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To: City of Whitefish Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan – Steering Committee
From: Kate McMahon, Applied Communications
Date: 10/10/2017
Re: Big Mountain Key Development Area – Future Land Use Designation

The consultant team, with input from staff, has drafted the following language to reflect the discussion at the last Steering Committee regarding the future land use designation for the northeast and northwest corners of E. Lake Shore Drive and Big Mountain Road. If the Committee is in agreement with this language, it will be added to “Chapter 4 – Land Use and Key Developments”.

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 surrounds this property to the west and south, the low-density residential development to the north, and 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 all 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 particular 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 commercial zoning 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 will 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 east and north end of Whitefish Lake.

In order 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 recognize the existing zoning, the committee recommends designating this property as “**suburban residential**” on the future land use map with a “hatch” or “stipple” pattern and a footnote referencing this section of the document to denote the unique character of this property.

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 particular 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, because there is no detailed land development program for this key development area, no detailed analysis of economic performance has been provided. However, it

can generally be observed and stated that higher densities and more revenue it will generate over time in sales and rents, more efficient utilization of infrastructure, and higher tax revenues, will perform better economically for the community. Those increased 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.