



Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

DRAFT Meeting #27 Minutes

June 7, 2021

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

In Attendance:

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

Staff: Dave Taylor, Hilary Lindh

Public: Mayre Flowers

A. Meeting called to order at 2:03 pm

B. **Approved May 3, 2021 meeting minutes** - with referenced comments from Citizens for a Better Flathead attached

C. Review Responses to May Comments and Revisions to Draft Plan

Hilary went through revisions to the draft plan responding to committee and public comments made at the May steering committee meeting. The following topics were discussed:

Front setbacks for Segment B. The committee reviewed setbacks used in other western mountain communities and the City Attorney's response regarding the potential for variable setbacks. The committee was satisfied with an increased setback from the highway of 30-feet with a caveat added for smaller lots. For example, Kalispell makes exceptions for lots when the required setback covers 10% or more of the gross lot area. The actual text amendment to the zoning code changing the setback will be brought to the public for consideration as part of implementing the plan, once adopted.

Hand sketches on page 74 replaced with photos. The sketches were deleted and replaced with a photo showing the type of strip mall that Whitefish does not want to see developed in the corridor in contrast to another showing an existing multi-tenant development on Wisconsin Avenue that better represents the Whitefish character. The committee was satisfied with the change.

Effect of Mountain Mall on downtown. At the May meeting, the committee asked that the language used to describe the devastating effect the opening of Mountain Mall had on downtown Whitefish be strengthened. The committee was satisfied with the change made on page 13.

Restructure plan. Public comment in May included a suggestion to reorganize the plan so all content relating to one segment be in one location, followed by all the content related to a different segment. The committee saw the value in reorganizing but also agreed it works as it is and did not support a change.

Revision of Segment A and Segment B renderings. When the renderings were first introduced in August 2020, the committee asked for revisions to better reflect the vision for the corridor. The Segment A rendering now focuses on a bridge concept on Spokane Avenue in place of the existing culverts that would act as a gateway to the downtown. The Segment B rendering includes more green spaces and less development than the first version. The committee was satisfied with both new renderings.

Previous public comment. The committee discussed earlier public and committee comments including a request for an external technical review of the plan before a public review draft is released. Marilyn shares these concerns, which she also stated in April and May. Steve and June spoke in favor of moving forward with the draft as is. Marilyn suggested and the committee agreed with the need to add a one-two page summary or list of key projects up front that calls out the most important tasks for the community to focus on when implementing the plan. Steve made a motion, and John seconded the motion, to approve the draft and move forward with a public review draft of the plan with the addition of an executive summary and agreed upon minor administrative changes (correction of typos, etc.). The committee took public comment (below) and then voted 5-1 to approve the motion (Marilyn voted against the motion).

D. Public Comments

Mayre Flowers emailed comments to the committee on behalf of Citizens for a Better Flathead just before the meeting was held (attached). She thought the plan deficient in concrete solutions and out-of-the-box solutions. She asked if Council would be empowered by the actions recommended in the plan, or if they would still be reactive. She stated concurrency is important in managing growth and she did not think the plan addressed it, or the mitigation that should be required for new development. She had concerns about the Transportation Plan update currently underway in Whitefish based on what the consultant said about the Kalispell Transportation Plan and its lack of coordination with, or consideration of, the Kalispell Downtown Master Plan. Mayre also had concerns about lack of money in the Capital Improvement Plan for expanding the road network to relieve traffic congestion. She thought the committee should wait until at least the June 21 City Council meeting when an amendment to the Extension of Services Plan and revision of the Urban Growth Boundary south of City limits is being considered.

E. Next Steps

With the vote to move forward with a public review draft, the committee is set to absolve. Staff will summarize the outcome of the meeting for the remaining committee members and provide a schedule of public meetings, public hearings, and work sessions where the draft plan will be presented and considered for adoption. The draft plan will be briefly introduced to the Planning Board on June 17 with a work session and public open house anticipated for July 15. Participation at these events by steering committee members is requested and encouraged, but not required.

F. Adjournment – 3:10 pm



To: Highway 93 S Corridor Plan Steering Committee
Re: Whitefish Hwy 93 Corridor Plan
6-7-2021

“The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them.”
- **Albert Einstein**, scientist (1879-1955)

The quote above appears in the Downtown Kalispell Plan vision section adopted by the City of Kalispell in 2017. (<https://www.kalispell.com/168/Downtown-Plan>) we share this quote with you today, because we think it suggests a question that I think must be central to the direction you choose to take in finalizing your work on the Highway 93 S Corridor Plan. That question is: Does the Draft Highway 93 S Corridor Plan, at this stage in its development represent new thinking and a fresh and clear vision for how growth in this corridor should proceed over the next twenty years? As a committee have you gone the extra mile in inviting in different perspectives to help you evaluate the work you and the planning staff have done since early 2018 to identify policies and goals that can effectively guide the rapid growth the city is facing and honor the vision that the public has for how Whitefish should grow?

Several recent events suggest, we believe, that your work here is not yet done. The first of these is the fact that while this current draft plan as well as other city policies call for not supporting the extension of city services south, this question of extending city services all the way to Blanchard Lake Rd intersection with Hwy 93 is now squarely before the City Council on June 21st. This corridor plan sadly will not inform that decision, because it has mostly side-stepped the critical debate of the pros and cons of such a change in policy and perhaps most importantly has failed to take advantage of outside expertise of planners who work around the northwest or country to challenge us with new and more comprehensive solutions.

The second event of concern comes out of the recent presentation of the findings of the new Kalispell Transportation Plan (<https://kalispellmove2040.com/resources/>); a plan being prepared by KJL Engineering, the same consultant the City of Whitefish and Columbia Falls has contracted with for their transportation plans. At the end of that zoom presentation I asked the transportation consultant Wade Kline how the findings and conclusions of the transportation plan supported the Kalispell Downtown plan adopted by the city in 2017 with significant public input, and what tools would be used to address the projected 85% increase in VMT (vehicle miles traveled) that his study found would occur in and around Kalispell. His response was short and to us alarming. He said that it was his feeling that the City of Kalispell could no longer move forward with its downtown plan goals and would have to revisit them and make changes and that the study did not address strategies to reduce VMT other than the fact that Kalispell already has a bike and pedestrian plan. This is not a good outcome for Kalispell, nor would it be for Whitefish. The adopted downtown plans for both these cities should be a given that a new

transportation plan model is formulated to support, not undermine! Simply calling for new roads and new road lanes to address increases in traffic is old school thinking as pointed out in numerous transportation articles of late in anticipation of the federal government passing a new infrastructure bill and funding for infrastructure improvements. See for example <https://archive.curbed.com/2020/3/6/21166655/highway-traffic-congestion-induced-demand> and https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/05/23/highway-funding-infrastructure/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most&carta-url=https%3A%2F%2Fs2.washingtonpost.com%2Fcar-ln-tr%2F32a8fdf%2F60abd1549d2fdae3025df6f7%2F5c71c4f89bbc0f6149a661c2%2F41%2F70%2F60abd1549d2fdae3025df6f7

As a committee we challenge you to take the necessary steps to:

1. Make certain that the current ongoing development of the Whitefish Transportation Plan (which we were told at the Kalispell hearing is due for first draft in Jan. 2022) clearly calls for a plan that supports the Whitefish Downtown Plan and demonstrates tools and policies to reduce VMT. As we have been told that the new transportation plan will take guidance from the Highway 93 S Corridor Plan, it is critical that the Highway 93 S Corridor Plan call for the plan to support the Whitefish Downtown Plan and to provide a menu of tools and policies to not merely accommodate new traffic demand but to effectively reduce VMT in and around the City of Whitefish.
2. Answer the following questions and if your answer isn't a resounding yes—insist on the city investing in an expert review of the current draft Highway 93 S Corridor Plan to identify where it can be enhanced. Given that the stated purpose of the Highway 93 S Corridor Plan is “to propose more specific policies for land use, development, and growth at the southern entrance to Whitefish as an addendum to the Whitefish City-County Growth Policy,” **can you identify the top half dozens new policy solutions that the current draft plan proposes and why they excite you?**

While the valuable work done to date on this plan documents numerous important issues, we feel it falls seriously short on providing substantial new policy directives and solutions to guide critical issues such as should the city extend services now to Blanchard Lake Rd., or how can the city best plan and put in place now policies to secure funding for completing a road network to relieve the already at capacity congestion on Hwy 93 S; or are the landscaping, open space, parkland, and housing policies, median and roundabout goals in this plan supported by clear policies that will not leave the city council feeling that it does not have the policies or tools to insure compliance when the next development proposal is put forward?

Finally, while the minutes reference our comments at your May 3rd meeting, they are not attached as the minutes state they are. Additionally, the issues/concerns we ask you to consider, including the need for criteria specific to Hwy 93 S to ensure that the city's growth policy's concurrency policies and goals are met in the Hwy 93 Corridor, or the troublesome timeline for implementation of the plans goals, are not addressed in your minutes, so it is not clear if they were considered.