



# Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

## Meeting #26 Minutes

May 3, 2021

2:00 pm, Council Chambers Conference Room and via WebEx

### **In Attendance:**

Committee Members: June Hanson and Marilyn Nelson in person, Mark Pascoli, John Muhlfeld, and Steve Kane remotely via WebEx (Ryan Hennen, Roger Sherman, Justin Lawrence, Scott Freudenberger absent)

Staff: Dave Taylor, Hilary Lindh

Public: Rhonda Fitzgerald

### **A. Meeting called to order at 2:03 pm**

### **B. Approved April 12, 2021 meeting minutes**

### **C. Review of Revisions to Draft Plan**

Hilary went through revisions to the draft plan responding to committee and public comments made at the April steering committee meeting and sent via e-mail after that meeting. The following topics were discussed:

Front setbacks for Segment B. The draft plan recommends increasing the current setback of 20-feet to 25-feet. At the April meeting there was discussion around whether deeper lots should have larger minimum setbacks than shallower lots. Staff initially responded that the standards should apply equally to all properties within a zoning district and the quality of landscaping may be more important visually. After further committee discussion, John asked staff to vet the idea of a sliding scale for required setbacks based on lot depth with City Attorney Jacobs. The committee also asked staff to provide examples of commercial setback sizes used in other western mountain communities.

2030 traffic projections adjusted. The draft plan cited traffic projections made in the 2009 Transportation Plan; public comment at the April meeting pointed out they were inconsistent with the actual growth trends experienced 2003-2018. Staff revised the projections using 2019 AADT numbers and an annual growth rate of 1-1.4%. The committee was satisfied with this change.

Segment B vision statement. The draft statement in April contained remnants of language used when the committee was considering methods of restructuring the corridor. The statement was modified to be more consistent with the current vision and recommendations in the plan and the committee was satisfied with the change.

Potential future transitional zoning district for Segment C. The draft included a recommendation that commercial buildings 10,000 square feet (sf) or larger trigger the need for a conditional use permit (CUP). April comments included a suggestion to reduce that threshold further. Staff response described current County threshold in Segment C of 15,000 sf and City threshold in Segment B of 10,000 sf and expressed concern that an even smaller building footprint could discourage potential annexation requests. Staff also explained that the standards proposed in this plan for a future transitional zone are a placeholder; any new zoning district the city considers would have its own public process when details such as actual building size triggering need for a CUP would be determined. The committee was okay

with leaving the building threshold size as a placeholder with the knowledge the actual trigger size may change in the future.

Goal B.1 revisions. The content largely stayed the same as the April draft, but the goals and objectives were rearranged to make more sense. The committee was satisfied with the changes.

Request for outside review of the draft plan. In April Marilyn submitted comments to the committee requesting outside review of the draft plan. She asked Rhonda to share information about a potential consultant who could conduct a technical review, as she does not think the committee has enough information needed to make a recommendation about adopting the plan. She is frustrated there are not more tools at the City's disposal to ensure a future the community wants. Steve said the committee has momentum and he is not enthused about handing the plan off to someone new and the time involved. The plan is a visionary document, and the committee needs to seize the opportunity to move forward. John said he supported Steve's comments. He asked why this corridor plan was different than any of the other corridor plans the City recently adopted. Marilyn said this corridor is more important and has higher potential for negative impacts to the City. Rhonda also noted the other plans were completed with outside consultants in addition to staff, committees, and public. Mark noted if a review could be completed at the same time as other agency and public review it might be okay, but if it were to take longer, he would not be in favor. John said he wanted to support staff and asked for their thoughts. Dave was willing to hear from outside sources but noted the time and effort staff has put into this plan. Hilary summarized the research she had done talking with planners from other mountain resort towns regarding the issue of planning outside City limits. She acknowledged there may be additional tools other planners have experience with, but also noted staff had proposed some options earlier which the committee did not want to consider further. Steve moved to consider Marilyn's proposal for third-party review of the plan. There was no second, and the motion died.

Hand sketches on page 74. Steve had suggested replacing the sketches with professional renderings. The committee agreed the sketches could be replaced with photos.

#### **D. Public Comments**

Rhonda reiterated her earlier comments about the need for a larger setback in the WB-2; she suggested looking to Park City and Ketchum for examples. She was satisfied with the revisions to the traffic projections and the Segment B vision statement. Regarding the building size threshold for a CUP in Segment C, Rhonda said we want to encourage infill in the City limits, not encourage leapfrog development south of the City. The development standards should not encourage developers to choose a site further from the City. She is also in favor of having an outside consultant do a technical review of the plan. Rhonda suggested via email comments the plan be restructured such that a reader could follow the issues, objectives, vision, goals, and objectives of each segment independently of the other segments. The committee will consider this alternative format and provide feedback next meeting. She then spoke again about the effect of Mountain Mall on the downtown when it first opened. The current language on page 13 should be much stronger than "the downtown suffered". The committee agreed.

Mayre Flowers emailed comments to the committee just before the meeting was held (attached).



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### **E. Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 7 at 2pm. It will be held in person in the Council Chambers. A link to attend via WebEx may be provided if requested.

### **F. Adjournment – 4:10 pm**



Re: Whitefish Hwy 93 Corridor Plan  
5-3-2021

I am unable to make the meeting today, but wanted to share with you briefly thoughts on next steps. I am attaching a copy of an excel spread sheet where I simply organized the timeline of actions to be done by date. For me this clarified my concerns that this plan is not the comprehensive policy document that clearly sets forth principles to guide growth and the infrastructure needs in this corridor today. Knowing that Hwy 93 in this corridor is already at or beyond capacity should be more front and center in this plan along with clearer standards that must be met now –not in five, ten, or twenty years.

As the community of Whitefish faces some of the greatest growth pressures it has ever seen in the immediate future will we take the time and get additional expert input on this corridor plan to assure that this plan addresses specifically what roads the city will built, when, and how the city will pay for them to reduce congestion on Hwy 93? Currently this corridor plan is totally silent on addressing criteria for complying with the essential policy set forth in the Whitefish Growth Policy which requires concurrency for urban services before new growth is permitted? Does this plan provide the guidance needed for the next Town Pump, or the next massive recreational tourist attraction (see references to encouraging commercial recreational uses that are ill defined on pages in the plan including 79 and 84 of the draft corridor plan) like the folks in Lake County are now grappling with out of the blue on a forested hillside just outside of Lakeside?

As such new development proposals come, is it clear what standards they must meet so that new development is consistent with the community's vision for this vital entrance corridor. So many of the important items are five to ten to twenty years out on the proposed time line.

This plan should begin with a one-to-two-page list of principles that will guide future growth in the entrance corridor going forward and what funding priorities the city will provide or seek to put in place to achieve it. A list of action items and policies to be developed over five, ten, and twenty years does not provide city residents and those wishing to develop projects within this corridor the necessary certainty or predictability that this plan has the teeth to meet the extraordinary growth pressures the city faces. The work to date is valuable as it sets forth vital background information, but let's not stop now. Please recruit and secure a professional review of this plan that focuses on ways to strengthen the plan to ensure the city can secure the vision that the public is asking for.

Timeframe	Action	Actor	Description
Initiate within one year	<b>Foster dialogue and coordinated planning between the City of Whitefish and Flathead County p. 94</b>	City-County	The City of Whitefish must start a dialogue with the City of Columbia Falls, City of Kalispell, and Flathead County to achieve future cooperation on planning initiatives affecting the City and to realize the goals and objectives outlined in this plan for Segment C of the highway corridor. As a first step, the City should coordinate with Columbia Falls and Kalispell to open a dialogue with Flathead County about regional transportation planning issues. The objective is to build a working relationship between the three cities and Flathead County to facilitate coordinated land use planning, including adoption of County-wide transportation corridor development standards.
	<b>Review parking standards</b>	City	National standards for commercial parking requirements should be reviewed and compared to current Whitefish standards; minimum parking requirements for some commercial uses should be reduced. Additionally, adjacent commercial parking lots should be connected to each other where possible to facilitate movement between them without having to re-enter the highway. Parking standards for multiple commercial uses on the same lot should also be revised. The standards should also consider accommodation of electric vehicles and ride-share services.
	<b>Revise landscaping standards</b>	City	Landscaping standards should be revised to require variation in plant heights, massing, and colors, and limit the amount of turf or grass used. Better buffering between residential and commercial uses is needed. Retention of healthy, mature trees should be better incentivized, and wider areas of landscaping with public amenities should be encouraged. The exemption for landscaping for automotive sales lots should also be removed, and the use of planter boxes in parking lots allowed. Use of native species that minimize irrigation water use for commercial properties should be incentivized.
	<b>Develop outdoor storage screening standards for light assembly and manufacturing</b>	City	To encourage a diverse economy in Whitefish, light assembly and manufacturing was recently made an administrative conditional use in the WB-2 Secondary Business zoning district. To ensure compatibility with existing and surrounding businesses, standards need to be developed for screening of outdoor storage of materials and equipment.
	<b>Revise sign district along Baker Avenue north of East 13th Street</b>	City	The sign standards should better reflect the smaller lot sizes, narrower right-of-way, and slower speed limits in this portion of the corridor. Review appropriateness of the Resort Community Business and Old Town sign districts as potential replacement of the Highway Commercial sign district in this area. Review the existing sign district boundaries.
one to two years	<b>Update architectural review standards for multi-tenant commercial buildings.</b>	City	Development and businesses in the corridor should be encouraged to help diversify the Whitefish economy, provide higher wages and salaries, and support existing and new housing and employment in the corridor. Multi-tenant commercial buildings can help reduce costs for start-up types of businesses needing smaller spaces, but linear strip malls can be very unattractive. The architectural review standards should ensure future multi-tenant buildings are visually consistent with the vision for the corridor. The types of uses permitted in the WB-2 would not change as part of this action.
	<b>Revise the Special Provisions for Lots</b>	City	A conditional use permit is currently required for multiple uses on the same lot. In locations where the primary building is set back far from the highway and there is an overlay large parking lot in front, the City could encourage addition of a second, smaller building, or what is called a "liner" building, along the highway frontage to break up the view of the parking lot. The special provisions for lots should be revised to allow addition of a second use in the form of a "liner" building on properties with overly large parking lots in Segment B with an administrative conditional use permit.
	<b>Revise WB-2 zoning district.</b>	City	The Secondary Business zoning district currently requires a 20-foot setback from the front property line. However, not all lots adjacent to the highway have their "front" facing the highway. To ensure a consistent landscaped setback along the highway and to encourage the retention of existing mature trees along the highway, add a 25-foot landscaping setback from Highway 93 South specific to the WB-2 Secondary Business zoning district between East 13th Street and the Highway 40 intersection.
	<b>Petition and Encourage Flathead County to develop a zoning compliance permit. p. 94</b>	City-County	Flathead County has limited ability and staff resources available to enforce and ensure compliance with its development standards. The City should petition or otherwise encourage the County to develop a zoning compliance permit as a tool to improve compliance in the Highway Overlay Zone. The extent of commercial zoning along Highway 93 south of Whitefish should not be expanded.
	<b>Avenue in Segment A and on Highway 93 South in Segment B.</b>	City-MDT	For Montana Department of Transportation to consider reducing speed limits through the corridor, the City should formally request a speed study be conducted on Highway 93 South between Highway 40 and Greenwood Drive and on Spokane Avenue between the Whitefish River and East 6th Street.
	<b>Consider speed limit reduction on Highway 93 South in Segment C.</b>	City-County-MDT	Since Segment C is outside of City limits, Flathead County must request a speed study be conducted by Montana Department of Transportation south of the Highway 40 intersection. The City should ask the County to make this request.
"Dependent on, and only if City policy changes with regards to the urban growth	<b>Create a highway transition zoning district.</b>	City	To ensure properties at the entrance to Whitefish that annex into the City in the future are developed in a manner consistent with the community's vision for Segment C, and to better buffer adjacent residential properties from negative impacts, a new transitional zoning district should be created to apply to annexations in areas currently zoned by the County as Secondary Business. Traffic intensive uses should be moved from permitted to conditional uses. In the interim, developers petitioning for annexation of commercial properties should be encouraged to use the Planned Unit Development process or propose conditional zoning for the property consistent with the community's vision for the gateway to Whitefish.
"In tandem with development of a new zone, overlay, or sub-district for downtown as recommended by the Downtown Business	<b>Amend annexation policy.</b>	City	Amend the annexation policy to encourage owners or developers of County zoned commercial property who petition for annexation to use the Planned Unit Development process or propose conditional or transitional zoning for the property to be consistent with the community's vision for the gateway entrance to Whitefish.
	<b>Develop new transitional zone, overlay, or sub-district within Secondary Business district for Segment A.</b>	City	To account for character differences due to smaller lot sizes, narrower road right-of-way, slower vehicle speeds, proximity to the river, downtown, and direct adjacency to a residential neighborhood, the development standards in Segment A should be differentiated from those in the remainder of the WB-2 Secondary Business zoning district.
	<b>Oppose expansion of commercial zoning in Segment C</b>	City	To be consistent with the City's vision for this segment of the corridor, all future commercial and light industrial development must be limited to properties currently zoned Secondary Business and Business Service District. The City will oppose any expansion or parcel-by-parcel creep of the commercial zoning districts beyond current limits.

Ongoing	<b>Segment C inconsistent with the City's vision for this segment of the corridor or with the goals, policies, and statements of the Flathead County Growth Policy; support those which are consistent</b>	City	The vision for Segment C includes better buffering of commercial uses, use of commercial building materials that blend well with natural surroundings, and commercial uses that do not generate frequent vehicle trips. The Flathead County Growth Policy has many goals and policies related to development in the Highway 93 South corridor south of City limits including consideration of scenic resources, community character, existing neighborhood plans, traffic safety and flow, and the geographic, cultural, and historic heritage of the City.
two to three years	<b>Establish a continuous count station to collect traffic data specific to Whitefish</b>	City-MDT	The closest Montana Department of Transportation continuous count station is on Highway 2 east of Columbia Falls, which does not adequately capture the traffic volumes and patterns unique to Whitefish. The City will request and encourage Montana Department of Transportation to establish a continuous count station closer to Whitefish to capture more relevant traffic data.
	<b>South between Highway 40 and East 13th Street</b>	City-MDT	To improve night-time visibility on the highway, the City will request that Montana Department of Transportation improve delineation of the driving lanes through Segment B. This may involve more frequent painting of lines, installation of recessed reflectors, or some
	<b>93 South between East 13th Street and the Highway 40 intersection.</b>	City-MDT	Using Abelin's conceptual median plan as a starting point, the City should work with Montana Department of Transportation to develop a median installation plan to provide access management for the Highway 93 south corridor. The intent is to move towards a shovel-ready project that could advance as sufficient funding opportunities arise.
two to five years	<b>Develop frequently spaced bus pull-outs and shelters with hop on/hop off bus service within and between segment B and downtown</b>	Public-Private Partnership	A future on-demand bus service, Flathead County's Mountain Climber, will provide transit between the corridor and downtown. The City should continue to work with transit providers, whether publicly or privately funded, and Montana Department of Transportation to locate and develop bus pull-outs and shelters along Segment B and to establish and/or expand hop on/hop off bus service within and between Segment B and downtown.
	<b>Increase the frequency of Adopt-a-Highway litter pick-up efforts (April – October) along Highway 93 South.</b>	Public-Private Partnership	Montana Department of Transportation has an Adopt-a-Highway program that connects volunteer groups with litter pick-up efforts on their transportation corridors. While there is already an organization volunteering to pick up litter along the Highway 93 South corridor, efforts have been limited to a one-time event in the spring. The City should work with Montana Department of Transportation, corridor businesses or business associations, volunteer organizations, and interested individuals to increase the frequency of litter pick-up along the highway.
Two to five years for Canoe Park; Five to ten years for trail development contingent on replacement of Spokane Avenue	<b>Further develop Whitefish River Trail and Canoe Park to be more accessible</b>	City	To improve access to and visibility of the Whitefish River in Segment A, both the trail along the river and Canoe Park that provides public access to the river could both be further developed.
	<b>cross section to improve capacity, reduce demand, and improve aesthetics.</b>	City-MDT	As part of any Spokane Avenue improvement project, the City will work with Montana Department of Transportation to achieve the community vision for Segment A. The cross section should include protected bike lanes, continuous sidewalks on both sides of the roadway, more frequent and safer pedestrian crossing opportunities, pedestrian-scale lighting, decorative highway lighting, and more trees and landscaping in boulevards. A project is needed in the relative near term to address a leaking City water main and poor quality road surface.
	<b>Extend East 7th Street from Spokane Avenue to Kalispell Avenue.</b>	City-MDT	To any Montana Department of Transportation reconstruction project on Spokane Avenue, the City will add a project to extend East 7th Street from Spokane Avenue to Kalispell Avenue.
	<b>Replace Spokane Avenue culverts with a bridge on Spokane Avenue.</b>	City-MDT	As part of any Spokane Avenue improvement project, the City of Whitefish will request Montana Department of Transportation remove the culverts under Spokane Avenue and replace with a bridge. The bridge and any new or widened bridge in the corridor should be designed attractively as a gateway entrance to downtown Whitefish compatible with adjacent neighborhoods. Bridges should accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists over the river, as well as extension of the Whitefish River trail under the bridge. Bridges should facilitate views of and access to the river and accommodate seasonal flowers or landscaping.
Five to ten years	<b>Design and construct a Highway 93 South cross section between East 13th Street and Highway 40 to increase safety, improve capacity, reduce demand, and improve aesthetics.</b>	City-MDT	As part of any Highway 93 South improvement project, the City will work with Montana Department of Transportation to achieve the community vision for the segment. Improvements should include a raised, landscaped center median, protected bike lanes, more frequent and safer pedestrian crossings, transit pull-outs and shelters, combined access drives, more trees and landscaping in the boulevard, pedestrian-scale lighting, and decorative highway lighting. Traffic volumes in the near future may trigger installation of a raised median, which would be the impetus for more comprehensive improvements.
	<b>Construct intersection improvements on East 13th Street at Baker Avenue and at Highway 93</b>	City-MDT	As part of any Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 South or Baker Avenue improvement project, the City will work with Montana Department of Transportation to improve the function of East 13th Street intersections. Preliminary traffic simulations indicate the addition of a second southbound lane on Highway 93 South at East 13th Street would improve the Level of Service at that intersection. Improvements at the intersection of East 13th Street and Baker Avenue might include signalization or installation of a roundabout.

	<p><b>Improve intersection safety at Blanchard Lake Road and the entrances to North Valley Hospital.</b></p> <p><b>Create park-and-ride lot(s) near Highway 93 South/ Highway 40 intersection.</b></p> <p><b>Develop a separated shared-use path, park-and-ride lot(s), and bus stops along the highway in Segment C.</b></p>	<p>City-County-MDT</p> <p>City-County-MDT</p> <p>City-County-MDT</p>	<p>The City will encourage Montana Department of Transportation to improve intersection safety at the entrance to North Valley Hospital from Highway 93 South and Highway 40, as well as at Blanchard Lake Road. The City will request Montana Department of Transportation consider installation of acceleration and deceleration lanes on Highway 93 south of Highway 40 at intersections where warranted.</p> <p>The City will identify existing parking lots with potential for part-time use as park-and-ride lots and request Montana Department of Transportation consider new park-and-ride lots near the Highway 93 South and Highway 40 intersection as part of any highway improvement project. For example, large parking lots associated with churches in the area could potentially provide part-time public park-and-ride use during times and days when they are otherwise vacant.</p> <p>The Highway 93 South corridor south of City limits is under the jurisdiction of Flathead County and Montana Department of Transportation. The City should work with the County and Montana Department of Transportation to develop a separated shared-use path, park-and-ride lot(s), and bus stops in Segment C. In addition to identifying a funding source for these facilities, the City and County should develop a joint operation and maintenance agreement for the shared-use path with Montana Department of Transportation. The City should also work with transit providers to increase service.</p>
<p>Ten to twenty years</p>	<p><b>Designate Baker Avenue between East 13th and East 2nd Streets as the truck route through downtown Whitefish.</b></p> <p><b>Consider roundabout at Highway 93 South and Highway 40 intersection.</b></p>	<p>City-MDT</p> <p>City-County-MDT</p>	<p>As part of any Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 South improvement project, the City will work with Montana Department of Transportation to designate Baker Avenue as the truck route through downtown Whitefish, while mitigating potential impacts to existing uses. Road widening to accommodate truck traffic may require acquisition of right-of-way, a process that will likely add years to the timeline.</p> <p>Initial traffic modelling suggests installation of a roundabout at the Highway 93 South/Highway 40 intersection will improve Level of Service. As part of any Highway 93 South or Highway 40 improvement project, Montana Department of Transportation will consider and analyze the effect of replacing the existing signal with a roundabout. The City supports and encourages this consideration and analysis.</p>