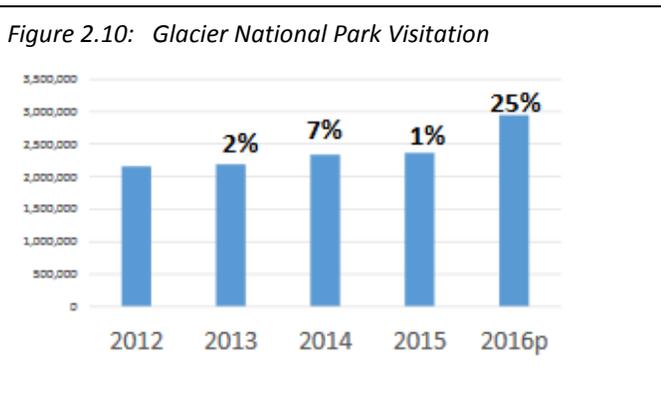
Table 2.2: Whitefish Mountain Resort Total Skier Visits per Season

Year	Skier Visits
2007/08	297,000
2008/09	274,500
2009/10	283,000
2010/11	318,000
2011/12	294,000
2012/13	322,500
2013/14	345,000
2014/15	310,000
2015/16	322,500
2016/17	346,000

Source: Whitefish Mountain Resort

**D. Other Tourism Indicators**

As indicated by data from Glacier National Park and airport deboardings, visitation has been growing and the trend is expected to continue. This should support business growth in Whitefish.



Source: [www.bber.umt.edu/pubs/seminars/2017/Tourism.pdf](http://www.bber.umt.edu/pubs/seminars/2017/Tourism.pdf)

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## B. Land Use and Zoning

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### 1. Existing Land Use Pattern

The area between the railroad and Skyles Place has the most intense mix of land. In this short, 0.2 mile stretch, there is a mix of retail, restaurants, office, multi-family, single-family, and low-rise apartments.

The largest share of the population in the corridor resides in the segment located between Skyles Place and Crestwood. There are several low-rise apartment complexes in this area as well as single-family subdivisions located on Colorado Ave., Woodside Lane, Parkway Drive, Labrie Drive and Crestwood Drive. There are still some older single-family homes along Wisconsin Avenue, but a number of these homes have been converted to professional offices. The Stumptown Ice Den is a city park/recreational facility that is also the location of a ski museum. North of the Ice Den is a commercial complex with retail, restaurant, offices and warehouses. Two restaurants are located at the Wisconsin/Denver Street intersection.

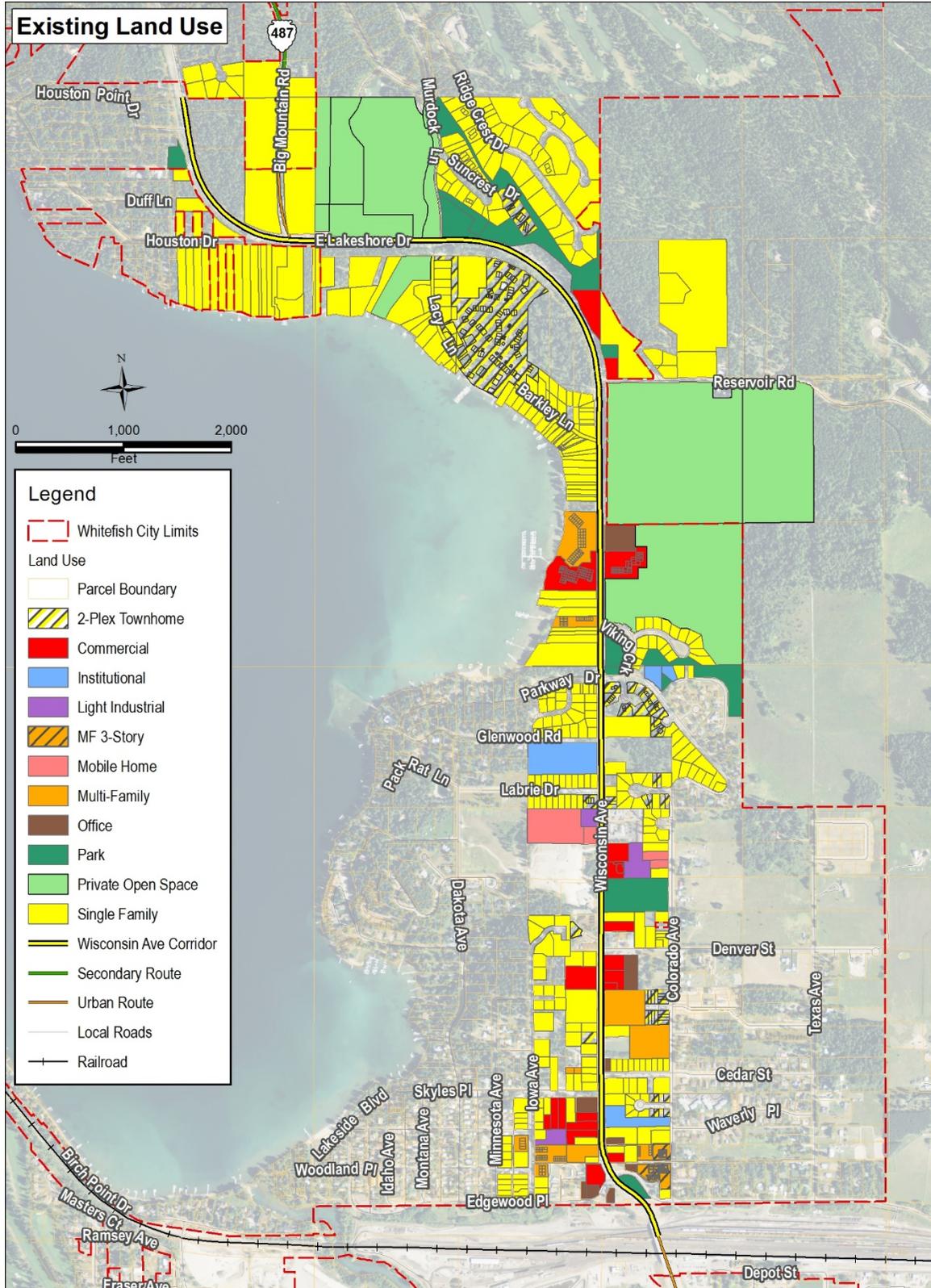
The corridor segment north of Crestwood extending to Big Mountain Road is characterized as more rural, pastoral setting. On the east side of Wisconsin Avenue are large tracts properties with frontage on Whitefish Lake. The Lodge at Whitefish Lake is a large-scale resort with lodging, restaurant and marina. North of the resort are large residential lots with lake frontage. On the west side of Wisconsin Avenue there are large areas of open space including a private golf course and two large wetland areas that are protected from future development. There is a small commercial area on the northeast corner of Wisconsin and Reservoir Road. Large vacant tracts are located at the Big Mountain Road intersection

### 2. Activity Nodes

Along this linear corridor are several activity nodes that provide gathering places, represent major employment centers and attract traffic from outside of the immediate study area. These areas include:

- Edgewood Drive/Wisconsin Avenue Intersection – This node is located at the only traffic controlled intersection in the corridor. There are several restaurants that are gathering spots and a number of small commercial businesses. The plan should give special consideration to this node as the southern gateway to the corridor and as the link to downtown.
- Denver Avenue/Wisconsin Ave. – McGarry’s restaurant and Bonsai Brewery are popular gathering spaces. There are concerns with pedestrian/bike/auto conflicts at this node.
- Stumptown Ice Den/Alpine Market Commercial Area – This node encompasses both sides of the street and includes a major recreation center, a small food market, restaurant, offices, car wash, and drive-thru coffee hut. This node provides commercial services for residents along the corridor. Linkages to potential major development at the former gravel pit will be important.
- The Lodge at Whitefish Lake - The Lodge spans both sides of Wisconsin Avenue. It is a major employment center and attracts significant visitor traffic. The node has frontage on Whitefish Lake and is adjacent to major conservation areas. Expansion of this node to vacant parcels north and south of the Lodge and their impact on water quality is a concern.

Map 2.1: Existing Land Use Map



### 3. Zoning

The “WRR-1: Low Density Resort Residential” zone, which allows multi-family and short-term rentals, represents the largest amount of acreage in the study area. Although there is significant land that is zoned as, “WR-3: Low-Density Multi-Family Residential”, the current land use on many of these parcels is single-family homes. The WR-3 zone allows professional offices and personal services as a conditional use if the property is located on Wisconsin Ave.

The largest non-residential zone is “WRB-2: General Resort Business”, at the Lodge at Whitefish Lake. Mountain Harbor is zoned “WRB-1: Limited Resort Business”. There are 14 acres of “WB-1: Limited Business” that includes primarily restaurants, offices, and neighborhood oriented businesses. This zoning is generally located at the activity nodes that were described in the earlier section.

County zoning in the northern part of the corridor includes SAG-10 on the property that is under a conservation easement and residential zones at the Big Mountain Road intersection.

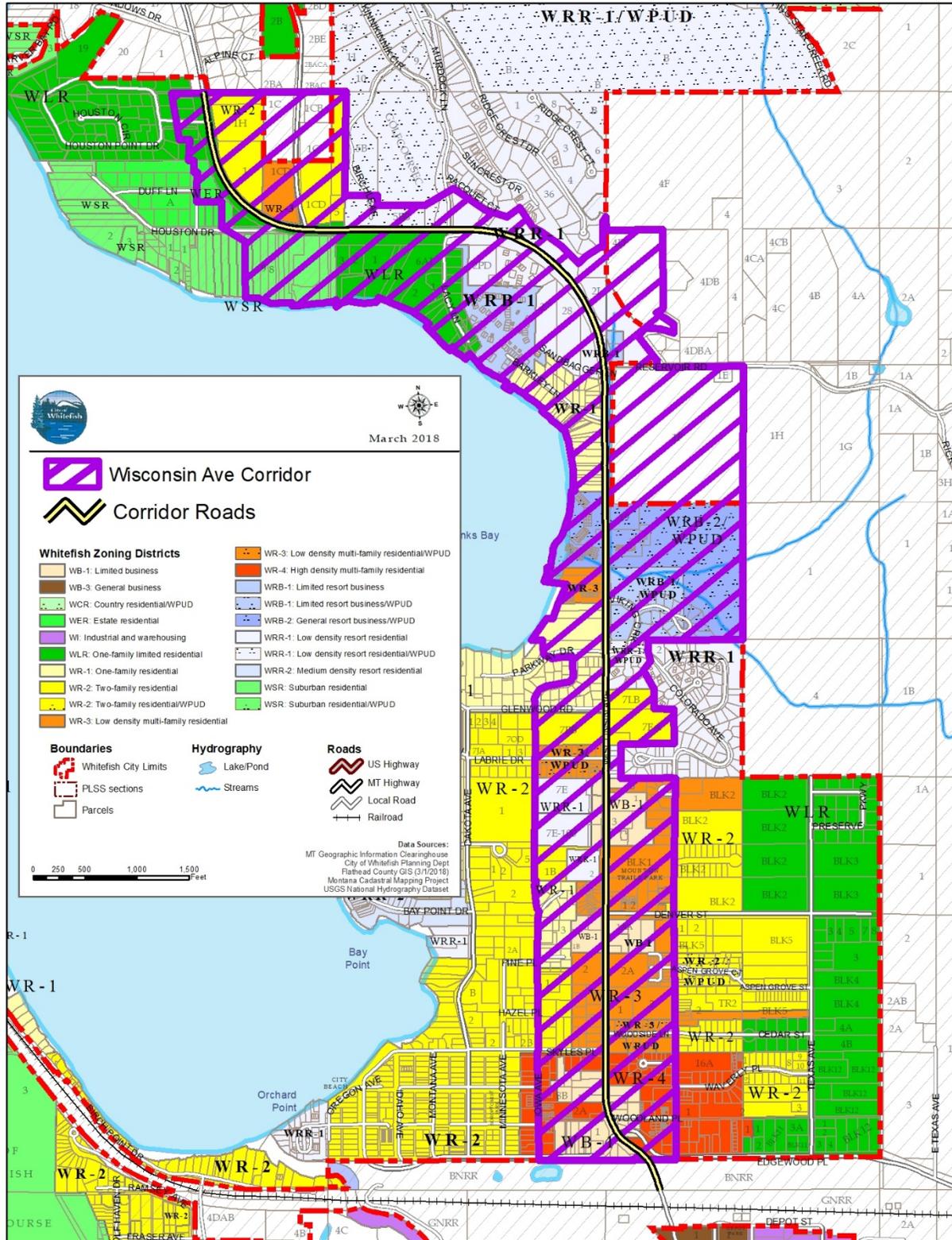
Table 2.3: Study Area Zoning by Acres

Total Corridor by Zoning	Total Acres
WB-1: Limited business	14
WLR: One-family limited residential	12
WR-1: One-family residential	11
WR-2: Two-family residential	33
WR-3: Low density multi-family residential	36
WR-4: High density multi-family residential	6
WRB-1: Limited resort business	3
WRB-2: General resort business	37
WRR-1: Low density resort residential	53
WSR: Suburban residential	3
R-4: Residential County	18
County Zoning (SAG-10)	40
County Zoning (R-1, RR-1, R-4)	30

Source: Flathead County Assessor Data, 2016

Note: Acreage to be updated with new corridor boundaries

Map 2.2: Zoning Map



#### 4. Development Potential

To achieve the goals and objectives of this corridor plan, it is necessary to coordinate with private development or redevelopment activity on parcels within the study area and identify specific strategies for those parcels. Such strategies would provide guidance on land use, circulation, site design, landscaping and opportunities for coordination with other improvements in the area.

- Edgewood Drive – Former trailer park is now vacant. It is zoned commercial. A mixed-use project with a residential component could be developed with a planned unit development.
- Redevelopment of Single-family Lots along Wisconsin – There are older single-family homes on large lots that are candidates for redevelopment. There is potential to assemble these lots to allow for a larger multi-family complex with amenities.
- Denver Street and Colorado Avenue – This area is zoned for multi-family and is centrally located in the corridor. It is walkable to commercial services.
- Reclaimed Gravel Pit – This area is a former gravel pit that is located on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue, directly across the street from the Alpine Market. The lots with frontage on Wisconsin Avenue are zoned “WB-1: Limited Business” while the remainder of this redevelopment area is currently zoned “WRR-1 Low-Density Resort Residential”. The parcel is adjacent to an existing trailer park that is also zoned WRR-1. Both parcels are owned by a single land owner. Redevelopment of these parcels should link to the activity node on the east side of Wisconsin.
- Big Mountain Road Intersection – At the northwest and northeast corner of this intersection are large vacant tracts and existing residential with older deteriorated single-family homes. The Growth Policy identifies these tracts as having redevelopment potential. Current zoning is a combination of one-family residential and low-density multifamily. On the south side of the intersection are large single-family tracts with lake frontage. These are under the same ownership as the parcels on the north side of the intersection. The owner has expressed an interest in a unified development for these parcels.

*Figure 2.12: Former Gravel Pit Site*



## 5. Growth Policy Future Land Use Map

While a growth policy must address issues at a community-wide level, the corridor plan takes a more detailed look at issues and potential problems in the study area. Data is collected, and analysis is conducted at a localized level, allowing policies and actions that result in greater precision and effectiveness. Subsequent chapters will evaluate and refine the following land use categories from the future land use map of the existing Growth Policy as well as new categories adopted in 2015.

**Neighborhood Commercial** - Neighborhood commercial is usually defined as commercial uses that mainly draw clientele from a smaller, sub-community area. Uses include convenience stores, personal services such as a barber shop or salon, and agency offices such as a branch bank, real estate, or insurance. The purpose of neighborhood commercial is usually for the convenience of residents of nearby neighborhoods as well as passersby. They tend to be pedestrian oriented, shorten vehicle trips, and generate far more non-motorized trips than general commercial, which is more often auto oriented.

**High Density Residential:** Multi-family residential, mostly in the form of apartments, condominiums, and townhomes, are accounted for by this designation. Areas designated for High Density Residential development are mostly near the downtown and along major transportation routes. All multi-family structures are now subject to architectural review, and the City will be looking for a higher quality of site planning, architecture, and overall development than high density projects have exhibited in the past. The applicable zones are WR-3 and WR-4, but WR-2 with a PUD option also allows for high densities.

**Urban:** This is a residential designation that defines the traditional neighborhoods near downtown Whitefish, but it has also been applied to a second tier of neighborhoods both east of the river and in the State Park Road area. Residential unit types are mostly one and two-family, but town homes and lower density apartments and condominiums are also acceptable in appropriate locations using the PUD. Densities generally range from 2 to 12 units per acre. Limited neighborhood commercial located along arterial or collector streets are also included in this designation. Zoning includes WLR, WR-1, and WR-2.

**Suburban Residential:** Lower density residential areas at the periphery of the urban service area generally fall under this designation on the Future Land Use Map. The residential product type is predominantly single-family, but cluster homes and low-density town homes that preserve significant open space are also appropriate. Densities range from one unit per 2 ½ acres to 2.5 units per acre, but could be higher through the PUD. Zoning districts include WCR, WER, and WSR. Cluster residential that preserves considerable open space, allows for limited agriculture, and maintains wildlife habitat is encouraged.

**Rural Residential:** The rural residential designation is intended primarily for areas that are already divided into lots of 2 ½ to 10 acres in size. Its intent is to preserve rural character while allowing existing large-lot residential areas to continue without becoming non-conforming as to minimum lot size. Applicable zoning districts include WCR and WA-10. Rural residential is not seen as a desirable future development option, and this Growth Policy does not advocate designating additional areas for rural residential beyond what is already depicted on the Future Land Use Map.

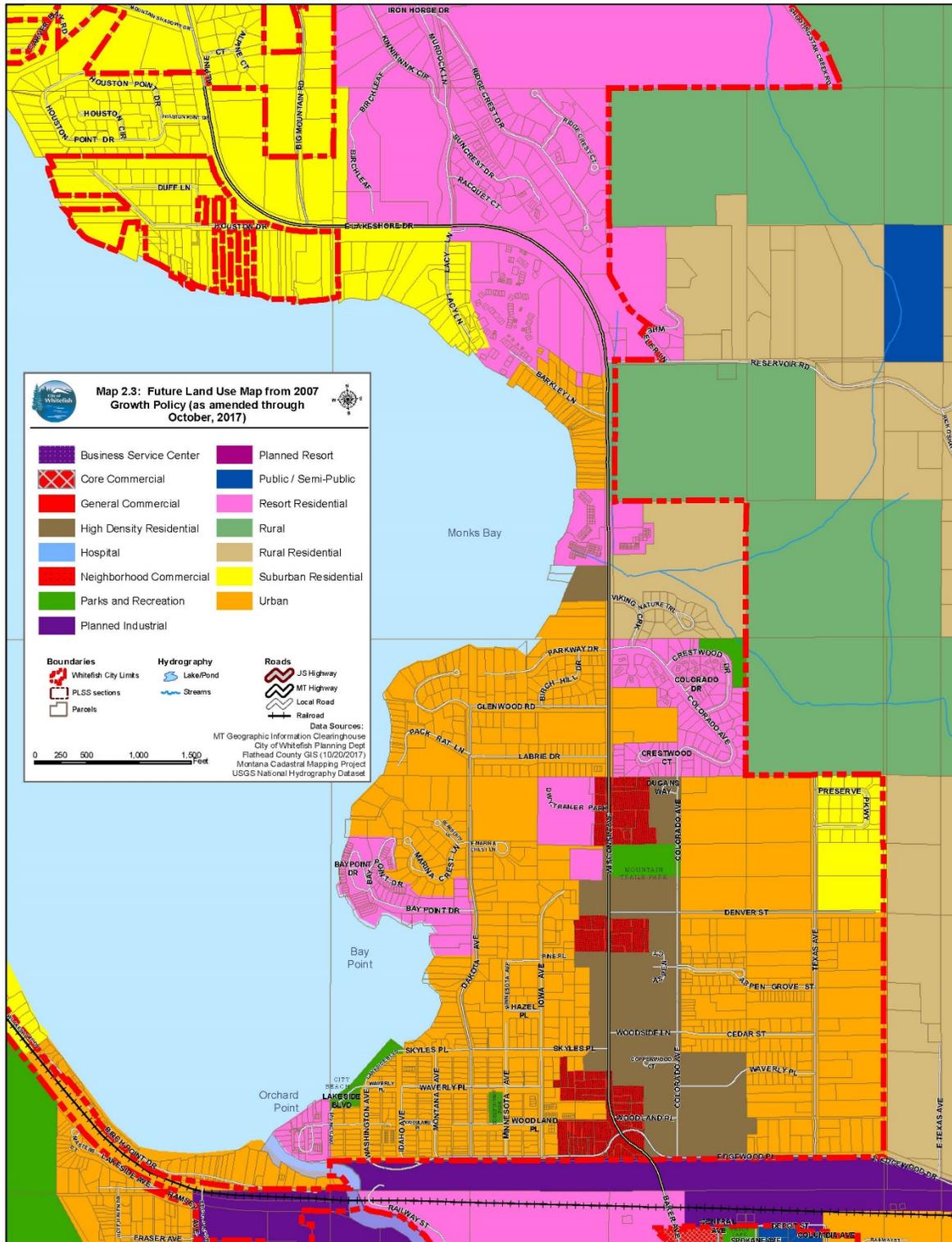
**Resort Residential:** This designation is defined by resort residential development of all types and densities (in accordance with specific zoning). Included are one and two-family residential, rental cabins, vacation cottages, condominiums, and town homes. Commercial hotels and motels are not a part of this designation, but limited resort commercial is allowed. Zoning is generally WRR-1 and WRR-2.

**Resort Commercial:** This designation accommodates commercial and residential uses oriented towards tourism and resort activities. The lodging can include hotels and motels including restaurants, bars, and retail as accessory uses to hotels and motels. Applicable zoning districts are WRB-1 and WRB-2. *(Note: This land use designation did not exist as part of the 2007 Growth Policy but was adopted in 2015 as part of the US 93 West Corridor Plan.)*

**Public/Semi-Public:** Schools and municipal government services fall under this designation. Underlying zoning varies by neighborhood, and a separate P/SP should be considered when the zoning code is revised following adoption of this Growth Policy.

**Parks and Recreation:** Primarily City parks and the golf courses are included in this category, by it also contains some county and state park facilities. Zoning varies, and a special park zone should be considered in future code rewrites.

Map 2.3: 2007 Growth Policy Future Land Use Map with Amendments through 2016 (North Detail)



## C. Transportation

### 1. Average Daily Traffic – Trends

Traffic volumes along the study corridor are collected annually as part of MDT’s traffic data collection program. A total of 5 data collection sites are located along the study corridor. The data collected at each site is used to determine an average annual daily traffic (AADT) volume. AADT represents the average number of vehicles that pass a given point on a typical day of the year. Existing (2015) AADT volume on the study corridor ranged from a low of 5,440 vehicles per day (vpd) East of Big Mountain Road on East Lakeshore Drive, to a high of 14,620 vpd on Baker Avenue, between railroad tracks and Edgewood Place in Whitefish.

Table 2.4: Existing AADT Traffic Volumes

SITE	LOCATION	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
15-4A-018	Baker Avenue, between RR Tracks and Edgewood Place	13,020	15,910	10,110	17,450	14,620
15-4A-19	Wisconsin Avenue, N of Edgewood Place	9,460	12,110	11,440	12,090	10,950
15-4A-20	Lakeshore Drive, N of Reservoir Road	5,910	7,670	3,710	7,910	5,990
15-4A-009	Lakeshore Drive, E of Big Mountain Road	3,060	5,310	2,800	5,690	5,440
15-4A-051	Big Mountain Road, N of Lakeshore Drive	1,740	3,240	1,270	3,010	2,340

Source: Montana Department of Transportation

AADT data for the past 5 years (2011 through 2015) were used to determine an average annual growth rate (AAGR) for all the count sites along the study corridor. Based on the past 5 years of data, traffic is increasing at an AAGR of 3.9% along the corridor. Since traffic volumes can vary greatly over short periods of time, an analysis of multiple years of historic data will more accurately project future conditions.

### 2. Whitefish Transportation Plan - 2009

The corridor is bisected by Wisconsin Avenue (State Highway 487), which is the main access to Whitefish Mountain Resort and the east side of Whitefish Lake. Wisconsin Avenue has the only grade-separated crossing of the BNSF Railroad Tracks on the south end. Several side streets connect to Wisconsin Avenue within the corridor, providing local circulation. While private and public local streets provide access to individual residences and businesses, the northern portion of the corridor lacks connectivity through a grid road network. The Whitefish Transportation Plan (2009) identified the following issues:

**a. Existing & Projected Level of Service (Peak Hours)**

Urban road systems are ultimately controlled by the function of the major intersections. Intersection failure directly reduces the number of vehicles that can be accommodated during the peak hours that have the highest demand and the total daily capacity of a corridor. As a result of this strong impact on corridor function, intersection improvements can be a very cost-effective means of increasing a corridor’s traffic volume capacity. In some circumstances, it may be possible to delay a project that would require the road to be widened with other improvements that could improve traffic flow and increase the level of service. Due to the significant portion of total expense for road construction projects used for project design, construction, mobilization, and adjacent area rehabilitation, a careful analysis must be made of the expected service life from intersection only improvements. If adequate design life can be achieved with only improvements to the intersection, then a corridor expansion may not be the most efficient solution. With that in mind, it is important to determine how well the major intersections are functioning by determining their Level of Service (LOS).

LOS is a qualitative measure developed by the transportation profession to quantify driver perception for such elements as travel time, number of stops, total amount of stopped delay, and impediments caused by other vehicles. It provides a scale that is intended to match the perception by motorists of the operation of the intersection. LOS provides a means for identifying intersections that are experiencing operational difficulties, as well as providing a scale to compare intersections with each other. The LOS analysis for the existing intersections was conducted according to the procedures outlined in the Transportation Research Board’s Highway Capacity Manual – Special Report 209 using the Highway Capacity Software, version 4.1f.

The LOS scale is based on the ability of an intersection or street segment to accommodate the amount of traffic using it. The scale ranges from “A” which indicates little, if any, vehicle delay, to “F” which indicates significant vehicle delay and traffic congestion. Under most circumstances, a LOS of C or better (i.e. A, B or C) is the standard by which traffic operations are judged. It must be recognized that the level of service scale relates to traffic operations, and does not necessarily consider the concept of desirable “community values.” For example, some communities may accept a lower level of service standard from a traffic operational perspective if other amenities are provided (i.e. sidewalks, bicycle lanes, street trees, etc.). In many smaller communities, the particular level of service that is deemed acceptable may be based on factors other than facilitating traffic flow and transportation operations.

Table 2.5: Peak Hour LOS (Stop Controlled Intersections)

Intersection	2007		2030*	
	AM	PM	AM	PM
Wisconsin Ave. & Reservoir	B	C	C	F
Wisconsin Ave. & Colorado	B	C	C	F
Wisconsin Ave. & Denver	B	C	C	D
Wisconsin Ave. & Glenwood	B	B	B	B
Wisconsin Ave. & Skyles	B	C	B	C
Wisconsin & Woodside	C	C	C	D
Wisconsin Ave & Edgewood	A	A	B	B

\* 2030 projected traffic with no improvements to transportation system

(See pgs. 2-18 and 4-3 of Whitefish Transportation Plan, 2009)

**b. Corridor Capacity Problems Indicated by the Travel Demand Model**

The Transportation Plan analyzed current and future conditions to determine if the roads have an adequate number of lanes for the traffic volume. The traffic model computed volume to capacity ratios for major segments of the road network under both existing and future conditions. Roadways at or above capacity may indicate existing or future operational problems. Within, or nearby, the study area, the following segments were listed at or above capacity for future 2030 conditions.

- East Edgewood Drive – Texas Ave. to East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
- Wisconsin Avenue – East Edgewood Drive to Skyles Place
- Wisconsin Avenue – Denver Avenue to Big Mountain Road

**c. Problem Identification**

The Transportation Plan also identified the following issues within the corridor.

- Big Mountain Road provides the only general access for the Whitefish Mountain Resort as well as the many residential subdivisions on Big Mountain. Allowances for secondary emergency access (mainly egress) are in place and should accommodate potential emergency situations.
- The Wisconsin Avenue viaduct is the only grade-separated crossing of the BNSF rail facilities connecting downtown Whitefish to the northern neighborhoods of the city, to Iron Horse and to Big Mountain. This has implications for emergency access and overall traffic flow.
- Street standards should be “neighborhood sensitive”. Flexibility is needed for infill projects and those in environmentally sensitive areas. The City of Whitefish can determine the elements of roadway typical sections for local streets. For collector and arterial roadways roadway geometry must be coordinated with the Montana Department of Transportation.

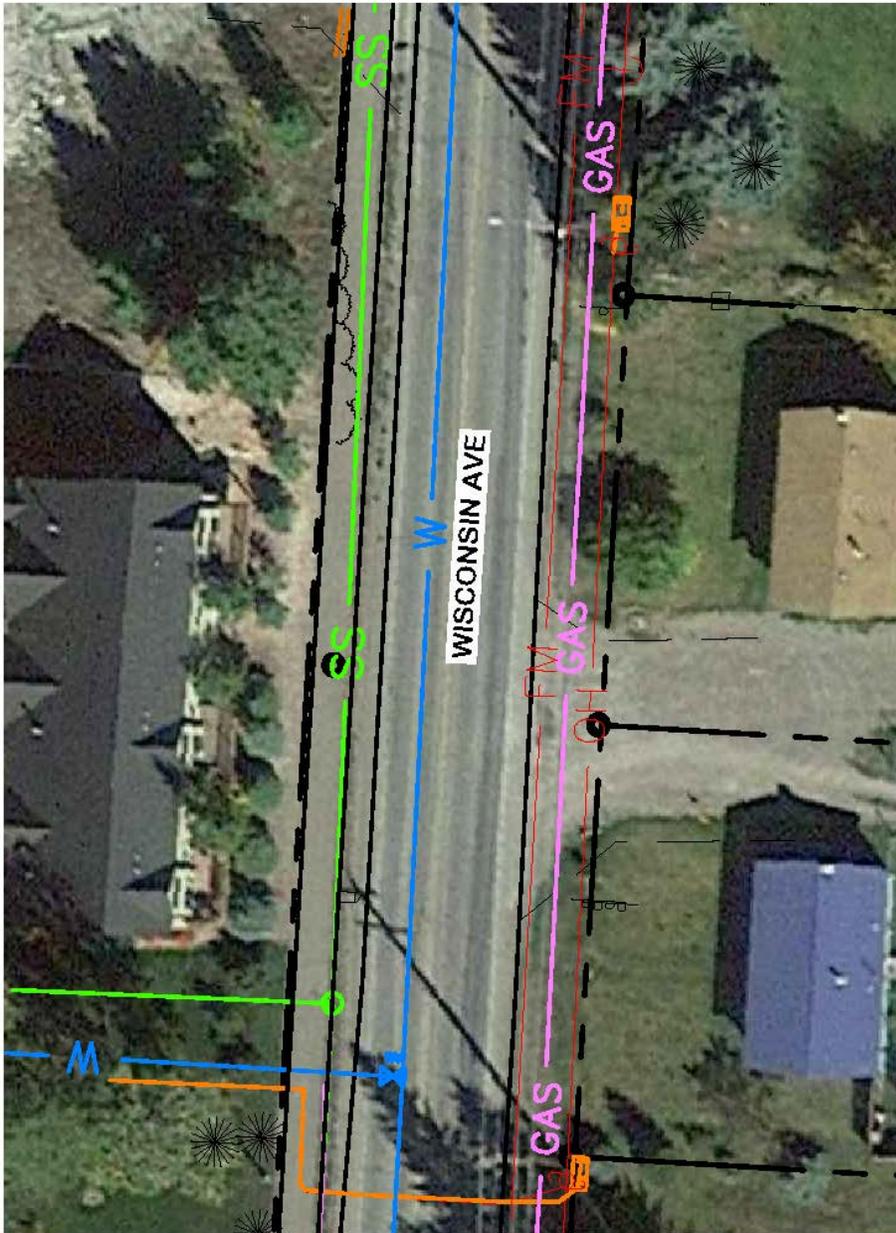
*Figure 2.13: Colorado Avenue and side streets have become an alternate route of travel*



- Speeding is a concern on Wisconsin Avenue. As a major arterial, traffic calming typically is not applied to this type of facility. Potential traffic calming remedies could, however, include landscaping and streetscape features that change the perception of the driving environment. Input at public meetings indicated speeding concerns with spillover traffic on Colorado Avenue and Dakota Avenues and that traffic calming measures should be considered for these streets.

- There is a need to strengthen the east-west connectivity in the grid and to provide more circulation alternatives. Extending East Marina Crest Drive from Dakota to Wisconsin is one example of how this may be accomplished.
- The existing Right-of-Way (ROW) for Wisconsin Avenue is approximately 60' wide. Currently, all utilities, driving surfaces and bicycle/pedestrian facilities are located within the ROW. The typical right-of-way does not have enough room for additional lanes of travel.

Figure 2.14: Typical Roadway Segment Illustrating Layout within 60' Right-of-Way



### 3. Connect Whitefish – Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan – 2016

Within the Wisconsin Corridor, the plan recommends expansion of the trail network, safety improvements and various types of wayfinding signs. Following is a list of proposed projects:

- a. **Connectivity** - Providing connections between existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities and key destinations, such as downtown, parks and schools.

**1. Whitefish Promenade:** A 1.6-mile loop in Downtown Whitefish following Railway Street, Spokane Avenue, and the Whitefish River Trail. Continues over viaduct to connect to Wisconsin Ave. Trail System.

- Viaduct improvements to include shared Use Paths on both sides. Design concepts included in the Downtown Master Plan. (0-5 years) City Council established improvements to the viaduct as a priority for FY 2017.
- Negotiate with BNSF to create a Shared Use Path connection under the north end of the Wisconsin Viaduct. (10-20 years)

Figure 2.15: Whitefish Promenade Concept for Viaduct (Excerpted from Downtown Plan.)



**2. Wisconsin Avenue Trail:** A 4.2-mile shared use path between Downtown and Les Mason State Park following Wisconsin Ave. and E. Lakeshore Dr. The route provides access to the Haskill Basin Trailhead, Big Mountain Road, and connections to neighborhoods north of the railroad.

- Denver St - Wisconsin to Texas Construct Shared Use Path along Denver St connecting Wisconsin, Colorado and Texas Ave. (5-10 years)
- Extend Shared Use Path along E. Lakeshore Drive to Les Mason State Park (10-20 years)

**3. City Beach Loop:** A 3.5-mile recreational loop from Downtown to City Beach via the Wisconsin Viaduct to Colorado Ave., Birch Hill Dr., Glenwood Rd., Dakota Ave. and Skyles Pl., returning via Oregon Ave. and the Whitefish River Trail back to downtown. This route connects residential neighborhoods north of the railroad to City Beach and Downtown, and includes the "Mountain Trails Park Cutoff" to shorten the distance.

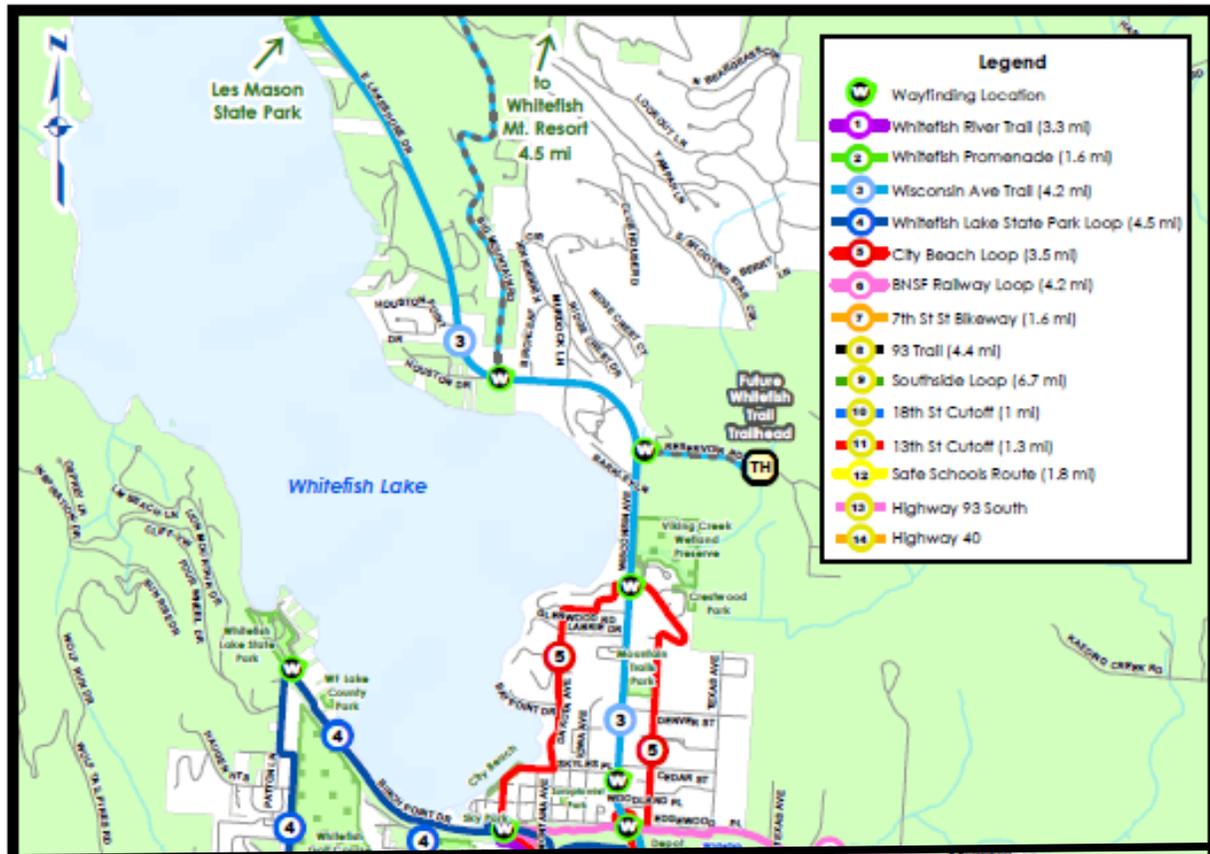
- Mountain Trails Park Cutoff - Construct Shared Use Path along Marina Crest Ln between Dakota and Colorado Ave. (5-10 years)

- b. Safety** - Improving the safety of existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities to help people feel more comfortable while walking, jogging and bicycling.
- Wisconsin and Labrie Drive Path – Crossing: Examine performance and consider redesign to potentially add two-sided safety signage, traffic calming and possibly standard flashing beacon. Safety signage is currently single-sided.
  - Whitefish Lake Lodge – Crosswalk: Redesign to reduce damage from drivers and plows, and include electrical source. Currently solar panel is in the shade of pedestrian bridge and pedestrian-activated LED lights are ineffective.
  - Skyles Pl - Dakota Ave to Wisconsin Ave: Add "Bike Route" signing and "Sharrow" pavement markings.
  - Colorado Ave and E. Edgewood Drive Crosswalk: Improve crosswalk striping and upgrade signage to current MUTCD standards.
  - City Beach Loop Route: Add "Bike Route" and/or "Share the Road" signing and "Sharrow" pavement markings on Dakota Ave, Birch Hill Drive, Parkway Drive, and Colorado Ave as part of the City Beach Loop recreational bike route.
  - Add "Bike Route" and/or "Share the Road" signing and "Sharrow" pavement markings for Reservoir Rd., Big Mountain Rd., and East Lakeshore Drive.



*Sharrow Pavement Marking*

Figure 2.16: Proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian Routes in the Wisconsin Ave. Corridor Study Area



#### 4. Transit

Flathead County operates Eagle Transit which provides service between Whitefish and Kalispell. Within the corridor, Eagle Transit offers a Dial-A-Ride service from the Alpine Village Market.

The Big Mountain Commercial Association is a non-profit association that raises funds to pay for the Snow Bus and the Glacier Park Express. The Snow Bus operates from December to April and provides free transit service from locations in Whitefish to Whitefish Mountain Resort.

The Glacier Park Express operates in the summer months and provides transit service between Whitefish Mountain Resort, Whitefish, and Glacier National Park (Apgar Village). Service is free between Whitefish and Whitefish Mountain Resort. There is a fee of \$10 for round-trip service to Glacier National Park. The summer buses are equipped with bike racks.

Figure 2.17: Snow Bus



The Snow Bus makes the following stops along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor.

- Good Medicine Lodge – Pulls over on side of the road in front of the Lodge for patrons. No Parking.
- Stumptown Ice Den – Pulls over on the side of the road in front of the facility. The Ice Den does not allow parking because all the parking spaces are needed for users of the ice rink. There is a plan to construct a “pull-out” just south of the approach to the parking lot. This would allow the bus to pull off to the side of Wisconsin Avenue and not impede traffic. If this pull-out is constructed, there should be a park-n-ride lot located close by for parking.
- Alpine Market
- Lodge at Whitefish Lake – The bus pulls in the parking lot, but the aisles are narrow and it is difficult for the bus to maneuver in and out of the lot. A pull-out, similar to the design for the property south of Stumptown Ice Den, would be beneficial.
- The bus will stop at Hidden Moose Lodge upon request. The stop is not listed in the schedule.

The ridership numbers peaked in 2014 and have been stable at approximately 20,000 riders for 2015 and 2016. The increase in ridership correlates with an increase in skier numbers. Passengers on the bus include resort employees, visitors, and school children. It is anticipated that ridership will increase along with increased visitation.

Although there are bus stops along the corridor, there is no parking for these stops. Establishing a park-n-ride lot within the Wisconsin Avenue corridor and improving pedestrian safety are priorities for the transit operators. Such bus stops and park-n-ride lots would be available for all types of transit use.

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## D. Infrastructure & Public Services

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### 1. Water

The water system in the area is inter-connected and looped. The City's water treatment plant is located on Reservoir Road, east of the corridor. As future development occurs, both domestic and fire flow requirements need to be monitored. The existing water main in Wisconsin Avenue is aging and may require repair. Replacement of the line should be coordinated with transportation improvements.

### 2. Sewer

The corridor is served with City sewer. Most of the area is serviced by gravity mains that flow southerly, eventually crossing the BNSF tracks near the Whitefish River. Areas north of Labrie Drive flow into the Viking Lift Station, which is located near Crestwood. This lift station was updated in 2008 to have a maximum pumping capacity of 1,000 gpm. This was sized to accommodate growth for a 15-year period from 2008 or until 2023. As future development occurs, flows to both the lift station and the gravity mains need to be monitored.

### 3. Stormwater

The corridor is only partially served by a stormwater drainage system. There is a stormwater drainage system from Edgewood Place north to approximately the Ice Den, on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue. This stormwater drainage system flows south towards Edgewood Place and discharges to the ditch that is south of Edgewood Place. All runoff north of this system flows into either Viking Creek, which discharges to Whitefish Lake near The Lodge, or sheet flows overland into Monks Bay. There will need to be stormwater runoff controls and water quality treatment infrastructure built with any future development.

### c. Power, Gas, and Communications

The corridor is served with power, gas and communications. The utility companies have been contacted and feel there is adequate utilities for future development. Any future development will need to coordinate their individual needs with the appropriate utility companies.

### d. Emergency Services

The Whitefish Fire Department provides fire and EMS service to the City of Whitefish, the surrounding Whitefish Fire Service Area and is the primary emergency responder to the areas to the north and west. Big Mountain Fire Department serves the resort area and has two full-time fire fighters. Insurance Services Organization (ISO) is a for-profit company that conducts risk analysis for insurance companies that subscribe to their service. ISO generates a Public Protection Classification (PPC) for each department based on a number of factors with one being the best rating and a rating of 10 indicating no fire protection. Insurance rates are often based on these rating. Property located more than 5-road miles from a fire station have a PPC rating of 10. A satellite station near the intersection of Big Mountain Road would increase the area that is located within 5-miles of a station and it would improve response times north of the railroad tracks, especially if road access on the south part of Wisconsin is cut-off. A new station may also provide an opportunity to establish a resident program with on-site housing for fire fighters.

## E. Environment

### 1. Watershed

Watersheds perform functions such as filtering pollutants from run-off, replenishing groundwater, providing wildlife habitat and supplying sites for a variety of natural processes essential to a healthy ecosystem. The study area is located within the Whitefish Lake watershed where stormwater run-off from the land within this watershed drains into Whitefish Lake. In the corridor, key features of the watershed include:

- Viking Creek - The Middle and South Fork of Viking Creek originate in the Battin Nature Conservancy Easement before entering Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve. From Wisconsin Avenue, the stream is conveyed to Whitefish Lake via a long (approximately 550 feet) culvert. Viking Creek is significantly influenced by groundwater, run-off and the City of Whitefish Water Treatment Plant which discharges overflow water from the reservoir to the stream. According to a report by the Whitefish Lake Institute, the stream is moderately impaired.<sup>i</sup>
- Whitefish Lake at Monk's Bay – Properties located in the north part of the study area have lakeshore frontage along Monk's Bay in Whitefish Lake. Due to topography, geology, and wind patterns, sediment and nutrients from non-point pollution tend to collect in this portion of the lake. This area of the lake is very sensitive to run-off and land development.
- Averill Wetland Nature Preserve – The Whitefish Lake Institute owns and manages the 28.8-acre Averill's Viking Creek Wetland Preserve. The preserve protects the wetlands that provide a water cleansing function in the watershed. In the summer of 2013, WLI opened the *Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail* which is open to the public and is used for educational programs.
- Battin Nature Conservancy Easement – This easement is for privately owned 215-acres that borders the Whitefish Lake Institute's 28.8-acre wetland on its north and east sides. The easement and the wetland provide a large contiguous area that protects water quality and provides habitat for aquatic, terrestrial and avian wildlife in the heart of Whitefish. There is no public access for this easement.

Figure 2.18: View of Battin Nature Conservancy Easement from Wisconsin Ave.



## 2. Water Quality Issues

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality, lists Whitefish Lake as an impaired waterbody. Specific water quality concerns related to the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor study area include:

- **Phosphorus and Nutrient Loading** – Disproportionate loads of phosphorus and nutrients can lead to excessive algal growth with the potential to suffocate aquatic life. The part of the lake adjacent to the study area has been determined to have the highest potential to react to an increase in phosphorus loading. This is the shoreline area with the highest level of development and is subject to activities that contribute to phosphorous loading such as such as septic leachate, fertilizer runoff, and shoreline erosion.
- **Lakeshore development** - Like wetlands, natural shorelines act as buffers between lake water and the land surrounding it. Shoreline vegetation filters nutrients and pollutants, reduces erosion, and provides wildlife habitat. Nearshore development can remove much of the natural vegetation, reducing the cleansing and buffering capacity of the shoreline and decreasing habitat. The clearing of land to develop residences and neighborhoods also increases the amount of impervious surfaces which in turn increases surface runoff from precipitation to the lake. Fertilizers used to maintain non-native vegetation such as lawns and gardens also increase the load of nutrients reaching the lake.
- **Septic Leachate** - Septic —leachate is the liquid that remains after wastewater drains through septic solids. The liquid contains elevated concentrations of bacteria and organic compounds from waste, detergents, and other household materials. Monk's Bay has medium potential for septic leachate contamination. <sup>ii</sup>
- **Non-Point Pollution - Stormwater Run-off** - Urban development increases the potential for stormwater impacts to water quality. As stormwater flows over roadways, sidewalks, driveways, parking lots, and other impervious surfaces, it can pick up soil, debris, chemicals, and other pollutants or pathogens and convey them to receiving waterbodies. Improvements to the stormwater infrastructure can mitigate these issues.
- **Docks – Marinas** - Marinas can degrade water quality from chemicals, fuel spills and run-off. Motorized watercraft can cause erosion and are more likely to introduce invasive species.
- **Aquatic Invasive Species** - Introduced via watercraft, aquatic invasive species disrupt the natural ecosystem of the water body.

## MONTANA LAKE BOOK BEST PRACTICES

### *BUFFER STRIPS*

- Build buffer strips to filter pollution from run-off coming from developed areas.
- Plant vegetation in the buffer to soak up excess nutrients and absorb pesticides, herbicides and other pollutants before they reach a lake or stream.
- Design vegetated buffer strips to help contain sediment that is carried by run-off.

### *LANDSCAPE WITH CARE*

- Maintaining large areas of native trees and vegetation. Native plants require less maintenance than other plants and are more likely to survive and provide better wildlife habitat.
- Keep lawns, gardens and other cleared areas small.
- Don't rake leaves or other forest floor debris;
- Never use fertilizers in buffer strips and minimize their use in adjacent areas
- Choose natural alternatives to herbicides or pesticides for lawns and gardens.

### *PROTECT THE NATURAL SHORELINE*

- Leave existing rocks and aquatic plants to break the waves from boats and wind. These prevent erosion and stabilize the shoreline.
- Use temporary docks that are put in and removed seasonally.

<http://www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php>

### 3. Wildlife

Both the Battin Nature Conservancy area and the Averill Wetland Nature Preserve are part of a much larger natural landscape that connects to the USFS Flathead Forest, State of Montana Stillwater Forest, and conservation easements in Haskill Basin located on FH Stoltz Company forest land. This landscape is rich in biodiversity providing habitat for grizzly bear, black bear, moose, elk, deer and a wide variety of smaller mammals, birds, fish and amphibians. Developments that incorporate ecological principles and build with wildlife in mind are becoming more attractive to home buyers. Consideration of wildlife use and movement through a property should occur in the earliest planning stage, ideally before the proposal is even submitted to the local governing body for review. The Montana Subdivision and Platting Act requires that impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat be taken into account in the local subdivision decision making process. Principles for wildlife friendly development include:

- Maintain natural habitat patterns.
- Allow natural processes to continue.
- Enable wildlife movement between natural areas.
- Maintain key plants and animals.
- Minimize the extent of disturbance.
- Design to avoid human-wildlife conflicts
- Mitigate traffic impacts on wildlife
- Wildlife friendly fencing

Figure 2.10 Deer Near Wisconsin Ave.



### 4. Wildland-Urban Interface

The entire study area is located within the Wildland -Urban Interface (WUI). The WUI is the zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. Wildfire disasters can be mitigated through comprehensive land use planning that includes housing development design, fuels management, and public education.

Providing emergency services to the area north of the BNSF railroad tracks is a concern. According to the Whitefish Growth Policy, “The only grade-separated crossing is over the Wisconsin Ave. viaduct, with an at grade crossing that connects E. 2nd St. to Edgewood Avenue. . . . This access constraint has always been a challenge for emergency services (as well as utilities) in Whitefish, but the issue is being made more critical with increased growth along the north and east sides of Whitefish Lake, multi-family growth in the Colorado-Texas corridor, continuing buildout of Ironhorse, and additional development at Big Mountain Village and along the Big Mountain Road.”

While the transportation plan recommends an additional at-grade crossing to address access concerns, this is a long-term and costly solution that may or may not proceed. An additional fire station on the north end of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor has been proposed to address these concerns.

<sup>i</sup> “Whitefish Lake Water Resources Report” prepared by the Whitefish Lake Institute

<sup>ii</sup> . “Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Shoreline Area of Whitefish Lake, Montana” prepared by the Whitefish Lake Institute

# III. PLANNING FRAMEWORK



## A. INTRODUCTION

The corridor plan is a type of “neighborhood plan” and is authorized in the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) – Section -76-601 (4). Although the neighborhood plan must be consistent with the overall growth policy, the MCA does not specify the contents of a neighborhood plan. The Whitefish Growth Policy – 2007, however, does include guidance on preparing neighborhood plans, and more specifically, corridor plans.

### Neighborhood Plans:

- “That the proposed neighborhood plan is a refinement of the Growth Policy in terms of the type and distribution of development, infrastructure, open spaces, and environmental considerations.”
- “That the proposed neighborhood plan provides **extraordinary** community benefits toward the stated goals of this Growth Policy such as affordable housing, preservation of community - neighborhood character, preservation and/or enhancement of natural resources, provision of open space, or essential and/or desirable community infrastructure.”

### Corridor Plans:

“Upon adoption, these corridor plans will effectively amend this Growth Policy with goals, policies, and recommended actions specific to each corridor. Following that, any special regulations regarding land use, access, buffering, screening, and/or landscaping may be considered.”

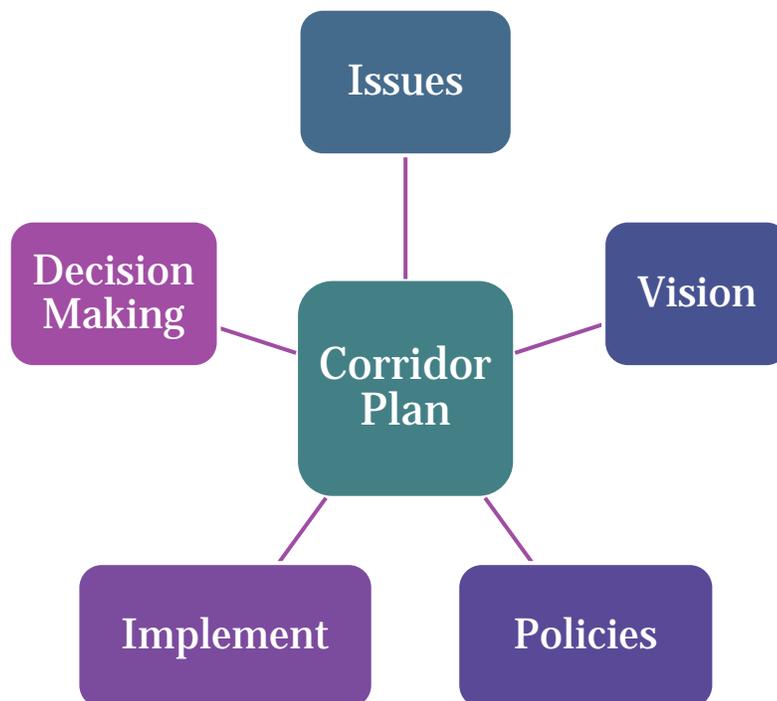
This chapter establishes the planning framework for the Wisconsin Ave. corridor study area and is comprised of the following components:

- **Issue Identification:** Public input and an existing conditions analysis were the basis for identifying issues within the corridor that are addressed within this plan.
- **Vision for the future:** The steering committee relied on an inclusionary public input process to develop and communicate a consensus vision for the future of the corridor as expressed through goals and objectives.
- **Public policy:** Just as a growth policy sets forth a broad body of public policy for an entire city, town, or county, the corridor plans sets policy in greater detail within a more concentrated area. Together, the vision and policy framework guide both public and private investment in

development, infrastructure, and amenities. Policies refine goals and objectives in other relevant planning documents and reflect public input as well as steering committee feedback.

- **Implement through Regulatory and programmatic framework:** Once the vision and policies are articulated the plan should become the basis, or “nexus”, for any regulatory changes needed to address the issues and achieve the vision. For some issues, the need may be for additional and/or more flexible regulations. For other issues, the better solution might be design review, housing, or infrastructure upgrade programs.
- **Decision making:** One of the most important uses for the corridor plan is in public and private decision making. Land use and growth and development decisions are made all the time in boardrooms as well as council chambers. The vision, body of policy, and identified issues and approaches all come together to provide definitive guidance to private investment decisions and fair, predictable, and consistent development review decisions by the governing body.

Figure 3.1: Components of the Planning Framework



## B. Environment/Water Quality

### 1. Vision

This study area is unique for an urban area in that it links private conservation areas within the corridor to federal, state and private forest lands. This connected landscape includes wildlife corridors, ecologically important wetlands, and protection for the city's drinking water. Additionally, Whitefish Lake is an outstanding natural asset located adjacent to the corridor.

Both Whitefish Lake and the conservation areas contribute to the recreation amenities, scenic views and small town character not just for this corridor but for the entire city of Whitefish. Private parcels throughout the corridor contain wooded lands that are also part of this landscape. Preserving these natural assets and the character of the corridor should be a priority for future development.

Figure 3.2 View of Whitefish Lake



"The City of Whitefish recognizes the benefits of protecting forest land, watersheds, riparian corridors and conserving open space that provides clean water quality and supply for the City municipal water system and clean water and habitat for native fish, wildlife and plant communities..."

*Haskill Basin Conservation Easement - 2016*

### 2. Issues and Opportunities

The following issues were identified from the existing conditions analysis and public input.

- The land within the study area drains into Whitefish Lake and development along this corridor can significantly impact water quality in the lake through non-point pollution from stormwater run-off and the introduction of invasive species.
- Threats to water quality include near shore development that removes native vegetation, septic leachate and nutrient loading.
- The corridor has conservation areas that are part of a connected landscape. Development can cause fragmentation of wildlife corridors and disrupt natural drainage processes.
- A wooded/forested landscape provides a visual backdrop for the corridor and vegetation provides significant environmental benefits. Removal of this vegetation can alter the character of the corridor and increase stormwater run-off. Whitefish does not have a tree preservation ordinance to address these concerns.
- More intense development, if not designed properly, has the potential to diminish the scenic value of the corridor.
- The study area is located within the wildland-urban interface.
- Both the City of Whitefish and Flathead County have lakeshore protection ordinances that regulate development with 20' feet of the mean high water level.
- The City of Whitefish has adopted water quality standards regarding stormwater run-off and erosion, however, properties within the corridor that are located outside of city limits are not subject to these standards.
- Marinas and docks if not operated properly can diminish water quality.
- The zoning regulations allow a practice referred to as "pyramiding". This allows all property owners within a homeowners association to have access to the lake and results in increased marina use from such a developments.

### 3. Goals & Policies

**Goal 1.1:** Protect water quality, stream stability, and natural processes that preserve aquatic habitat and wildlife habitat.

**Goal 1.2:** Preserve the natural landscape, scenic views and forested character of the corridor.

<b>Policies</b>
1.1 Maintain the natural hydrological and ecological functions of wetlands and riparian areas by minimizing human disturbances in sensitive areas and avoiding practices that degrade water quality.
1.2 Adopt best management practices, treat storm-water, reduce impervious area and incorporate green infrastructure into development plans to reduce run-off and to protect water quality
1.3 Minimize impacts of developments on views through site design that provides for open space, preserves scenic vistas and maintains wooded areas as buffers along property borders.
1.4 Encourage development plans that incorporate native vegetation, reflect the natural landscapes of the corridor and include management practices to protect against invasive species.
1.5 Support improvements and site designs that protect habitat, provide for connected wildlife corridors and that minimize conflicts with wildlife.
1.6 Encourage fire-wise designs especially in wooded areas and on steep terrain.
1.7 Work with private land owners to restore natural stream flows and improve drainage systems.
1.8 Require properties to connect to city water and sewer and encourage annexation in order to enforce city water quality and storm water regulations.
1.9 Promote clean marina standards and discourage new public marinas or developments that would increase motorized watercraft usage.
1.10 Maintain and enforce city water quality protections as well as policies regarding aquatic invasive species.

### 4. Resources and Best Practices

- City of Whitefish, Engineering Standards for Stormwater Control, [www.cityofwhitefish.org/public-works/city-development-plans.php](http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/public-works/city-development-plans.php)
- City of Whitefish, Title 13: Lake and Lakeshore Protection regulations & City Code 11-2-27 [www.cityofwhitefish.org/public-works/city-development-plans.php](http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/public-works/city-development-plans.php)
- City of Whitefish, Water Quality Regulations, 11-3-19 – Water Quality Protection, 11-3-33 – Erosion and Sediment Control, [www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php](http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php)
- Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources, Conserving Wooded Areas in Developing Communities, <http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/urban/bmps.pdf>
- Montana DEQ, Montana Non-Point Source Management Plan <http://deq.mt.gov/Water/WPB/Nonpoint-Source-Program/Guidance-Documents-and-Resources>
- Whitefish Lake Institute, “Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area”, [www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php](http://www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php)
- Whitefish Lake Institute, Montana Lake Book, [www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php](http://www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php)

Figure 3.3: Aerial of Monks Bay illustrates effects of sedimentation and non-source pollution



Figure 3.4: This bear resistant trash storage is an example of how developments should design for wildlife.



Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Guidelines at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/buildingWithWildlife/subdivisionRecommendations>

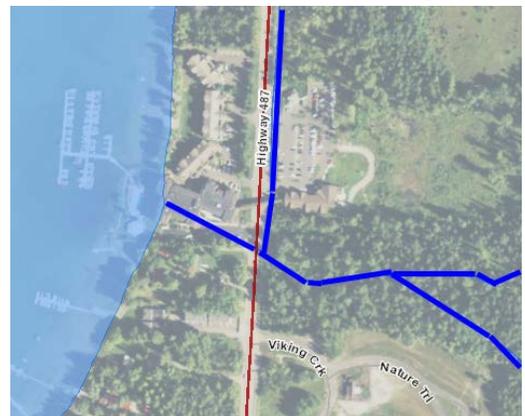
Figure: 3.5 Example Site Plan that Preserves Existing Stands of Trees



Studies show value of development increases when trees are maintained.

The "Whitefish Area Water Resources" report recommends abandoning the culvert west of Wisconsin Ave. and moving Viking Creek to a newly created stream channel on this property south of The Lodge at Whitefish Lake. This would benefit the aquatic community including a potential spawning and recruiting stream reach for westslope cutthroat trout. Cooperation from the private land owner, City and MDT would be required.

Figure 3.6: Current alignment of Viking Creek

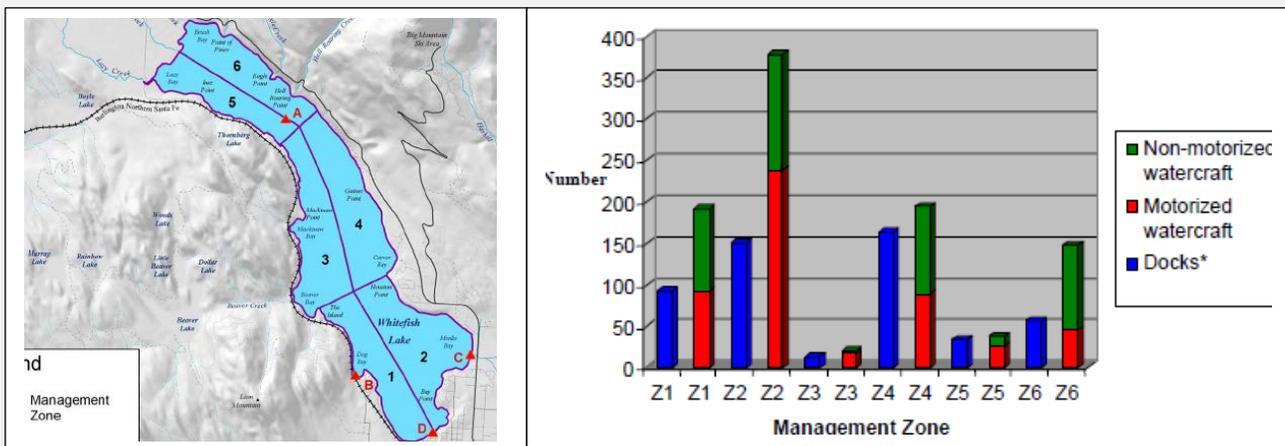


## Marina and Water Quality Issues

Marinas can have significant environmental impacts. Poorly designed and operated marinas can degrade air quality from fumes and emissions, water pollution from chemicals or fuel spills and non-point pollution from stormwater run-off. Additionally, motorized watercraft can also cause erosion in riparian areas and are more likely to introduce invasive species.

In 2007, the Whitefish Lake Institute conducted a study to look at the relationship between gasoline constituent loading and motorized watercraft densities on Whitefish Lake. The study found that lakeshore properties located in the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, are in the Zone 2- which has the highest concentration of docks and motorized watercraft. Consequently, “public health could be comprised” and “aquatic life located in shoreline areas associated with heavy boat traffic and boat storage/staging areas are at increased risk of deleterious acute and/or chronic effects.”

Figure 3.7: Whitefish lake Management Zones and Dock/Boat Density (2005-2006)



Source: Whitefish Lake Institute, *Gasoline Constituent Loading of Motorized Watercraft Levels, Whitefish Lake*

Both the City and County have adopted Lakeshore Protection Regulations that provide construction standards for marinas. Additionally, commercial marinas are a conditional use under the City of Whitefish zoning regulations which provides an opportunity for additional review. A model for design and operation of marinas is the “Clean Marina” guidelines that have been adopted by the marina industry and the National Park Services. According to the National Park Service, “Clean Marinas incorporate environmental practices and standards that go beyond regulatory and contractual requirements to promote clean water and fresh air. The number one priority of a Clean Marina is to keep coastal and inland waterways clean, attractive, and healthy.” Guidelines address:

- Marina & Facilities – Management & Operations
- Marina Design & Maintenance
- Stormwater Management
- Petroleum Control
- Sewage Handling
- Emergency Planning
- Waste Management (Including Hazardous Waste)

### Resources

<http://www.cleanmarina.org/>

[https://concessions.nps.gov/docs/concessioner%20tools/National\\_Clean\\_Marina\\_Initiative\\_2012.pdf](https://concessions.nps.gov/docs/concessioner%20tools/National_Clean_Marina_Initiative_2012.pdf)

## C. Residential - Neighborhoods

### 1. Vision

Residential areas within the study include a mix of established single-family neighborhoods, multi-family housing, older single-family homes that are likely to redevelop to more intense uses and resort residential areas with short-term rentals. Public input indicates a desire to preserve the established neighborhoods while recognizing that in-fill development may represent major development opportunities that could address some of the need for workforce housing.

New residential development should be compatible with existing community character in terms of scale and urban design and should mitigate potential impacts through buffers, landscaping, transportation improvements and site planning. Residential areas that are linked to nearby commercial areas through pedestrian features and urban design are preferred. A mix of product types will meet the variety of housing needs in the community.

Figure 3.8: Stable Residential Area in the Corridor



“Protect and preserve the special character, scale, and qualities of existing neighborhoods while supporting and encouraging attractive, well-designed, neighborhood compatible infill development.” (Whitefish Growth Policy)

### 2. Issues and Opportunities

The following issues were identified from the existing conditions analysis and public input.

- In the south half of the study area, there are numerous parcels with frontage on Wisconsin Avenue that are currently developed with older, small single-family homes. It is likely these properties will redevelop to optimize the land-uses allowed under the existing WR-3, Low Density Residential zoning. This conversion from single-family to multi-family development has the potential to significantly alter the character of the corridor.
- There are several stable, single-family neighborhoods along Colorado Avenue that are zoned WR-3 and WR-4. The current future land use map, designates these areas for “High Density Residential”. It may be more appropriate to designate these areas as lower-density multi-family urban development to reinforce the importance of protecting these neighborhoods.
- The Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment indicates a shortage of workforce housing, especially in the rental market. Although the number of housing units in the corridor grew significantly in the last 15-years, the majority of these new units are owner-occupied or seasonal rentals. A mix of residential product types is desirable to meet various market demands.
- Residents in the corridor have expressed a concern that new development should be compatible with the community character of existing residential areas.
- Unified planned residential developments offer more flexibility in site design to mitigate potential impacts as well as the opportunity to provide amenities to the neighborhood and community.
- Residential areas that are linked to activity nodes and local businesses and have a diversity of housing types are more walkable and vibrant.

### 3. Goals & Policies

**Goal 2.1:** Provide for the diverse housing needs within the corridor while protecting community character and neighborhoods through compatible residential developments.

**Goal 2.2:** New residential developments should incorporate design elements to promote walkability, sustainability and vibrant neighborhoods.

Policies
2.1 Support pedestrian-scale residential design that encourages walkability, accessibility, and linkages to neighborhood scale activity nodes.
2.2 Support cohesive, distinctive, and diverse residential developments that are compatible with existing neighborhoods and promote safe and quiet neighborhoods. ..
2.3 Integrate higher to mid-density housing with access to transit/biking/walking routes and access to commercial services.
2.4 Encourage mix of product types within the same development that can be marketed to a variety of income levels for both seasonal and year-round residents.
2.5 Encourage unified developments that mitigate potential impacts on adjacent neighborhoods, reflect neighborhood scale and character and contribute to a vibrant corridor.
2.6 Promote the development of affordable work-force housing.
2.7 Encourage green space, pocket parks and community gardens in the residential areas.
2.8 Mitigate potential noise and other adverse impacts from more intensive land uses that adjoin residential areas.

### 4. Resources and Best Practices

- Whitefish Zoning Ordinance - <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php>
- Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment  
<http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/cms-assets/documents/261488-793383.whitefish-area-whna-final.draft.2016-1>
- Architectural Review Standards - <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/boards-and-committees/architectural-review-committee.php>

### Whitefish Architectural Standards

The Residential Architectural Standards apply to two dwelling unit or more- structures in the Whitefish Planning jurisdiction. *(Note: The following photos were selected to illustrate a few select design concepts. Please see the Architectural Standards for the complete text.*

*Goal: Multi-family development in Whitefish will be designed to suit the neighborhood where it is located, relate to the street and surroundings and meet the needs of the residents.*

Figure 3.9 Example of Compatible Multi-family



Figure 3.10 Exterior finish building materials should be of a nature in color and texture that is complimentary with the structures within each building district.



Figure: 3.11 Landscaped areas must be planned as an integral part of the project, rather than simply located in the left-over spaces on the site.



Figure 3.12 Provide visual variety in exterior

## D. Transportation and Infrastructure

### 1. Vision

Wisconsin Avenue, a state highway, is the only separated grade crossing over the railroad tracks. As the single connection from downtown to Whitefish Mountain Resort, this arterial roadway is crucial to the city's overall transportation system. It must accommodate increasing traffic volumes and provide for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit.

Transportation improvements in the study area should be integrated with land use planning to provide a safe, efficient, and effective circulation system. Improvements should provide for all transportation modes and should be inviting and walkable. It is important to coordinate with state agencies to maintain neighborhood character. As the corridor develops designing sustainable infrastructure becomes more critical.

Figure 3.13 Bike Path along Wisconsin Ave.



*The plan must provide for all modes of transportation.*

### 2. Issues and Opportunities

The following issues were identified from the existing conditions analysis and public input.

- Traffic in the corridor is increasing at an annual growth rate of 3.9% and will continue to increase along with new development in the study area and increased visitation at Whitefish Mountain Resort.
- According to the Whitefish Transportation Plan, traffic projections indicate that, without any improvements to the system, by the year 2030 several intersections and road segments along Wisconsin Avenue will experience unacceptable levels of congestion and delay.
- The current right-of-way along Wisconsin is typically 60'. Consequently, there is limited room for road improvements and additional right-of-way is required for widening projects. Select projects to improve intersection safety and provide turn-lanes are options for alleviating some congestion.
- As congestion on Wisconsin Avenue increases, traffic will spillover to alternative routes in adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Wisconsin Ave./Big Mountain Road are a state secondary highway under MDT authority. MDT is the lead agency for design and funding of roadway improvements. Coordination with the City of Whitefish will be part of the planning process.
- Wisconsin Avenue is the only grade separated crossing over the railroad tracks and is the only general access for Whitefish Mountain Resort. This has implications for emergency access and traffic flow.
- The "Whitefish Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan-2016", recommends enhancements and expansion of the trail system to improve connectivity, enhance safety and augment wayfinding.
- Future roadway designs should accommodate pedestrians and people with limited mobility with a more functional buffer strip between the trail and street.
- The non-profit Big Mountain Commercial Association provides transit services during the winter and summer seasons. Ridership has been increasing. Safe transit stops and park-n-ride lots are needed.
- It will be necessary to continually monitor water and sewer infrastructure capacity to ensure that such facilities are adequate to handle growth from new developments.
- There is a need for a satellite public safety/fire station facility near the Big Mountain Road intersection.
- Improve circulation by strengthening east-west connectivity on the grid.

### 3. Goals & Policies

**Goal 3.1:** The corridor should have a connected, efficient, safe, accessible and attractive transportation system to accommodate all modes of travel.

**Goal 3.2:** Infrastructure in the corridor will have adequate capacity to accommodate future growth.

Policies
3.1 Identify improvements to increase roadway capacity, reduce congestion, meet ADA requirements and improve intersection safety.
3.2 Adopt standards to require adequate building setbacks to allow for future widening projects along Wisconsin Avenue.
3.3 Strengthen the east-west connections on the grid such as extending Denver east of Texas in order to provide an alternate travel route to Wisconsin and extending East Marina Crest Drive.
3.4 Promote non-motorized transportation through designs that incorporate walkability, connectivity, accessibility and wayfinding features to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians.
3.5 Work with county, state and local businesses to expand transit and mobility options in the corridor and identify potential sites for park-n-ride lots and encourage drop-off sites in new developments.
3.6 Design transit stops, drop-off sites and pedestrian/bike crossings to improve safety, accessibility and user experience.
3.7 Provide adequate facilities and access for emergency services in the corridor.
3.8 Consider designs such as traffic calming to reduce speeds on local residential streets and to reduce vehicle -wildlife collisions.
3.9 Monitor water and sewer capacity as new development occurs and recommend improvements and/or conservation measures to accommodate future growth.
3.10 Coordinate with state, county and developers to design and fund transportation improvements in the corridor.

### 4. Resources and Best Practices

- City of Whitefish, “Whitefish Transportation Master Plan” & City of Whitefish, “Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan” [www.cityofwhitefish.org/planning-and-building/long-range-plans.php](http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/planning-and-building/long-range-plans.php)
- Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, “Complete Streets Toolkit”, [www.dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/documents/NutritionAndPhysicalActivity/MontanaCompleteStreetsToolkitSmall.pdf](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/documents/NutritionAndPhysicalActivity/MontanaCompleteStreetsToolkitSmall.pdf)
- Montana Department of Transportation, Traffic Manuals & Handbooks [www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/manuals/process-handbook.pdf](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/manuals/process-handbook.pdf)  
<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/manuals.shtml>
- City Whitefish, “Engineering Standards”, <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/large-files/pdf/PublicWorks/Engineering%20Standards.pdf>

Wisconsin Avenue is a state highway. All proposed developments will be required to participate in the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) Systems Impact Action Process (SIAP). MDT's review and assessment of impacts resulting from projects initiated by private developers or others that substantially affect the state's transportation system.

Figure 3.14: MDT System Impact Planning Process

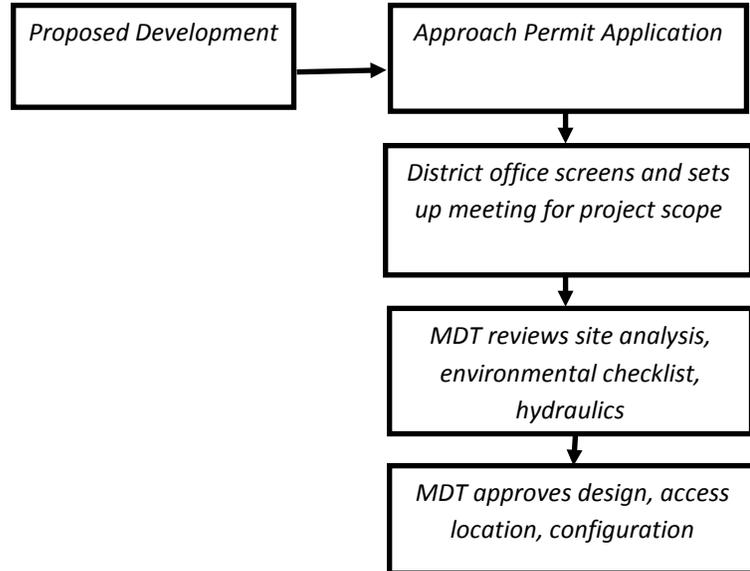


Figure 3.15: Example of Traffic Calming Sign



“Traffic calming refers to a number of methods to reduce vehicle speeds, improve safety and enhance the quality of life. In its simplest definition, it is changing the physical environment to reduce the negative effects of vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicle street users.”

Bike share stations are becoming more popular as a way to promote travel options that take vehicles off the road and reduce parking needs.

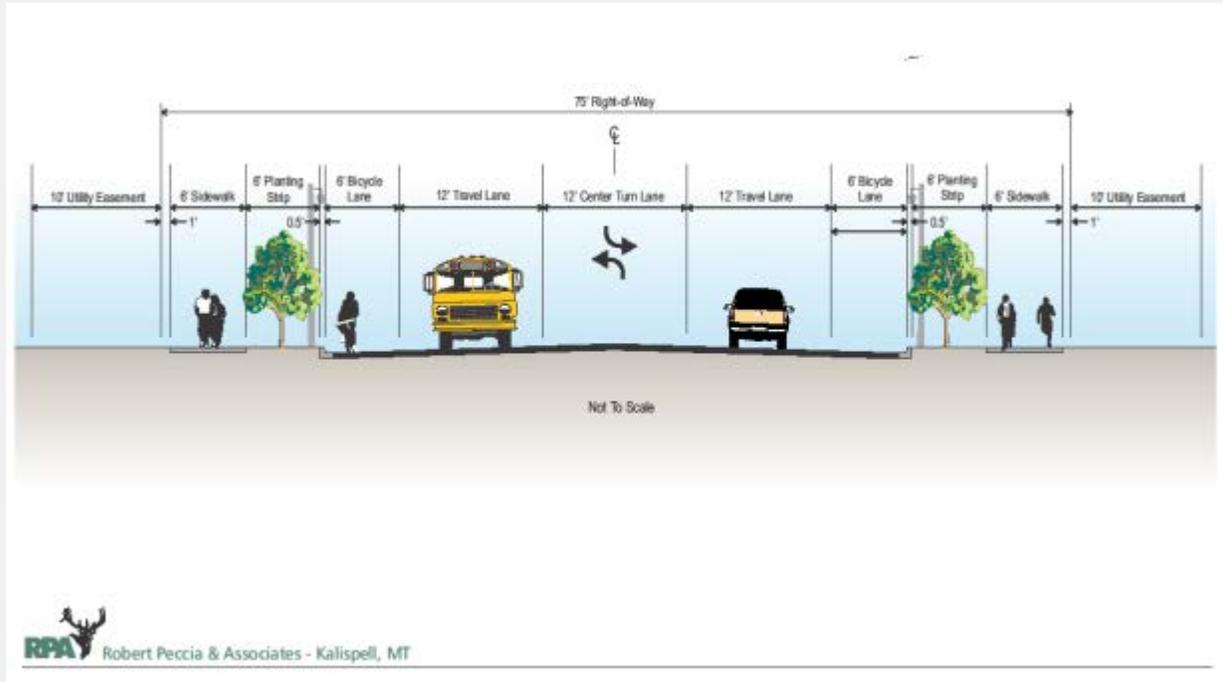
Figure 3.16: Example of Bike Share Station



## PLAN FOR FUTURE ROADWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Per the Transportation Plan, Wisconsin Avenue should ultimately be a 3-lane urban section. The conceptual design for this roadway section would require at least 75' of ROW, if the utilities are relocated outside of the ROW in Utility Easements. If utilities are to be within the ROW, then the ROW would need to be larger up to 95'.

Figure 3.17: Wisconsin Avenue Conceptual Design



In order to prevent buildings from being constructed too close to the future ROW, the properties along Wisconsin Avenue should have a front setback of sufficient distance to provide for the additional ROW and the desired setback from the future ROW. It would be recommended to provide for a minimum 35' setback along the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor to building edges. This would provide for a 20' future ROW on each side and a 15' setback from the future ROW line.

While the transportation plan recommends a three-lane cross section, it is not likely that this can be built along the entire length of the corridor within the 20-year planning horizon of this corridor plan. Due to limited R.O.W. and funding limitations, it is more likely that turn-lanes, along with intersection improvements, are more likely to proceed in the near future. The highest priority for these types of improvements is in the more urbanized area from Edgewood to Reservoir Rd. and would be based on additional traffic studies for this road segment.

## E. Urban Design

### 1. Vision

Although Wisconsin Avenue is a state highway, it is a two-lane road lined with primarily low-rise buildings that gives the corridor a small-town feel and a pedestrian friendly environment. The south half of Wisconsin Avenue contains a vibrant mix of low- to mid-density residential uses interspersed with offices and local businesses. About mid-way along the corridor, the character transitions to forested, large lot residential parcels with significant tracts of open space and conservation areas. Mountain views serve as a scenic backdrop along the entire length of the study area.

Public input indicated a desire to maintain the existing character of the corridor and to promote developments and public investments that create an inviting atmosphere for residents as well as visitors.

### 2. Issues and Opportunities

The following issues were identified from the existing conditions analysis and public input.

- Site planning elements that contribute to neighborhood character include scale, building mass, site layout, setbacks, signs, landscaping, parking, building materials, open space/buffers and other architectural features. Zoning and architectural design standards are existing tools that address these components of urban design.
- Portions of the corridor are located within the Resort Community Business District for architectural review. The boundaries would need to be revised if business zoning is expanded in the corridor.
- Streetscapes that promote walkability and have a theme that unify various design elements can create a distinctive sense of place. Streetscape elements include gateways treatments, sidewalk/paths, boulevard, street trees, street lights, street furniture, landscaping, public art, signage, public open space/parks, and utilities. Streetscape plans would need to be coordinated with Montana Department of Transportation.
- Forested areas contribute to the character of the corridor. Although the architectural standards for the resort community business district encourages preservation of mature trees, there is no tree preservation ordinance that would prevent removal of trees on lots not subject to design review.
- Scenic views along the corridor are an asset that contribute to the overall community character and quality of life.
- Currently there are no formula retail businesses along the corridor. Currently, zoning regulations permit such uses but they are subject to architectural review.
- The Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan includes recommendations for gateway and median landscaping for Wisconsin Ave. and Edgewood Place.
- The Stumptown Ski Museum at Mountain Trails Park is an example of a structure that reflects the heritage of Whitefish and contributes to the character of the corridor.
- There are a few vacant properties that are in disrepair and deter investments in the surrounding area.

Figure 3.18: Business on Wisconsin Ave.



This local restaurant is a good example of how the scale and bulk of the structure combined with setbacks, building materials and landscaping blends well with the neighborhood character of the corridor.

### 3. Goals & Policies

**Goal 4.1:** Preserve the existing character along the corridor through site design and plans that reflect the neighborhood scale and preserve the features that contribute to the quality of experience in the study area.

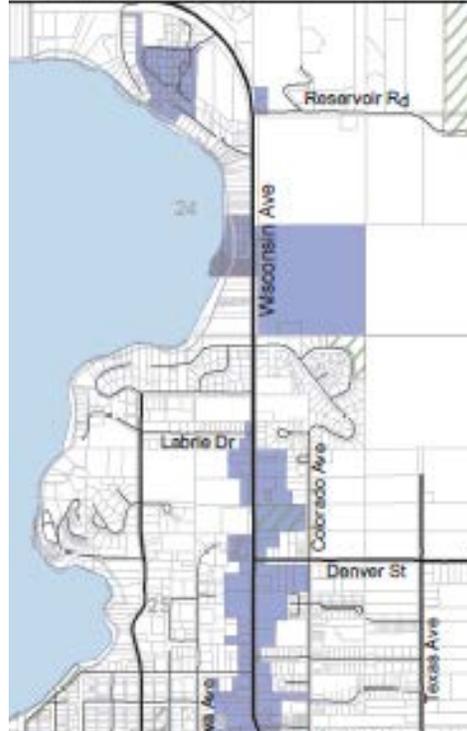
**Goal 4.2:** Invest in public improvements that will enhance aesthetics and create a sense of place.

Policies
4.1 Maintain or enhance views of Whitefish Lake, Big Mountain and forested areas and do not allow additional pedestrian sky bridges that would impede such views.
4.2 New development should reflect neighborhood character through scale, building design, open space, landscaping and other design features identified in the architectural standards.
4.3 Develop gateway treatments that include landscaping, signage and/or public art.
4.4 Review setbacks and height restrictions along corridor to maintain an open feel and prevent a canyon effect along Wisconsin Avenue.
4.5 Incorporate mature stands of trees into site designs to provide buffers and maintain the wooded/forested character along the corridor.
4.6 Encourage adaptive reuse of structures that reflect the heritage of Whitefish.
4.7 Design elements should include small scale, quaint, stone or timber accents that are uncluttered and well maintained.
4.8 Develop a streetscape plan to provide a unified theme for public improvements and reflect context sensitive design principles.
4.9 Revise regulations and design standards to include all business areas in the corridor and to maintain standard that allows formula retail if plans minimize generic designs
4.10 Work with utilities and MDT to investigate the feasibility of underground utilities where possible.

### 4. Resources and Best Practices

- Whitefish Zoning Ordinance - <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php>
- Architectural Review Standards - <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/boards-and-committees/architectural-review-committee.php>
- Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan - <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/planning-and-building/long-range-plans.php>
- Montana Department of Transportation, "Context Sensitive Solutions Guide", 2015, [www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/cadd/report\\_templates\\_guidance/css\\_guide.pdf](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/cadd/report_templates_guidance/css_guide.pdf)

Figure 3.19: Architectural Design District – Resort Community Business District



“Goal: The Resort Community Business Districts will develop as areas with smaller scale buildings in order to be good neighbors to residential areas located immediately adjacent to these corridors. Parking areas will be sited in order to not conflict with surrounding residential neighborhoods.”  
(Whitefish Architectural Standards)

Figure 3.21: Business on Wisconsin Avenue



Protect the neighborhoods’ existing character by using existing shapes, forms, and structural elements. Use the existing character of the neighborhood as a context for all new development. Do not use new construction to redefine the feeling and presence of the neighborhood.

Figure 3.20: Public art, street furniture and streetscape all contribute to context sensitive designs.



Context Sensitive design, “... is an approach that leads to preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, community, and environmental resources, while improving or maintaining safety, mobility, and infrastructure conditions.”

[www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/cadd/report\\_templates\\_guidance/css\\_guide.pdf](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/cadd/report_templates_guidance/css_guide.pdf)

Figure 3.22 This house on Wisconsin Avenue that has been converted to offices is a good example of adaptive reuse of structures



## F. Economic Performance

### 1. Vision

The Wisconsin Avenue corridor has experienced significant growth in investment including an increasing number of units available for seasonal rental and supporting commercial development. This trend is expected to continue. Currently development is spread out along the length of the corridor.

Public input focused on the importance of maintaining the character of the area while allowing new economic development that does not detract from the strength and potential of downtown Whitefish. Businesses should work together to develop a unique identity or “brand” for the corridor and to promote development that will include amenities for residents as well as enhance the economic performance of the properties in the study area.

Figure 3.32: Microbrewery located in corridor



*This microbrewery is a successful small commercial establishment as well as a popular gathering space for the residents of the neighborhood and tourists.*

### 2. Issues and Opportunities

The following issues were identified from the existing conditions analysis and public input:

- An additional almost 600,000 square feet of residential, resort and limited commercial could occur along the corridor under current zoning.
- The corridor is going to experience increasing growth pressure as population and both summer and winter visitation increases in Whitefish.
- The area surrounding Wisconsin Avenue has traditionally been the location of housing affordable to many of the workers who serve visitors to Whitefish.
- Wisconsin Avenue is a prime area to address both increasing demand for workforce housing and opportunities to serve area visitors.
- Increased development of both housing and commercial services will increase traffic on Wisconsin Avenue.
- New development should be consistent with the scale and character of existing development along the corridor.
- Creation of development nodes that concentrate traffic generating uses at strategic locations along the corridor allowing efficient transit service and shared parking arrangements will enhance traffic management and help preserve the character of the corridor.
- A consistent street scape along the length of Wisconsin Avenue provides character and identity to the area distinct from the rest of Whitefish. Clearly identified districts generate higher values and increased visitor spending.
- Mixing uses around the character or identity of the district allows increases value and visitation to businesses in the area.
- Data for visitor spending, plane deboardings, skier visits, and Glacier Park visitation all indicate a trend of growth in tourism that would support business growth to serve this market.

### 3. Goals & Policies

Goal 5.1: Improve the overall economic performance of the corridor and Whitefish by encouraging a balanced mix of development – residential, resort, retail, office, and restaurant to serve residents and visitors.

Goal 5.2: Focus development opportunities along the corridor to support rather than compete with downtown Whitefish

Policies
5.1 Allow increased densities and mixed uses at key nodes along the corridor that are served by transit while preserving natural landscapes and open space between the nodes.
5.2 Support small scale local business and entrepreneurial ventures that are complimentary to the corridor.
5.3 Invest in streetscape improvements to improve the active transportation experience, establish a coherent design theme and increase overall value of the corridor.
5.4 Identify commercial sectors that are growing and can be captured on the corridor to support the health of downtown Whitefish.
5.5 Create flexible mixed use zoning tools to encourage private development that achieves the community’s vision but is market responsive.
5.6 Encourage business owners to work together on marketing and branding efforts for the corridor.
5.7 Evaluate the economic performance of development proposals and the overall value that amenities can bring to the community.
5.8 Support eating/drinking establishments with outdoor seating that function as a gathering place.

### 4. Resources

- Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.whitefishchamber.org/>
- Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau, <http://www.explorewhitefish.com/>
- Montana West/Flathead County Economic Development Authority, <http://www.dobusinessinmontana.com/>

**Urban Land Institute (ULI): Ten Principles for Developing Successful Villages**

- Create an enduring and memorable public realm
- Respect market realities
- Share the risk: share the reward
- Plan for development and financial complexity
- Integrate multiple uses
- Balance flexibility with a long-term vision
- Capture the benefits that density offers
- Connect to the community
- Invest for sustainability
- Commit to ongoing management and programming

*Figure 3.24 Example of Public Space integrated into design*



*Figure 3.25: Example of Pedestrian Oriented Design and Mixed Uses*



*“Pedestrian-oriented, mixed use centers are more successful by virtually every measure: rental rates for apartments and for office and retail space, sales prices for residential units, sales and tax revenues, hotel-room occupancy rates, and property values. Overall, per-square-foot rates for retail and residential rents in mixed use town center developments are 20 to 50 percent higher, absorption is two to four times faster, and appreciation is two to three times faster.”*  
Belinda Sward, “Where’s the Money in Smart Growth Developments?”

**Economic Performance Factors:**

- Taxation
- Employment
- Contribution to the base economy
- Visitor Spending
- Additional business and commerce from related businesses

## IV. LAND USE & KEY DEVELOPMENTS



### A. Vision

The Montana Code Annotated (MCA) states that governing bodies must be, “guided by and give consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the growth policy”. This chapter, establishes the optimum “pattern of development” for the study area by designating land uses and recommending preferred design concepts. The recommendations are intended to achieve a mix of uses that are compatible, address market demand, reduce the number of vehicle trips, and mitigate potential environmental impacts.

The future land use map depicts the long-term vision of how and where development should occur over the next 10 to 20 years. This land use map, along with the goals and policies, is a guide to developers and is a foundation for zoning decisions by city officials. Land owners and neighbors rely on the plan to make investments and for long-term predictability on how the area will develop in the future.

The land use classifications are from the existing Growth Policy and were described in Chapter 2 – Existing Conditions. As noted in those descriptions, each category may have multiple zoning districts and planning tools to implement the plan. A number of factors underlie the land use designations. These factors are documented in the existing conditions section of this plan and include:

- Regulatory Factors - Existing zoning, current Growth Policy land use designations, entitlements, relationship to other planning documents.
- Physical Factors- Existing land use, topography, development constraints.
- Social Factors – Public input, visual perceptions, neighborhood character
- Economic performance – Market trends, redevelopment potential, ability to bring new revenue into the community.
- Transportation & Infrastructure – Relationship to transportation facilities and means of access, availability and capacity of water, sewer and other utilities.

## B. Goals & Policies

**Goal 6.1:** Encourage compatible development that contributes to overall livability, meets evolving market demands, and mitigates impacts to the environment.

**Goal 6.2:** Integrate land use and transportation improvements that result in a pedestrian/transit/bike friendly corridor and reduces the need for vehicle trips.

Policies
6.1 Encourage integrated designs that may include landscaping, buffers, and other designs to mitigate land use conflicts between uses of different intensities.
6.2 Discourage auto-oriented strip commercial and big-box development.
6.3 Encourage developments with a variety of residential product types and associated commercial services to provide a vibrant mix of complimentary uses.
6.4 Locate land uses to provide convenient access to employment, shopping, recreation and other services for the neighborhoods in or adjacent to the study area.
6.5 Identify focal points or strategic locations in the study area and incorporate design concepts that support the vision for the corridor.
6.6 Encourage public spaces, tree preservation, public art, and other amenities in new development.
6.7 Allow for ground-floor retail and upper-level residential uses in mix-use developments.
6.8 Concentrate more compact, mixed use development in the south half of the corridor where there is already more intense development.
6.9 Plan for low-impact, lower intensity development on the north half of the corridor to reflect the more open, pastoral, character of the area.
6.10 Enforce codes regarding blight/public nuisances and encourage redevelopment of such properties.

## C. Resources

- City of Whitefish Zoning Regulations, Title 11 – Zoning Regulations, <http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php>
- Montana Code Annotated, “Section 76-1-605 - Use of adopted growth policy” [http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title\\_0760/chapters\\_index.html](http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0760/chapters_index.html)
- Montana Department of Transportation, Livability Benchmarks for Montana Transportation, <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/planning/benchmarks.shtml>
- Montana Department of Transportation, Local Transportation and Land Use Coordination: Tools and Gaps, [http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/planning/smart\\_trans.shtml](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/planning/smart_trans.shtml)
- Whitefish Code - Public Nuisance & Weeds [www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php](http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/city-code.php)

LAND USE - TRANSPORTATION LINKAGE

*Traffic congestion is a key concern on Wisconsin Avenue. While the previous chapter offers recommendations to increase roadway capacity and provide for alternative travel modes, these strategies are long term solutions. In the near term, the most effective strategies will reduce the overall growth in vehicle trips in the study area. Studies indicate that the geographic distribution of jobs, commercial areas and population can create dramatic changes in trip generation. A mix of uses that offer convenient and walkable access to work/shop/dining/recreation opportunities will reduce the requisite car trips by allowing residents or lodging guests to walk, bike, or take short car trips instead of driving through the corridor to access these services south of the viaduct.*



*Figure 4.1: Local neighborhood businesses provide convenient access to shopping for residents who reside in the corridor.*



*Figure 4.3: A mix of residential product types can provide a transition between commercial areas and single-family neighborhoods.*

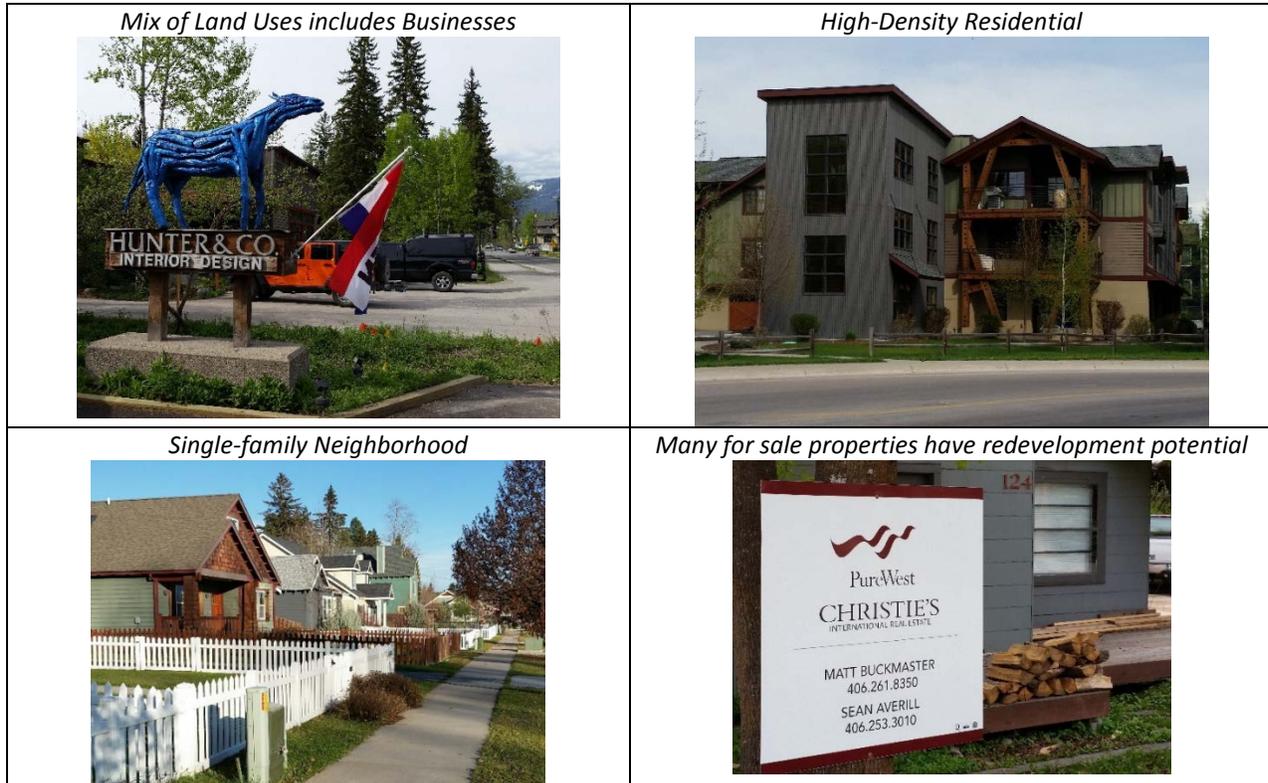


*Figure 4.2: Trees and berms can be an effective buffer between land uses of different intensities*

## D. Future Land Use - Sub Area A

**1. Character & Key Features** – This section of the corridor is conveniently located to downtown and city beach. It has a mix of land uses from local business, offices, multi-family and single-family areas.

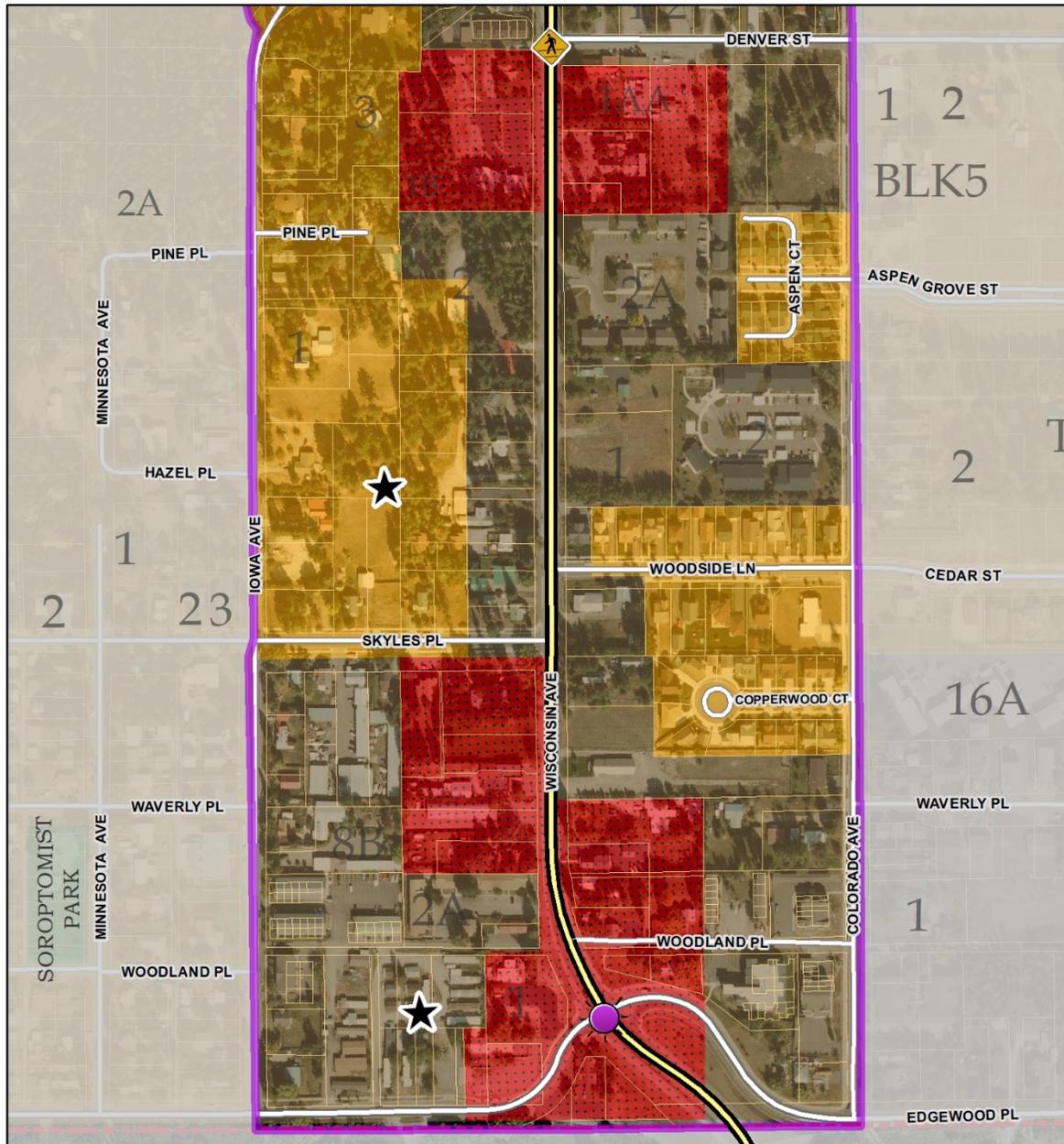
Figure 4.4: Examples of Land Uses in Sub-Area A



## 2. Issues and opportunities

- The future land use designations fronting on Iowa Street have been designated as high density residential to be consistent with the zoning and land use.
- The stable single-family areas between Wisconsin and Colorado is changed to “Urban” to be more consistent with the existing single-family use.
- The intersection of Edgewood Place and Wisconsin Ave. is shown as a gateway to the corridor per the recommendations in the downtown plan. It is also an important pedestrian crossing.
- The former mobile home park on Edgewood has been designated as high-density residential to promote year-round work force housing.
- A recent Growth Policy amendment designated additional neighborhood commercial on the west side of Wisconsin at Denver Ave. Due the expansion of commercial uses at this location, it will be important to improve the intersection to enhance the safety of the pedestrian crossing and traffic on the bike path in this area.
- The land use designation for several parcels at the southwest corner of Skyles and Wisconsin is changed to neighborhood commercial to reflect land use and to better follow parcel lines.
- The Can-am motors/storage facility lots on Skyles was changed from neighborhood commercial to high density to better fit in with adjacent uses and future development plans.

Figure 1: Future Land Use Map – Sub-Area A



**Proposed Future Land Use**

- High Density Residential
- Parks and Recreation
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Urban

- Wisconsin Ave Corridor
- Whitefish City Limits
- Parcels
- Gateway
- Key Development Area
- Pedestrian Crossing

**Future Land Use Map  
SUB-AREA "A"**



MT Geographic Information Clearinghouse  
City of Whitefish Planning Dept  
Flathead County GIS (3/7/2018)  
Montana Cadastral Mapping Project  
USGS National Hydrography Dataset

## E. Future Land Use - Sub-Area B

**1. Character & Key Features** – This sub-area has the highest concentration of population in the study area. A variety of residential uses are located within this sub-area including multi-family apartments, resort residential developments, single-family neighborhoods and a mobile home park. This area also has two major activity nodes with a retail/restaurant/office business complex located adjacent to the Stump Town Ice Den and the Lodge at Whitefish Lake located on the lake across from the Averill wetland preserve. There are also residential lots with lake frontage in this sub-area.

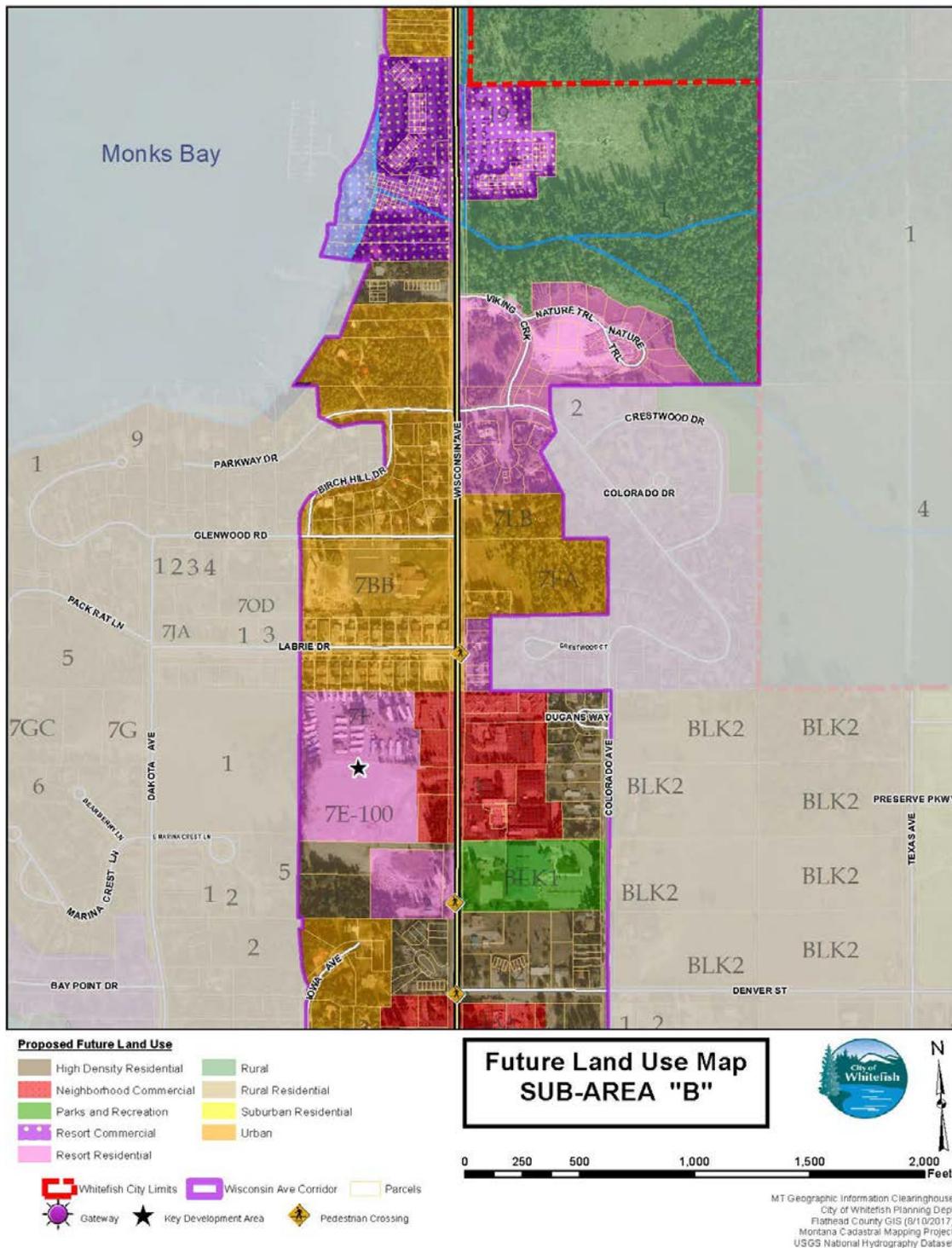
Figure 4.5: Examples of land uses in Sub-Area B



### 2. Issues and opportunities

- The former gravel pit is a key development area. In 2008 the Growth Policy was amended to designate the frontage on Wisconsin as “Neighborhood Commercial” with the remainder of the property designated as “Resort Residential”.
- There are three trail crossings on Wisconsin in the area.
- The Ice Den/Alpine Market business area and the Lodge at Whitefish Lake are major activity nodes.
- The land use category for the Averill Wetland Preserve is redesignated as rural.
- The land use category for the Viking Street/Nature Trail residential area is redesignated as “Resort Residential” to reflect current zoning of these parcels.
- There are stable single-family residential areas in this sub-area. Future development of parcels should be designed to be compatible with these areas.
- The Resort Commercial future land use classification is shown for the Lodge at Whitefish Lake and has been expanded two lots to the south between the Lodge and the Wildwood Condos.

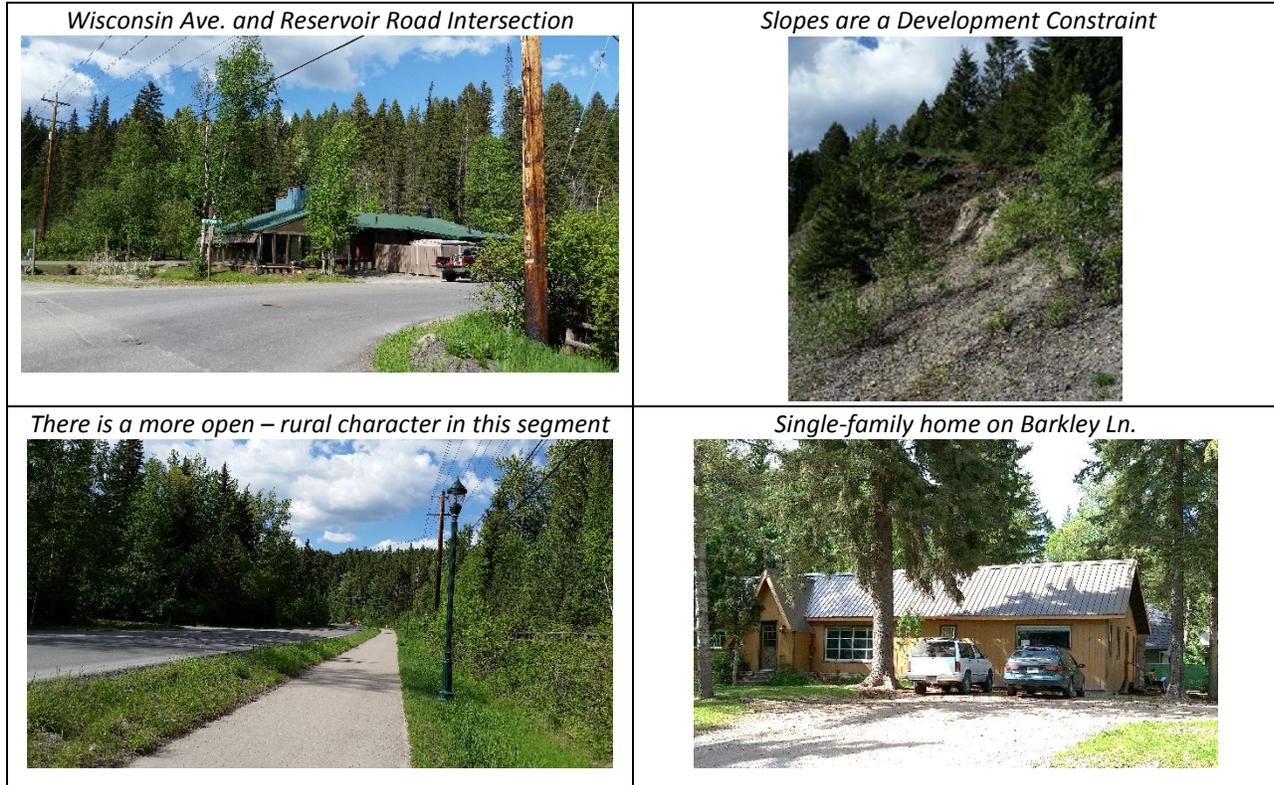
Figure 2: Future Land Use Map – Sub-Area B



## F. Future Land Use - Sub-Area C

**1. Character & Key Features** – This sub-area is characterized by a more rural, pastoral setting. On the west side of Wisconsin are large tracts with frontage on Whitefish Lake. The east side of Wisconsin Ave. has significant open areas due to a conservation easement, golf course, and hillside.

Figure 4.6: Examples of land-uses in Sub-Area C



### 2. Issues and opportunities

- Future intersection design improvements should treat the Big Mountain road intersection as a major gateway for both northbound traffic to the resort and southbound traffic into Whitefish.
- The intersection at Reservoir Road and Wisconsin Ave. should be improved to handle increased traffic from the Haskill Basin Trailhead.
- The northeast corner of Reservoir Road and Wisconsin Avenue has been redesignated as resort commercial to reflect the existing land use and zoning.
- Development of lakeshore properties can have significant impact on water quality. Commercial properties and large developments must comply with stormwater regulations while single-family properties are exempt. The cumulative impact of unregulated single-family homes can degrade water quality if they do not follow recommended best practices.
- The 2007 Growth Policy identified the Big Mountain Road intersection as having development potential. (See key development concept.)
- City owned property north of the neighborhood business is shown as resort residential to reflect existing zoning. This will require more analysis, however, to determine the appropriate use.
- The land use designations in Mountain Harbor have been changed to reflect the current zoning.

### Future Land Use Designation – Big Mountain Road Key Development Area

The approximately 31 acres of land lying along both sides of Big Mountain Road and north of East Lakeshore Dr. is sufficiently unique within the corridor planning area that it merits some special consideration. The current zoning on the property is WR-2 and WR-3 (city) and R-4 (county). This is in sharp contrast to the WLR zoning that is located to the west and south, the low-density residential development to the north, and the resort residential zoning (the Iron Horse Golf Club practice range) to the east.

No research has been conducted on the history of the current zoning, but it is widely believed to have been placed on the property in the early 1980s in response to then-existing trailers and cabins that are no longer on the property. When the 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy was adopted, the future land use map designated this area as “suburban residential” in spite of the zoning. This was done, according to recollections of those involved in the 2007 plan, primarily because:

- The property is located on the far end of the Wisconsin Ave. corridor, and as such, was not suited for the kind of residential densities allowed by the underlying zoning.
- The zoning in place no longer reflected the existing land use, but would allow densities far greater than those that ever existed on the property.
- The zoning was inconsistent with surrounding zoning.
- The existing zoning is inconsistent with surrounding land uses and character, which were and still are decidedly single-family and rural.

Since adoption of the 2007 Growth Policy, the Whitefish community is facing growth and development issues that were not necessarily apparent in 2007. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate to review the future the land use designation as part of the corridor planning process to address the following community needs:

- The need for workforce housing across the spectrum, and a greater supply and variety of housing of all types, including housing for young professionals who are seeking home ownership. This is a need that can reasonably be addressed on this property, especially given its size and underlying zoning.
- In addition, residential development at densities between the underlying zoning and what would be considered “suburban residential”, with some supporting convenience commercial, could ease traffic congestion along Wisconsin Ave. as residents would need to make fewer trips toward the lower part of the corridor or downtown. Any convenience commercial would also be utilized by residents of existing homes in the immediate area and homes farther out along E. Lakeshore Dr. all the way around the lake. Such a commercial land use could be a component of a PUD.
- This site would be the closest workforce housing opportunity to Whitefish Mountain, and work and recreational trips to Whitefish Mountain would not impact Wisconsin Ave. In addition, this site enjoys access to the Snow Bus as well as the Wisconsin Ave. bike/pedestrian path, further reducing site generated trips.
- Through the corridor planning process, the need for a satellite fire station has been determined. This station would provide fire suppression and emergency medical services to the entire area north of the viaduct, including the more isolated areas around the east and north sides of Whitefish Lake.

To address the above issues, acknowledge the vision for this property from the 2007 growth policy, reflect the existing land use/character of the surrounding area, and in recognition of the existing zoning, the corridor plan recommends designating this property as “**suburban residential**” on the future land use map with a diagonal hatch pattern and a footnote referencing this section of the document to denote the unique character of this property. In addition, the suburban residential designation recognizes the opportunity to transition from higher density development to lower density on the perimeter to better respect the scale and character of surrounding residential uses.

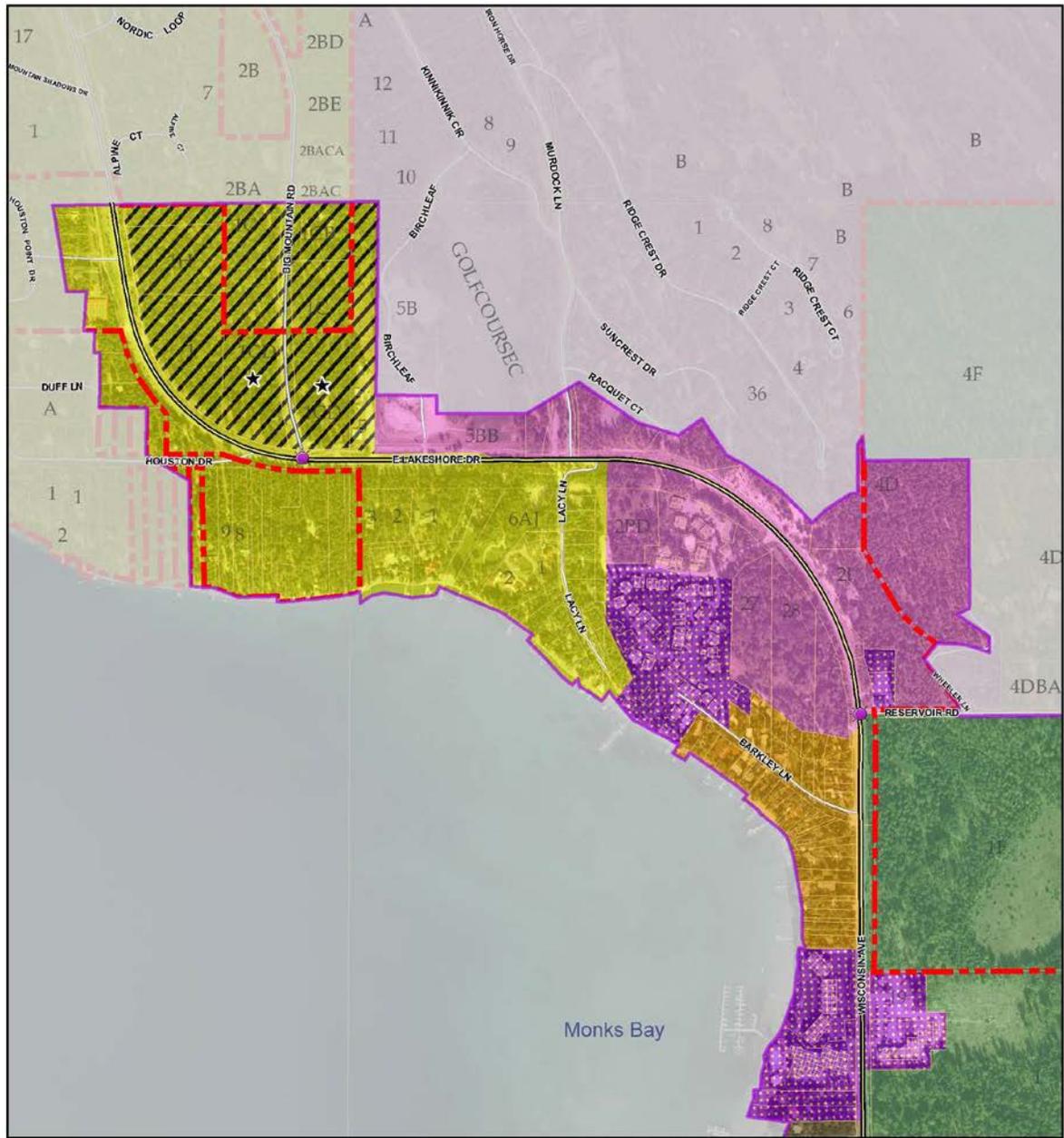
Suburban residential character does not necessarily mean large single-family homes on acreage lots. Suburban character can be at least partially achieved by clustering townhomes, modest and attainable single-family detached, 2 and 4-unit residential buildings, or semi-attached products around open space where the mature tree canopy has mostly been preserved. While it is understood that the current property owner or any subsequent owner has every right to develop the property to whatever the underlying zoning happens to be at the time of the application, it is recommended that the application be for a Planned Unit Development that will retain most of suburban character of the site and surrounding neighborhood.

There are other properties within Whitefish city limits for which the future land use designation in the Growth Policy does not necessarily mirror the existing zoning. This was done for a variety of reasons and those reasons were not necessarily consistent (or even applicable) from one property to the next. Because each of these situations is unique, it is not intended that the manner in which the zoning and future land use designation have been determined on this property should set a precedent of any kind in dealing with other properties where the future land use designation and existing zoning are not consistent.

As for economic performance, it can generally be observed and stated that higher densities will result in more efficient utilization of infrastructure, higher tax revenues, and will likely perform better economically for the community. Those increased tax revenues, in turn, will help to finance improvements including bikeway/pedestrian facilities and a satellite fire station that will enhance public safety in this part of the community.

In summary, this property can and should be developed in a manner that will preserve most of its suburban character. At the same time, development of this property can address several of the goals set forth in this plan, including a wider variety of housing types and workforce housing, a degree of self-containment with the support of convenience commercial, shortened and/or eliminated vehicle trips, and access to transit and non-motorized transportation.

Figure 3: Future Land Use Map – Sub-Area C



**Proposed Future Land Use**

High Density Residential	Rural Residential
Resort Commercial	Suburban Residential
Resort Residential	Suburban Residential - Big Mtn Road Key Development
Rural	Urban

Whitefish City Limits   
 Wisconsin Ave Corridor   
 Parcels  
 Gateway   
 Key Development Area   
 Pedestrian Crossing

**Future Land Use Map  
SUB-AREA "C"**



MT Geographic Information Clearinghouse  
 City of Whitefish Planning Dept  
 Flathead County GIS (8/10/2017)  
 Montana Cadastral Mapping Project  
 USGS National Hydrography Dataset

## Land Use Comparison

This simple comparison examines land use designations between the adopted Growth Policy and the Corridor Plan. Such an analysis can indicate if the land use designations are realistic and help the city determine if there is adequate capacity for water, sewer, and transportation facilities. It can also help the city evaluate how well the proposed development patterns are advancing the goals of the plan regarding workforce housing.

The major change in land use designations from the Growth Policy to the Corridor Plan is due to the creation of a new land use category for “Resort Commercial” in 2015 as part of the US 93 West Corridor Plan. This new category has been applied to parcels that are already zoned as “Resort Business” at Mountain Harbor and the Lodge at Whitefish Lake. As noted previously, an additional 2 acres adjacent to the Lodge and .8 acres at the corner of Wisconsin and Reservoir Road have also been designated as Resort Commercial. Overall, this resulted in a net decrease in the “Resort Residential” and an increase in the “Resort Commercial” category.

*Table 4.1: Comparison of Land Use Designation by Total Acreage*

	<b>2007 Growth Policy (Amended thru 2016)</b>	<b>Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan</b>
Rural/Rural Residential	70	62
Suburban Residential	63.2	63.2
Urban	60.5	62.6
High Density Residential	41.8	40.7
Resort Residential	78.1	64.2
Resort Commercial	-	23.4
Neighborhood Commercial	22.2	19.9

Furthermore, some of the residential land use designations for “Urban” and “High Density Residential” were modified to be consistent with the existing zoning or established land use. This only amounted to a net change of 2 acres between these categories. There was a reduction in the “Rural” and “Rural Residential” categories to reflect the residential development just south of the Averill Wetland Preserve.

Since a range of zoning districts and development scenarios are possible within each of the above land use categories, it is impossible to project the exact overall change in the number of residential uses that will be built over the next 10 to 20 years. This comparison, however, indicates that the overall character of the corridor will primarily remain residential with a mix of “Resort Residential”, “Resort Commercial”, and “Neighborhood Commercial”.

## G. Key Development Areas

The plan identifies key development areas that are at strategic locations, or focal points, within the larger study area. Development, or redevelopment, of these parcels can have significant impact on the corridor by applying development strategies that will help achieve the vision of the plan. The concepts provided for these key development areas are not meant to be prescriptive nor to preclude other sound development ideas—quite the contrary. They represent a vision of what is possible—a new way of looking at the redevelopment potential of land in the corridor. Some of the development concepts set forth for the Key Development Areas may not be feasible at this time. However, given the transitions projected for the corridor, such as more mixed and multiple use development, a higher degree of self-containment, and more pedestrian and transit friendliness, these concepts are expected to gain a foothold in the market over the 10 to 20-year time horizon of this plan.

A factor in identifying key development sites is that the land area is under common ownership. There are several advantages that unified site development offers over piecemeal development of multiple smaller lots. A larger site offers more flexibility for site layout, allowing buildings to be grouped, or clustered, so that environmentally sensitive areas or tree canopy can be preserved. It is also more cost efficient to plan for and develop a larger site as it allows for economies of scale and phasing of infrastructure improvements. A unified site development also has the advantage of having just one central entity with which to negotiate for rights-of-way, park land, and other amenities. Finally, whereas single-family lots that may be exempt from stormwater regulations, larger scale projects allow the city to consider the full impacts of development on water quality and to direct mitigation measures where needed.

These key development sites provide an opportunity for compatible development and can be a catalyst for public and private investments. All activity nodes should be designed to be walkable, safe, and inviting, but differ from one another in character, function and purpose, so that each offers a unique experience. The following are guidelines to evaluate proposals for these key development areas:

- Mobility – Walkability, connections to pedestrian-bike trail system, transit oriented design, shared mobility features.
- Neighborhood Character – Reflect scale, bulk, and architectural design of neighborhood. See Architectural review standards.
- Coordination with other plans – Achieve multiple goals by addressing planning issues identified in other planning documents. (Downtown Plan, Transportation Plan, Bike & Pedestrian Plan, etc....)
- Water quality – Preserve natural waterways, reduce impervious area, treat stormwater run-off, and promote water conservation.
- Marketability – Residential and/or commercial mix that is supportable by the market, and capable of attracting development capital.

The options identified for key development areas compare the economic performance of traditional development that may occur by-right under the existing zoning versus more intense development that is

likely under a unified development concept. Taxable value estimates are based on the average assessed value for the particular property type on the most current tax rolls. It should be noted that the value for the particular land owner or developer will depend on market conditions and mix of land uses at the time of development

Finally, it should be noted that some of the key development areas may be facing impediments to their development or redevelopment. These impediments can take various forms. Some can be regulatory, especially in the short term. Regulatory concepts that support a particular type of development in a key area may not exist at the present time. Some impediments can come in the form of infrastructure improvements that may not be totally within the developer's control, such as off-site water or sewer upgrades or a new connecting street.

Other impediments can come in the form of blight. The large vacant structure at the NW corner of Wisconsin and Edgewood is located at the very front door to the Edgewood Place key development area, and that area will not develop as envisioned until something is done to put that build back into a productive use. The City of Whitefish could help in this regard by considering a "vacant building ordinance". Typically, these ordinances address nuisance conditions associated with a vacant building, public safety concerns, fire hazards, and the need for nominal maintenance to prevent the vacant building from impacting the value and use of nearby properties. The ultimate objective is to encourage the owner to rehabilitate the building, or raze it and build a contemporary new structure that contributes to the neighborhood and attracts investment, or, sell the property to someone who will exercise one of those options. Some impediments may be out of the City's control, but there can be almost immediate benefits to the City addressing those that are.

## West Edgewood

**Description:** Vacant 2.5 acre parcel located on north side of Edgewood Place between Wisconsin and Iowa. Former mobile home park is currently zoned WB-1, Limited Business.

**Owner:** Stinson Family Trust

**Features:** Trail access on Edgewood. Walkable to downtown and commercial services. Views of Whitefish Mountain.

**Infrastructure:** Utilities and infrastructure close to property. Water and storm drainage are in Edgewood Place. Sanitary sewer is in alley north of property.

**Dev. Considerations:**

Since site lacks visibility from Wisconsin, market for office/retail space is limited under traditional development scenario

Will require rezoning to develop as high-density multi-family

Incentives for affordable housing and transit oriented or shared mobility features.

Create pedestrian friendly, live-work environment.

**Development Potential:**

Scenario 1: Traditional single-story commercial office/retail flex space with WB-1.

Scenario 2: Multi-story multi-family rental or condo units to meet affordable housing needs. This scenario has an estimated increase in building value 15% to 45% from traditional development option.

Figure 4.7: Subject Area



Figure 4.8: Location is suitable for multi-family units and could provide workforce housing.



The subject property lacks visibility from Wisconsin Avenue and this diminishes its potential for retail/office development. There is a demand, however, for multi-family residential and workforce housing and with the proximity to downtown and other services, such housing would be desirable at this location. The property, however, is currently zoned as “WB-1” Limited Business” and residential is only permitted in this district as accessory apartments with a conditional use. Since WR-4 zoning is adjacent to the property on the west and north, changing the zoning to WR-4 would allow for multi-family units and would be consistent with the surrounding land use patterns. Additionally, the recently adopted workforce housing plan notes various incentives for workforce housing that could be utilized for development on this property to help the city meet its housing goals.

Table 4.2: West Edgewood –Comparison of Development Types

	Traditional	Affordable Rental
<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Office/Retail</b>	<b>Multi-Family</b>
<b># of Units</b>	n/a	50
<b>Total Sq. Ft.</b>	26,000	50,000
<b>Value per Sq. Ft.</b>	\$233	\$168
<b>Total Value</b>	\$6,058,000	\$8,400,000

1. Multi-family residential can help meet workforce housing needs

# NW Corner Skyles & Wisconsin

11.6 acres. Of 26 parcels, 23 under common ownership. Current land use is single-family homes. Parcels fronting on Wisconsin Ave. zoned WR-3 (6.5 acres). Parcels on Skyles Pl. and Iowa Ave. are zoned WR-2 (5.1 acres).

**Features/Amenities:** Significant urban tree canopy. Topographically, property rises about 5% from Wisconsin Ave. To Iowa Ave. Adjacent to bike/pedestrian trail. Walkable to commercial services and city beach.

**Infrastructure:** Utilities and infrastructure are close to property. Water and sanitary sewer are in Wisconsin Avenue, Skyles Place, and Iowa Avenue. Storm drainage is in Wisconsin Avenue and at the intersection of Skyles Place and Iowa Avenue.

**Development Outcomes:** Continue use of parcels as residential to be compatible with surrounding neighborhood.

Unified development plan offers more flexibility for mix of residential product types. Incentives for affordable housing.

Higher intensity residential is appropriate for parcels fronting on Wisconsin Ave.

Lower density residential on west half should be compatible with single-family areas on Iowa Ave.

Design internal street layout and site access to lessen traffic impact on adjoining streets.

Set-backs on Wisconsin should provide for future street widening.

Transit-oriented design as part of development.

Maintain wooded areas/tree canopy as much as possible.

Topography is opportunity for unique site design.



Figure 4.10: Subject Property

Most of these properties are under single ownership and it is likely they may be planned as one multi-phased project.

Figure 4.11: Site Plan Preserves tree canopy



Figure: 4.12: View shows slope and tree canopy in this area.



Figure 4.13: Older single-family homes are currently being rented out and may be future candidates for redevelopment into higher intensity residential uses.

**Development Potential:** With the maximum WR-3 density under the Planned Unit Development (PUD) overlay of 14 du/acre, the eastern portion of the property could produce up to 90 units, or up to 113 units with a density bonus for affordable housing. With WR-2 zoning, the western part of the property could produce a maximum of 62 units, or 82 units with the affordable housing density bonus.

These densities, however, should only be considered as hypothetical maximums. Factors such as maintaining tree cover, street layout, topography, and need for lower densities to the west all will likely reduce the ultimate density from the maximum build-out calculations. The consensus is to maintain the residential land use of this key development area while identifying the desirable outcomes for long term development of this parcel with a mix of residential product types.

## Gravel Pit Redevelopment

**Description:** 10.5 acres across Wisconsin Ave. from Alpine Market commercial area. Existing mobile home park on north 1/4 of site. Remaining site reclaimed gravel pit. 3.5 acres with frontage on Wisconsin Ave. is zoned WB-1. South 1.3 acres is WR-2. Remainder of site is zoned WRR-1.

**Owner:** Lenticular Properties

**Features/Amenities:** Prime location in corridor. Convenient to commercial services.

**Infrastructure:** Utilities and infrastructure are adjacent to site in Wisconsin Ave.

**Development Considerations:** Unified development to provide flexibility and amenities.

Incorporate transit oriented and pedestrian friendly design.

Incentives to maintain workforce housing and to provide buffer on the north end to mitigate impacts on LaBrie neighborhood.

On-site retail to provide services to resort and residential uses.

Set-backs on Wisconsin should provide for future street widening.

Extend East Marina Crest Drive from Dakota Ave. to Wisconsin Ave.

**Development Potential:**

Potential for mix-use development such as:

- Mix of Cottages, Condos or vacation rentals: Units would be of resort-quality and 800 to 1,200 sf each.
- Flex commercial space that could be either retail or office uses (finance, insurance, real estate, medical, etc.).  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor residential
- Include rental apartments to provide some workforce housing

Figure 4.14: Subject Property



Figure 4.15: Low-level buildings are more compatible with surrounding neighborhood.



A public open space could be an amenity that defines the traffic flow and accommodates transit users. An architectural theme would provide a distinctive style with substantial curb appeal. A unified theme could provide the condos, and retail/office offerings with a significant competitive advantage. First floor commercial with second floor residential would help meet work force housing needs.

Table 4.3: Gravel Pit Site –Development Analysis

	Potential Sq. Ft or # of Units	Value per sq. ft. or per unit
Retail/office	23,000	\$122
Condo- Cottages (Mix of Owner Occupied & Vacation Rental)	90	\$360,000
Multi-family	30	\$207,000
<b>Total Value</b>		<b>\$38,946,408</b>

## Big Mountain Road Intersection

Big Mountain Road and East Lakeshore Drive. Existing use is single-family residential. Existing zoning north of road is WR-2 (13.5 acres), WR-3 (8.31 acres), and County R-4 zone (9.19 acres.) South of road is County R-1 zone, Suburban Residential (11 acres).

**Features/Amenities:** Lakeshore frontage with steep slopes & moderately forested. Big Mountain Rd. provides the only general access to Whitefish Mountain Resort.

**Infrastructure:** Utilities and infrastructure are close to property. Water and sanitary sewer are in East Lakeshore Drive.

**Dev. Considerations for all development:**

Conservation design and stormwater treatment to protect water quality.

Best practices for lakeshore development such as lakeshore setbacks for sensitive areas.

Coordinate with MDT on intersection improvements and transit stops.

Set-backs on East Lake Shore should provide for future street widening.

Design pedestrian crossings at grade or underground to connect parcels.

Negotiate land for fire station/transit drop-off.

Maintain vegetation to screen from road and provide buffers to minimize impact on adjacent land owners.

Properties must annex to city to connect to water and sewer.

Suburban residential for lakeshore parcels.

Underlying zoning for properties north of East Lake Shore Dr. allow for multi-family but should be designed to reflect surrounding low-density suburban character.

Transition from higher density in center to lower density on perimeter.

Figure 4.16 Subject Area



Figure 4.17 : Preserving the tree canopy will be important



Figure 4.18: Multi-family on the interior of the site clustered around open space to preserve existing tree canopy can engender suburban character.



# V. IMPLEMENTATION



## A. Introduction

The primary means for implementing the plan is through day-to-day decisions that affect the development along the corridor. The goals and policies in this plan provide a framework for decision makers as they engage in the following activities:

- **Planning Initiatives:** Reflect corridor plan policies in related initiatives regarding transportation, utilities, parks/trails, housing, economic development and other community efforts.
- **Development Review, Design and Budgeting:** Rely on goals and policies to guide decisions regarding zoning, subdivision, site planning, capital investments, and engineering designs.
- **Communication:** Successful implementation efforts involve coordination with other public agencies as well as on-going communication and negotiation with private property owners.

There are also action items that can make the vision for the corridor plan a reality. These include code amendments, programmatic efforts and various projects that facilitate implementation of the plan. The action items in this chapter identify partners and resources that can help accomplish these tasks.

This action plan is a starting point for implementation and will evolve over time to respond to emerging community needs and opportunities. Some steps can be achieved relatively quickly, while others will be long term endeavors. The implementation steps help the community establish priorities and provide a benchmark to measure progress.

## B. Action Items

### ACTION 1:

**Review land use regulations to provide for future R.O.W. acquisition.**

Zoning should be revised to provide adequate set-backs for properties with Wisconsin Avenue frontage to allow for future road widening projects. Subdivision requirements should be reviewed to assure that dedication of right-of-way along Wisconsin is adequate to allow for road improvements.

**Timeframe:** One to two years.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Montana Dept. of Transportation, property owners, developers

**Resources:** Planning staff initiate with consultation from stakeholders.

**Policy:** 3.2

### ACTION 2:

**Evaluate options for road widening, turn lanes, curbs, parkways and intersection improvements along Wisconsin Avenue.**

Updates to the Whitefish Transportation Plan (2009) should consider design options for Wisconsin Avenue corridor improvements and provide guidelines for subsequent engineering designs. Important intersections include Skyles, Glenwood, Reservoir Road, and Murdock Lane.

**Timeframe:** Coordinate with Transportation Plan update and funding opportunities.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Montana Dept. of Transportation

**Resources:** Planning grants & city match for cost of study. Fuel tax for improvements.\*

**Policy:** 3.1, 3.3, 3.6

### ACTION 3:

**Identify options to expand transit and develop park-n-ride lots.**

Work with transit agencies to identify expand or improve transit stops and operating hours. Evaluate options for acquiring land for a park-n-ride lot in the corridor.

**Timeframe:** On-going monitoring of transit operations and potential to expand. Establish park-n-ride within next 5 to 10 years.

**Stakeholders:** Big Mountain Commercial Association, Flathead County Eagle Transit, Whitefish Mountain Resort, City of Whitefish, Montana Dept. of Transportation, Developers

**Resources:** \* [MDT Transit grants/programs](#)

**Policy:** 3.5, 3.6

### ACTION 4:

**Identify potential traffic calming solutions for Colorado Avenue.**

This would involve neighborhood meetings, developing preliminary cost estimates and identifying funding sources.

**Timeframe:** Coordinate with transportation plan update.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Colorado Ave. residents/property owners, Trail Committee

**Resources:** Transportation consultant to facilitate process and create engineering plans. Use planning grants with city matching funds. Incorporate recommendations into future capital improvement plans.\*

**Policy:** 3.8

## ACTION 5:

### **Conduct engineering study to address storm water management issues for Viking Creek and Batton Conservancy.**

Viking Creek carries a high volume of sediments and nutrients that discharge into the lake. An engineering study would investigate improvements to the storm water system. Evaluating options for “daylighting” Viking Creek per recommendations of the “Whitefish Area Water Resources Report”

**Timeframe:** Apply during next grant cycle.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Whitefish Lake Institute, property owners, DEQ MT DOT

**Resources:** Treasure State Endowment Program grant.\*

**Policy:** 1.1, 1.2, 1.7

## ACTION 6:

### **Adopt tree preservation guidelines.**

The tree canopy and forested areas are an important feature of the corridor. While Section 11-4-9 of the City Code requires a tree preservation plan for new development of multi-family or commercial properties, the city could develop a design manual for trees preservation to encourage property owners of single-family homes to voluntarily protect this resource.

**Timeframe:** Near term

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, property owners, developers, forestry experts

**Resources:** Planning grants. A task force could draw on local expertise.

**Policy:** 1.3, 1.4, 4.1, 4.5, 6.6

## ACTION 7:

### **Conduct feasibility study for Emergency Services Facilities near Big Mountain Rd.**

Evaluate potential sites and include cost estimates. The study could be a basis for negotiations with developers at the Big Mountain Road intersection and to apply for grants. The typical land area for a satellite fire station ranges from one-half to one acre.

**Timeframe:** Coordinate with emergency services planning

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, public safety agencies, developers, Whitefish Mountain Resort, Iron Horse, Sun Crest, Whitefish Lake and Big Mountain property owners

**Resources:** Planning grants, impact fees, negotiations with developers, contributions from stakeholders, resort tax\*

**Policy:** 1.6, 3.7

## ACTION 8:

### **Amend Architectural Review Standards to expand the design districts as needed to include any new commercial areas, address compatibility issues between uses and implement other policy recommendations.**

Currently, the Resort Community Business Design District does not extend north of Reservoir Road. The district boundary should be extended to include any new commercial areas and to address noise issues.

**Timeframe:** Near term

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish Planning Dept. & Architectural Review Committee

**Resources:** Architectural Review Standards

**Policy:** 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.7, 2.8, 4.2, 4.7, 4.9, 4.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.5, 6.6

### ACTION 9:

**Form a Wisconsin Ave. Business Group**

Business owners could form a group to promote the corridor and work with city on implementation of the plan. Such efforts may include an effort to develop a “branding” name/program for the area of the corridor such as “Lake and Mountain District.” Other efforts may include fund raising for public art, beautification projects, and promotional materials. Conduct public outreach for various activities.

**Timeframe:** Near term

**Stakeholders:** Business owners, Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, Whitefish CVB

**Resources:** Organizational materials and best practices from similar business groups. Fund raising & contributions from business owners.

**Policy:** 5.6

### ACTION 10:

**Develop Gateway Treatment Designs**

The Downtown Master Plan has conceptual drawings for the southern gateway. Improvements to the Big Mountain Road intersection should also include a gateway concept with landscaping plans and architectural renderings for signage and public art.

**Timeframe:** Coordinate with Downtown Master Plan implementation and intersection improvements

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Montana Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Corridor business group, Heart of Whitefish

**Resources:** TIF funds, resort tax, donations, grants\*

**Policy:** 4.3, 5.3

### ACTION 11:

**Implement Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan recommendations and continue exploring options for improving bike-ped network.**

Identify opportunities to implement the recommendations of the Bike-Ped Master Plan. Conduct additional studies to determine feasibility of bike path on both sides of street in from Edgewood to LaBrie, on cost of underground utilities and connection to Haskill Basin trailhead.

**Timeframe:** Coordinate with Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan priorities

**Stakeholders:** City, MDT, businesses, residents, bicyclists, Whitefish Legacy Partners

**Resources:** Transportation Alternative grants, MT FWP grants, Resort tax\*

**Policy:** 2.1, 2.3

### ACTION 12:

**Coordinate with development code revisions to draft ordinance language that promotes the goals and policies of the corridor plan**

Encourage development that is consistent with the vision of the corridor plan by making sure that code revisions do not create impediments to the preferred alternatives identified in the plan. For example, parking requirements for affordable or mixed-use developments may need to be revised to reflect different trip generation rates and incentivize development.

**Timeframe:** On-going

**Stakeholders:** City, developers, residents, Planning Board

**Resources:** Coordinate with code revisions

**Policy:** 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, 2.4, 5.1, 5.5, 6.1, 6.3, 6.5, 6.7

## ACTION 13

### **Conduct analysis for city owned lot north of Reservoir Road to determine best use of property**

This lot was donated to the city and is currently vacant. Potential uses include park/open space, park and ride lot or other public uses. There are potential wetlands on the site. Conduct a site analysis and evaluate alternatives to determine the most appropriate use.

**Timeframe:** Near term

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Park and Recreation Dept., neighboring land owners, State of Montana

**Resources:** City funds, grants

**Policy:** 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.7, 6.9

## ACTION 14

### **Review Zoning Regulations to address concerns about the practice of “pyramiding”.**

As described on pg. 3.3, the current zoning regulations allow pyramiding as long as there is adequate lake frontage under private homeowner parks. There were concerns regarding the degradation of water quality due the increase in boat activity that results from such practices. The current regulations (Section 11-9-2) should be reviewed to mitigate potential impacts.

**Timeframe:** Near Term

**Stakeholders:** Lakeshore Protection Committee, Whitefish Planning Department, property owners

**Resources:** Coordinate with other amendments to the regulations.

**Policy:** 1.1, 1.9, 1.10

\*Note: The funding sources for capital improvements and other investments vary depending on the type of project, partnerships with other agencies, and local government revenue streams. Funding levels for federal and state grant programs change from year to year based on budgeting processes and political priorities. Planning studies or preliminary engineering studies for a project, can assess availability of funding resources based on current programs and budgets.