Highway 93 South Corridor Plan

Steering Committee
Mayor John Muhlfeld
Councilor Ryan Hennen
June Hanson, Chair
Mark Pascoli, Vice-Chair
Marilyn Nelson
Roger Sherman
Justin Lawrence
Steve Kane (Appointed May 2019)
Scott Freudenberger, Planning Board Representative (Appointed August 2020)
Lisa Post (Resigned March 2019)
John Middleton, Planning Board Representative (Resigned July 2020)

City Council
Mayor John Muhlfeld
Ryan Hennen
Andy Feury
Frank Sweeney
Steve Qunell
Rebecca Norton
Ben Davis (Appointed May 2020)
Katie Williams (Term ended December 2019)
Richard Hildner (Term ended December 2019)
Melissa Hartman (Resigned April 2020)

City Staff
Dave Taylor, AICP, Planning & Building Director
Hilary Lindh, AICP, Long Range Planner
Matt Trebesch, GIS Coordinator

Consultants
GSBS Consulting - Economic Analysis
Salt Lake City, UT
Abelin Traffic Solutions, Inc. - Traffic Analysis
Helena, MT
Cushing Terrell - Perspective Renderings
Kalispell, MT

On the Cover
Photo courtesy of Chuck Haney
http://www.chuckhaney.com
0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

0.1 Corridor Plan Goals

The Highway 93 South Corridor Plan envisions a corridor representative of the Whitefish character with abundant green spaces dominated by views of surrounding mountain ranges and the Whitefish River. It should be a walkable and bikeable corridor with a variety of uses and services available. Many members of the community expressed something like this statement made by a participant in the online survey:

“Keep the small-town feel.”

Early in the public involvement process the themes shown above emerged to shape the vision, goals, and objectives found in this plan.

The planning area for the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan is linear and follows Highway 93 between East 6th Street in Whitefish and about a mile and a half south of City limits in Flathead County. It includes the highway right-of-way, a National Highway System facility for which improvements require coordination with Montana Department of Transportation, and private lands under the jurisdiction of the City of Whitefish or Flathead County. Parcel size and land uses vary along the corridor, resulting in a distinct character within three different segments:

Segment A includes the northern end of the corridor between East 6th Street and the Whitefish River. It has relatively low vehicle speeds, small lot sizes, and small buildings, with some commercial uses in converted...
residential structures. Some residential uses remain.

Key concepts introduced in the corridor plan address Land Use, Transportation, and the Environment and Open Space by segment.

**Segment A Land Use goals include the following:**
- Establish a theme for Segment A to indicate the entrance to the downtown business core two blocks north and the transitional nature of the segment between highway commercial, surrounding residential, and downtown.
- Revise the sign district along Baker Avenue to be consistent with speed limits.
- Encourage commercial and mixed-use development appropriate to the scale and transitional nature of the segment.

**Segment A has the following Transportation goals:**
- Improve safety and capacity, decrease demand, and improve aesthetics of the road right-of-way in Segment A.
- Promote bike and pedestrian facilities as valid and valued modes of transportation in equal standing with vehicle facilities.
- Replace the Whitefish River culverts with a bridge designed to serve as a transition or entrance to downtown Whitefish.
- Connect fragmented sections of Whitefish River Trail within corridor.

**Environment and Open Space goals in Segment A include:**
- Highlight the multiple values of and provide
Intersection. The parcels are relatively large, with large commercial buildings, large parking lots, and some multi-family residential and undeveloped parcels at the outer edges.

Land Use goals in Segment B include:
- Improve the visual character of the built environment in Segment B.
- Improve compatibility of adjacent land uses in Segment B.
- Encourage development and businesses in Segment B to help diversify the economy of Whitefish, provide higher wages and salaries, and support existing and new housing and employment.

The following are the Transportation goals for Segment B:
- Improve traffic flow and safety through Segment B while also improving aesthetics of the road right-of-way.
- Improve opportunities and experiences for bicycling, walking, carpooling, and transit in Segment B.

In Segment B the Environment and Open Space goals include:
- Increase opportunities for public access to natural areas and green space in Segment B.
- Improve environment of the road right-of-way in Segment B.
- Review requirements for commercial landscaping to use a mix of primarily native species with minimal watering requirements to reduce need for irrigation and support the City’s water conservation ordinance.

Segment B extends south from the Whitefish River to City limits near the Highway 40 intersection. The parcels are relatively large, with large commercial buildings, large parking lots, and some multi-family residential and undeveloped parcels at the outer edges.

Vision: Segment B will maintain its unique character as a commercial corridor and include a diversity of businesses. Land uses will continue to be primarily commercial but will not appear as a monotonous or continuous strip. Intense uses will be focused around key intersections with less intense uses and open spaces in between those intersections. The corridor will accommodate bicycles, pedestrians, and transit as well as vehicles. Traversing the corridor for all users will be more enjoyable because there will be abundant green space, trees and landscaping with shade, views of the mountains, enhanced pedestrian crossing opportunities, appropriately scaled decorative street lighting, landscaped medians, and an interesting built environment. The Whitefish River will be accessible, and the Whitefish River Trail will be continuous and connected to a protected bike lane along the highway. Additionally, traffic will be better managed because there will be multiple routes to get through the corridor, and the number of highway accesses will be reduced. Transit will be available and convenient.

Segment B extends south from the Whitefish River to City limits near the Highway 40 intersection. The parcels are relatively large, with large commercial buildings, large parking lots, and some multi-family residential and undeveloped parcels at the outer edges.

Land Use goals in Segment B include:
- Improve the visual character of the built environment in Segment B.
- Improve compatibility of adjacent land uses in Segment B.
- Encourage development and businesses in Segment B to help diversify the economy of Whitefish, provide higher wages and salaries, and support existing and new housing and employment.

The following are the Transportation goals for Segment B:
- Improve traffic flow and safety through Segment B while also improving aesthetics of the road right-of-way.
- Improve opportunities and experiences for bicycling, walking, carpooling, and transit in Segment B.

In Segment B the Environment and Open Space goals include:
- Increase opportunities for public access to natural areas and green space in Segment B.
- Improve environment of the road right-of-way in Segment B.
- Review requirements for commercial landscaping to use a mix of primarily native species with minimal watering requirements to reduce need for irrigation and support the City’s water conservation ordinance.

Segment C extends from City limits near the Highway 40 intersection south for about one and a half miles to the southern edge of the Growth Policy’s Future Land Use map boundary. It is within the jurisdiction of
Flathead County and is a combination of commercial uses lining the highway with residential uses behind, transitioning to residential and agricultural uses further south.

**Segment C Land Use goals include the following:**

- Encourage Flathead County to enforce zoning, Highway Overlay design, and sign standards for commercial development in Segment C.
- Discourage land uses in Segment C outside of Whitefish City limits inconsistent with the community’s vision for the segment or with the goals, policies, and statements in the 2012 Flathead County Growth Policy. Support consistent land uses.
- Limit future commercial and light industrial development to properties currently zoned Secondary Business and Business Service District.
- Foster joint planning between the City and Flathead County.
- Ensure any properties annexed into the City in the future are developed in a manner consistent with the community’s vision for the gateway segment of the corridor.
- Prioritize infill within City over commercial development in the County.
- Bring non-conforming and off-premises signs and billboards into compliance.

**Segment C Transportation goals include the following:**

- Improve traffic safety through Segment C including improving intersection safety and potentially reducing speed.
- Improve opportunities and experiences for bicyclists, pedestrians, car-poolers, and transit users in Segment C.

**Segment C includes the following Environment and Open Space goals:**

- Preserve forested and open spaces to help maintain the rural feel of the segment.
- Protect water quality.
- Minimize need for irrigation in corridor landscaping.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Goals Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Use Actions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoning Changes:</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>Planning Department</td>
<td>A.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• landscaping standards,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• parking standards,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sign districts,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• outdoor storage screening standards for light assembly and manufacturing,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Special Provisions for Lots,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• WB-2 zoning district setbacks along highway frontage,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• architectural review standards for multi-tenant commercial buildings,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• new zone, overlay, or sub-district in Segment A,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• new transitional zone in Segment C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition and encourage Flathead County to develop a zoning compliance permit</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>City and County Elected Officials and Planning Directors</td>
<td>C.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annexation Policy Development</td>
<td>Within 1 year</td>
<td>Planning Department, City Council</td>
<td>C.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose expansion of commercial zoning and discourage projects inconsistent with the community vision for Segment C</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Elected Officials and Planning Director</td>
<td>C.2, C.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster dialogue and coordinate planning between City of Whitefish, City of Columbia Falls, City of Kalispell, and Flathead County</td>
<td>Initiate within 1 year of plan adoption and continue relationship building</td>
<td>City and County Elected Officials and Planning Directors</td>
<td>C.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transportation Actions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider Speed Reductions - all segments</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
<td>A.4, B.4, C.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a continuous count station to collect Whitefish-specific traffic data</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
<td>B.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better delineate driving lanes with recessed reflectors, more frequent line painting, or some other method</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
<td>B.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a plan for a shovel-ready project to seek federal grants for Highway 93 improvements between 13th Street and Highway 40 intersections</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department and Parks Department, in coordination with Montana Department of Transportation</td>
<td>B.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Raised, landscaped median plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protected bike lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safer and more frequent pedestrian crossings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transit pull-outs and shelters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More trees and landscaping in the boulevard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pedestrian-scale lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decorative highway lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a plan with which to seek federal grants for frequently spaced bus pull-outs and shelters with hop on/hop off bus service within and between Segment B and downtown</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department in coordination with Montana Department of Transportation</td>
<td>B.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Transportation Actions Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Responsible Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a separated shared-use path and create park-and-ride lots and bus stops in Segment C</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Flathead County, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Intersection Safety and Level of Service</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 13th Street at Highway 93 and at Baker Avenue</td>
<td></td>
<td>B.4 C.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Entrances/Exits North Valley Hospital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Highway 40 - consider roundabout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Blanchard Lake Road – add acceleration and deceleration lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replace Whitefish River culverts with new bridge on Spokane Avenue</td>
<td>8-15 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Parks Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gateway entrance design</td>
<td></td>
<td>A.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pedestrian and bicycle accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Connect Whitefish River Trail under bridge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- River visibility, accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new cross section and reconstruct Spokane Avenue</td>
<td>8-15 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Parks Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Protected bike lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td>A.4 A.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Continuous sidewalks on both sides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More frequent and safer pedestrian crossings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pedestrian-scale lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More trees in boulevard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decorative highway lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend East 7th Street between Spokane Avenue and Kalispell Avenue as part of any project to improve Spokane Avenue</td>
<td>8-15 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department in coordination with Montana Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designate Baker Avenue as an alternative truck route through downtown Whitefish</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>Public Works Department, Montana Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Environment and Open Space Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Responsible Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase frequency of Adopt-a-Highway litter pick-up</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Planning Department and Parks Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further develop Whitefish River Trail and Canoe Park to be more accessible to public.</td>
<td>2-5 years for park, 5-10 years for trail, dependent on Spokane Ave bridge</td>
<td>Parks Department and Public Works Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire property or obtain permanent easements along Whitefish River and around the Highway 40 intersection</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Elected Officials in partnership with Land Trusts and Philanthropists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Responsible Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquire property or obtain permanent easements along Whitefish River and around the Highway 40 intersection</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Elected Officials in partnership with Land Trusts and Philanthropists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Environment and Open Space Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Responsible Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase frequency of Adopt-a-Highway litter pick-up</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Planning Department and Parks Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further develop Whitefish River Trail and Canoe Park to be more accessible to public.</td>
<td>2-5 years for park, 5-10 years for trail, dependent on Spokane Ave bridge</td>
<td>Parks Department and Public Works Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire property or obtain permanent easements along Whitefish River and around the Highway 40 intersection</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Elected Officials in partnership with Land Trusts and Philanthropists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.0 Introduction and Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Highway 93 South 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, which was prepared under the authority of and in accordance with Part 6, Chapter 1, Title 76, Montana Code Annotated. The Growth Policy called for the City to facilitate plans for all major transportation corridors to address land use, transportation function and modes, noise, screening, landscaping, and all aspects of urban design.” The Highway 93 West Corridor Plan (2015) and the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan (2018) are complete. Work on the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan began in 2018.

The Growth Policy recognized the complex nature of the issues plaguing the Highway 93 South corridor. It specifically called for the creation of a corridor plan to successfully address commercial growth, scale, architectural standards, landscaping/screening, utilities, trip generation, traffic safety, circulation, access, and bike/pedestrian facilities.

The Growth Policy also included a goal to diversify the local base economy with compatible business and industries to protect the character and qualities of Whitefish. As the 2016 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment documented, the tourism/visitor sector dominance of the economy contributes to the current scenario in which many service workers and even professionals do not earn wages and salaries that keep pace with the cost of living in Whitefish. As a result, many employees in Whitefish must live in other communities and commute for work. The Highway 93 South corridor, due to its zoning and ample land area, provides many opportunities for economic growth and diversity, as well as affordable housing.

Highway 93 South, also known as US Highway 93, is a National Highway System facility. Any proposed improvements in the highway right-
of-way will require coordination with Montana Department of Transportation. Locally funded improvements of the facility will require coordination with the Systems Impact Analysis Section, in particular.

As one approaches the City of Whitefish from the south on Highway 93 and begins to descend from Happy Valley, a panorama of Big Mountain and the Whitefish Mountain Resort Ski Area unfolds and dominates the view. Before entering the City limits, the highway frontage varies between residential farms, nurseries, mini-storage, professional offices, and a boat sales facility. Traffic runs at highway speeds and access to commercial properties is challenging. Approaching the major intersection with Highway 40, the backdrop on the horizon is dramatic, with the Whitefish Range, the Columbia Range, and spires from Glacier National Park vying for your attention. This is the gateway to Whitefish, and the first impression of many visitors. The speed drops to 45 mph with five lanes of often heavy traffic, including a center two-way left-turn lane, often called a “suicide lane” due to the perceived risk of using it. Grass boulevards with smatterings of landscaping line the sides of the highway, with narrow sidewalks providing pedestrian access. On the right are North Valley Hospital and the Smith athletic fields, just out of view and obscured by green space. Commercial businesses such as car dealers, building supplies, and grocery stores are separated from the highway by large parking lots, often with minimal landscaping. Behind the commercial highway frontage, townhouses, multi-family apartments, and several hotels peek out. Further along are several large vacant parcels and a dilapidated building ripe for redevelopment. Highway 93 then further slows to 35 mph and crosses the Whitefish River, which is hidden in culverts and difficult to see from the road. There the highway narrows into two-lane Spokane Avenue, traffic speed slows down to 25 mph, and the scale of buildings fronting the road tapers into smaller businesses and then into historic homes, many retrofitted into commercial offices. That is the Highway 93 South Corridor, and this plan will outline how it should grow and redevelop over the next twenty years.
1.1 Planning Area and Segments

The planning area for the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan is linear and follows Highway 93 between East 6th Street in Whitefish and the 2007 Growth Policy southern planning boundary, approximately one and a half miles south of the City. The boundary generally includes property, commercial development, or neighborhoods that front on, or are directly affected by Highway 93 South and Baker Avenue. Zoning is primarily comprised of the Secondary Business District. The east side of the corridor is generally bounded by the Whitefish River between the highway river crossing and JP Road. The west side is defined by the City/County boundary between West 13th Street and just south of Great Northern Drive. South of JP Road and Great Northern Drive, the east and west boundary is generally defined by the section line. On the north end of the corridor, the study area includes one and a half blocks east of the highway. The western boundary encompasses Baker Avenue and the parcels within a half block fronting Baker Avenue.

Parcel size and land use vary along the corridor, resulting in a distinct character within three different segments:

- **Segment A** at the north end of the corridor between East 6th Street and the Whitefish River has smaller lot sizes with commercial uses in relatively small buildings, some of which are converted single-family residences. Some residential uses remain.

- **Segment B** extends south from the Whitefish River to City limits near the Highway 40 intersection. The parcels are relatively large, with large commercial buildings, large parking lots, and some multi-family residential and undeveloped parcels at the outer edges.

- **Segment C** extends from City limits near the Highway 40 intersection south for about one and a half miles to the southern edge of the Growth Policy’s Future Land Use map boundary. It is within the jurisdiction of Flathead County and is a combination of commercial uses lining the highway with residential uses behind, transitioning to residential and agricultural uses further south.
1.2 Planning Process

Steering Committee
On February 20, 2018, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 18-09, creating the Highway 93 South Steering Committee. The Committee first met in May 2018 and the duration of the Committee was extended several times by resolution for a total of approximately three and one-half years. The Committee was made up of corridor business owners, residents, and appointed and elected officials. It generally met monthly to work with Planning staff to oversee development of the corridor plan and establish policy for the corridor planning area. Committee members also assisted with public outreach and visioning sessions.

Plan Process
The plan followed the processes shown right as it developed:

Task 1 – Inventory of Existing Conditions
Growth policies, land use, and transportation plans were reviewed for relevance to this plan. The following existing conditions were also inventoried:
- Population;
- Socio-economic characteristics;
- Highway and street circulation and facilities;
- Non-motorized circulation and facilities;
- Existing land uses, future land use designations and zoning;
- Land ownership, including public lands; and
- Parks and cultural resources.

The inventory of existing conditions is found in Chapter 3 of this plan.

Task 2 – Develop Public Involvement Process
The public involvement process included facilitating a Steering Committee, holding Steering Committee meetings, public meetings, and deploying an online survey. Public involvement is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Planning staff and the Steering Committee met between May 2018 and June 2021 where public input and participation was invited and noted. A public open house was held September 5, 2018, to provide an opportunity to learn about the project and provide feedback. A second public meeting was held January 8, 2019, and was a workshop style meeting where public feedback helped craft the vision for the corridor. An online survey was also developed.
A notice in the Whitefish Pilot invited the community to an open house meeting.

“Parking and safe foot travel are issues for this segment (A)” - survey response.

**Task 3 – Vision for Corridor Future**
As part of the visioning task, input from Steering Committee, public visioning workshop, and online survey were used to determine appropriate future land uses, transportation improvements, and goals for the environment and open space in the corridor. At the visioning workshop, groups of participants were asked to describe their best version of the corridor in the future. The 21-question online survey provided comprehensive feedback on community preferences for land use, the function of the transportation facilities, the environment, and open spaces by segment. The input was used to craft a statement about the desired future condition of the corridor and its segments. Additional information describing the visioning process is included in Chapter 3.

**Task 4 - Establish Plan Elements**
Based on the vision for the corridor, goals and objectives were set for each of the three corridor segments (Chapter 6). Guidelines were developed to address land use, scale, architecture, building and parking orientation, landscaping, urban design, transportation function and modes. The following elements are addressed by segment:

- Land Use;
- Transportation; and
- Environment and Open Space.

**Task 5 – Implementation Activities**
The final task recommended a strategy for achieving the goals and objectives of the plan and realizing the vision of the corridor. Implementation activities include revisions to corridor zoning districts, establishment or revision of development standards for future private development in the corridor, and direction on the public transportation facility and right-of-way. A comprehensive list of implementation activities is found in Chapter 7 Implementation.
Spokane Avenue looking southbound from Riverside Avenue to the culvert crossing of Whitefish River and the East 13th Street traffic signal where two vehicle lanes become five vehicle lanes.
2. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

2.0 Public Involvement Process

The community of Whitefish is the primary stakeholder in how the corridor functions and is used in the future. Public participation was critical in steering the planning process. Community involvement helped identify issues and opportunities within the planning area. It helped formulate the vision for the corridor, and it led to development of specific goals and objectives for the corridor.

2.1 Steering Committee

The Highway 93 South Corridor Plan Steering Committee was appointed by the City Council to be a sounding board for feedback and direction as City Planning staff developed the corridor plan. Each of the Steering Committee meetings were open to the public and provided an opportunity for public comment.

Committee members included the following:

City Council
- Mayor John Muhlfeld
- Ryan Hennen

Planning Board
- John Middleton (resigned July 2020)
- Scott Freudenberger (appointed August 2020)

Business Owners in or Adjacent to the Corridor
- Marilyn Nelson
- Justin Lawrence

Residential Owner-Occupied Property Owners in or Adjacent to the Corridor
- Roger Sherman
- Lisa Post (resigned March 2019)
- Steve Kane (appointed May 2019)

“At Large” City of Whitefish Residents
- June Hanson, Chair
- Mark Pascoli, Vice-Chair

Attendees at the public workshop learn about the planning process and provide feedback to City staff on their vision of the corridor.
2.2 Public Meetings and Survey
A series of public meetings were held and an online survey conducted to gather feedback on the corridor during the planning process. Several themes emerged which served to shape the vision, goals, and objectives for the corridor.

- The corridor is an entrance to town that should better represent what people who live here think of as the Whitefish character.
- The corridor should convey vehicle traffic, bicyclists, and pedestrians in a safe and efficient manner.
- There should be abundant green space, shade trees, protected bike lanes, and other amenities that make it an enjoyable place to bike and walk.
- The Whitefish River should be more visible and accessible.
- The corridor should be a place where businesses serve visitors and residents alike, but without competing with or detracting from the downtown retail core.
- There should be a clear distinction between developed commercial areas within City limits and the more rural and agricultural feel south of the City.

Public Kick-off Open House
The first public meeting was held at the National Parks Realty building on September 5, 2018, and was structured as a public kick-off and open house. Roughly 25 people joined City staff and Steering Committee members to learn about the project and provide feedback. A draft corridor plan boundary was provided, as well as information on existing conditions. The public helped identify issues and opportunities in the corridor. A complete summary of the comments and concerns collected is provided in Appendix A.

Issues identified during the meeting were related to the following:
- Land use: density of development, value of open spaces, commercial and residential uses).
- Transportation: traffic safety in the corridor (speed, congestion, center left-turn lane, left turns onto the highway from Blanchard Lake Road).
- Environmental and Open Space: water quality in Whitefish River, lack of visibility and access to the river.
Over 90% of respondents in an online survey conducted as part of the corridor planning process believe that some improvement to, a lot of improvement to, or a complete overhaul of, the corridor aesthetic is needed. Highway commercial districts serve a useful purpose but often come with the undesirable aspects of commercial strips illustrated in the photo of an unknown town above. This plan is important for developing a community vision for the corridor, setting goals and identifying tools to achieve those goals, and committing to a set of specific actions to make that vision a reality.

Opportunities identified included:
- Transportation: improve flow and safety of traffic (speed reduction, raised medians, roundabouts, intersection improvements, more road connections, reduce highway access, add frontage/backage roads, protected bikeways).
- Land Use: break up strip development with residential uses and areas of more concentrated commercial uses; aesthetics of the corridor (landscaping and entrance enhancements).
- Environmental and Open Space: preserve open spaces/green space; remove culverts conveying Whitefish River under Spokane Avenue and replace with bridge to improve visibility of and access to the river.

Public Visioning Meeting
A visioning meeting was held at the Hampton Inn & Suites on January 8, 2019. Approximately 65 members of the public participated in the meeting, as well as about a dozen City staff and officials. Attendees were broken up into five smaller groups, each with 10 to 14 people. The groups were asked to complete a series of exercises and to present their group’s consensus for each topic. The first exercise focused on the existing conditions in the corridor and asked groups to identify the best three places or features in the corridor. Top features identified were primarily related to the environment and open space, including the view of Big Mountain and views in general, as well as the landscaping or natural vegetation, trees, forest and existing undeveloped areas. Other top features were related to land use and included the variety in the types and sizes of buildings, their setbacks from the highway, and other factors that serve to visually break up the look of the corridor. Additional features identified are included in the visioning summary in Appendix A.
Short presentations were given to provide information on trends Whitefish
is experiencing and anticipated future scenarios regarding population, employment, housing, visitation and traffic. Given this information, the groups were asked to imagine the best-case future for each segment of the corridor. In general, the vision for the whole corridor is as an active and visually interesting place with a mix of land uses that meet the needs of residents. The corridor should accommodate people and alternative modes of transportation, not just single-occupant vehicles, and have abundant trees, landscaping, green space and views. A summary of all components outlined by the groups is provided in the visioning summary in Appendix A.

The final exercise asked the groups about the location and type of future residential units in the corridor. With the clarification that the question was not about whether this should or should not happen, participants were asked if apartments could be built in the corridor in a way that maintains the values they described through the visioning exercise. Each group was given 20 stickers, each representing 25 housing units and a map of a segment of the Corridor showing undeveloped or underdeveloped areas that could potentially be used for housing. The groups placed the stickers on the map where they thought housing could go and indicated the type of housing that would be appropriate. In general, groups located the greatest residential densities closer to downtown rather than further south, and east of the highway rather than west. The groups’ selections are summarized in Appendix A.

Online Survey
The public was also invited to provide feedback on the corridor plan by taking an online survey developed using Survey Monkey. A total of 457 people completed the survey between January 1 and February 15, 2019 and provided information about their preferences for land
use, transportation, environment and open space in the corridor. Regarding land use, over 90% of respondents believe that some improvement to, a lot of improvement to, or a complete overhaul of, the corridor aesthetic is needed. South of City limits, respondents noted the importance of preserving private property rights in their comments while also indicating maintenance of the rural character or feel of the corridor is desirable.

Responses to transportation related questions indicate that most people are opposed to the use of roundabouts in the corridor. About two-thirds of people thought roundabouts should not be considered for installation at signalized intersections. Instead, respondents generally believe new or better-connected bike lanes and routes, improved pedestrian crossings and sidewalks, and alternative parallel routes to downtown would be the most effective measures to take to improve movement through the corridor. More than two-thirds of survey respondents support the concept of replacing the existing center turn lane with a raised median or a mix of raised median with center turn lane.

There were several questions relating to the environment and open space. Most respondents believe it’s very or somewhat important the culverts that convey the Whitefish River under the highway be removed and replaced with a bridge. Additionally, most people support the idea that the City encourage or require preservation of open space or parkland in the corridor.

Complete survey results can be found in Appendix A.

For the first two public meetings and the online survey, a draft corridor planning area was depicted extending south to Blanchard Lake Road, approximately one-half miles from the Highway 40 intersection. This preliminary southern boundary was loosely based on the extent to which City services feasibly could be extended as described in the introduction. However, the draft boundary did not
encompass all the County-zoned Business Service District or the area to which the 2007 Growth Policy designated Future Land Uses. As development of the plan progressed, the southern boundary of the planning corridor area was extended south to the edge of Whitefish’s former planning jurisdiction.

Public Draft Presentation
A public open house was held July 15, 2021 at City Hall to present the draft plan for review and comment. About 25 people attended the event, which was immediately followed by a work session with the Planning Board and a public comment period. There was some concern about the conceptual alignment of a future Baker Avenue extension as it crosses a private road accessing the Park Knoll neighborhood. Residents near Baker Avenue between West 6th and West 8th Streets wanted to make it clear that the neighborhood is residential, not just commercial, and they would be impacted by designating Baker Avenue as the truck route through town. Many people liked the idea of a roundabout at the Highway 40 intersection with Highway 93, but a question about how it would work with traffic signals at every other intersection in the corridor. Planning Board asked that a grade-separated pedestrian crossing along the corridor be considered, and pointed out that any trail connections along the river would require involvement of the Flathead Conservation District. Parks Department has also requested they be included as stakeholders in any efforts to add landscaping, landscaped medians, boulevard trees, trails or parks for which the Parks Department would be responsible for maintaining. Open house media and an excerpt from the minutes of the work session discussion and comments are included in Appendix A.
3. CORRIDOR CONTEXT: EXISTING CONDITIONS

3.0 History

In the early 1900s, Spokane Avenue extended south from downtown to the Whitefish River, where it became Riverside Avenue. A 1907 plat of the neighborhood between East 6th and East 9th Streets (see page opposite) shows a bend in the river originally went as far east as the alley east of Spokane Avenue, indicating extensive fill was used to construct Spokane Avenue in this location. An aerial photo from 1990 indicates how much fill has changed the river channel in this location.

There was no bridge across the river on Spokane Avenue until 1933 when the new State highway first connected Whitefish and Kalispell. It wasn’t until 1967 that land south of the river was brought into city limits. Portions of the old hospital property and Greenwood Terrace properties were annexed that year, and the highway commercial zone was amended to include lands between the river and current city limits.

Following those annexations, the property that became the Mountain Mall and McDonalds was annexed into the City limits in the late 1970s. The mall itself was constructed in 1984 and its opening severely impacted the viability of downtown Whitefish for several years when businesses vacated their spaces to relocate to the mall.

The Highway 93 right-of-way extending to the Highway 40 intersection became part of the City in 1995 and water and sewer mains were extended to the Highway 40 intersection in 2002. The combination of City jurisdiction and services opened the door for a wave of annexations in the corridor in the 1990s as far south as the Les Schwab property, and in the 2000s as far south as the new North Valley Hospital and Great Northern residential subdivision just south of JP Road. Most wholly surrounded properties in the corridor were annexed in 2012.
On Baker Avenue, the first bridge across the river appears to have been constructed in the 1920’s. As recently as 1990, Baker Avenue ended at West 10th Street, which intersected with the highway south of the river (photo page 15). Baker Avenue was eventually extended to 19th Street, and the right-of-way annexed into the City in 1995. The properties along the Baker Avenue extension were added to the Secondary Business (WB-2) zoning district as well as Business Park (WB-4) and some Industrial and Warehousing (WI).

When Highway 93 was first constructed between Kalispell and Whitefish, it was a two-lane highway. There were no signalized intersections in the corridor until about 1995 when 13th Street and Commerce Street (Mountain Mall) were extended west to the Baker Avenue extension. A major 1998 reconstruction project upgraded the highway between Highway 40 and 13th Street to a five-lane highway (two lanes northbound, two lanes southbound, and a center two-way left-turn lane). In 2002 the signal at the Highway 40 intersection was installed. The signal at the JP Road intersection was installed in 2008 following reconstruction of the road on the east side of the highway and extension of the road west to Great Northern Heights.

Zoning along the highway has been Secondary Business since these properties came into the City. Zoning further from the highway has been Single-family Residential on large lots, Suburban Residential, and Agricultural. Development adjacent to the highway has historically and predominantly been auto-oriented commercial with single-family residential located intermittently on large, intact parcels (red parcels on map on page 16 show where a single house per lot was constructed pre-2003). Starting in the mid-2000’s, substantially more single-family and higher density residential housing was added to the corridor closer to the highway. Many residential projects of various densities have been constructed in the last 17 years, including Riverpark, River’s Edge, Riverwood Park, Riverwalk, Great Northern Heights, Whitefish Crossing, Riverview Meadows, and Alta Views.

The Blanchard Lake Zoning District, which encompassed the Highway 93 corridor south of the Highway 40 intersection, was implemented by Flathead County in 1993. Prior to this effort, there was no zoning south of City limits. Once the plan was adopted, the district was zoned Suburban Agricultural (SAG-5) for the first mile south of the intersection and Agricultural (AG-
In 2017 a zoning text amendment was adopted by the County rezoning properties with highway frontage from Suburban Agriculture to Secondary Business (B-4) or Business Service District (BS), and from Agricultural to Suburban Agriculture, as described more fully in the following pages.

Development of the entire corridor has been guided by several planning documents over the years. These include growth policies, land use, economic development, transportation, and climate action plans. Guidance documents relevant to this plan are summarized and reviewed in the following pages. A description of existing population and socio-economic characteristics, land ownership, existing land uses, future land use designations and zoning, highway and street circulation and facilities, non-motorized circulation and facilities, and parks and cultural resources are also provided in this chapter.

3.1 Growth Policies

**Whitefish City-County Growth Policy, 2007**

The Whitefish City-County Growth Policy guides and controls development in the City. It identifies issues and set goals related to future growth and land use. Maintaining the character and small town feel of Whitefish is an important theme of the Growth Policy. Factors affecting character include a diversity of residential types and densities and scale of development appropriate to surrounding uses. The downtown is the commercial and cultural center of Whitefish, and the highway commercial strip should not expand further south. No uses that further attract or generate more vehicle trips in the corridor are recommended. Attractive landscaping and functional pedestrian facilities are identified as important components of the existing Highway 93 South commercial corridor. It calls for maintaining the existing quality of development and views big box stores as needing more intensive development standards and public scrutiny.

Among several implementation actions of the Growth Policy was the need to formulate and adopt specific corridor plans, the top priority being the Highway 93 South corridor. The Growth Policy specifies any Highway 93 South Corridor Plan must address...
commercial growth, scale, architectural standards, landscaping/screening, utilities, trip generation, traffic safety, circulation, bike/pedestrian facilities, and access.

The Growth Policy has been amended several times since 2007 with the adoption of subsequent small area and corridor plans which propose more specific policies and future land use designations for the areas they cover than did the Growth Policy. These plans include the North Valley Hospital Campus Neighborhood Plan (2009), Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan (2015), Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan (2017), Highway 93 West Corridor Plan (2015), and Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan (2018). Each is described in more detail in this section of the plan.

Flathead County Growth Policy 2007, 2012
Several of the goals and policies stated in the Flathead County Growth Policy are applicable to the corridor south of City limits:
• Goal (G)6: ensure there is adequate commercial land that is safely accessible and efficiently serviceable; and Policies P.6.1-5: encourage internal interconnected roads; restrict commercial development in unsafe, inaccessible, remote rural areas; conserve resources and minimize transportation demand by encouraging redevelopment and infill of existing commercial areas in the county;
• G7: consider existing community character in commercial land development; and Policies P.7.1-6: encourage commercial development that is visually and functionally desirable; encourage mixed-use developments where appropriate;
• G11: protect scenic resources; and P.11.1-5: identify development impacts that threaten gateway areas and develop land use guidelines that mitigate these impacts without prohibiting development;
• G22: ensure there is available, accessible and adequate business infrastructure; and P.22.2: promote business centers and industrial parks in areas served by sufficient infrastructure and with consideration of proximity to population densities;
• G23: maintain safe and efficient traffic flow; and P.23.1-12: limit private driveways; restrict development in areas without adequate road improvements; encourage frontage roads and internal vehicle circulation;
• G46: honor the integrity and purpose of existing neighborhood plans, including South Whitefish, Blanchard Lake, and Highway 93 South Whitefish Corridor Plan and Zoning Amendment (south of Whitefish
city limits); • G49: growth and development around Whitefish that respects the geographic, cultural, and historic heritage of the city.

As a more general Vision Statement, the County seeks to protect scenic views; promote a diverse economy; manage transportation; maintain the identity of rural communities; protect access to and interaction with parks and recreation; properly manage and protect the natural and human environment; and preserve the rights of private property owners.

Whitefish City-County Master Plan 2020 (Adopted 1996, Superseded by 2007 Growth Policy)

Although it no longer has legal bearing on long range planning efforts under way, review of this plan is useful from a historical perspective to understand how long some concepts have been considered and recommended for Whitefish. The plan was superseded by the 2007 Growth Policy and rescinded by Flathead County in 2016. Under the Transportation Element, recommendations included:

• Widen US Highway 93 from MT 40 north to the Whitefish River including two through travel lanes in each direction, and a center landscaped median incorporating left-turn lanes at intersecting streets and drives;
• Develop a one-way couplet of streets with northbound traffic on Spokane and southbound traffic on Baker between 2nd and 7th streets;
• Construct new 7th Street bridge over river;
• Extend 7th Street east of Spokane to Kalispell Avenue;
• Extend Baker Avenue to Chalet Motel; and
• Prepare an alignment study for a system of parallel and side streets in the Highway 93 South commercial area including a new north/south road east of the mall extending north from JP Road to 18th Street and consider extension of Columbia Avenue to 18th Street.

Under the Parks and Open Space Element, the plan recommended development of an entryway park at Highways 93 and 40, including landscaped medians and parkways.

3.2 Land Use Plans and Zoning Ordinances

Whitefish City Zoning Ordinances

Whitefish zoning code was first adopted in 1982 but has been amended many times since. Most of the corridor planning area is zoned for Secondary Business (WB-2, WB-2/WPUD, and WB-2 Casino Overlay) in parcels fronting the highway. These lots are backed by lots zoned for Two-family Residential (WR-2) between East 6th and East 13th Streets, and by One-Family Residential (WR-1 or WR-1/WPUD), some Estate and One-Family Limited Residential (WER, WLR), High Density Multi-Family Residential (WR-4/WPUD), with limited areas of Business Park (WB-4) and Industrial and Warehousing (WI) between 13th Street and the City limits.

The intent of the Secondary Business district is to provide for those retail sales and services typically characterized by the need for large display or parking areas, large storage areas and by outdoor commercial amusement or recreational activities. In the Secondary Business district, structures must be set back 20 feet from the front property line. There are no side or rear setbacks unless the property abuts a residential district, in which case a 20-foot greenbelt is required along the property lines. Structures with a building footprint of 10,000 square feet or greater require a conditional use permit. Building height is limited to 35-feet.

The City code also includes provisions related to landscape requirements, lighting and parking standards, sign regulations, water quality protection, architectural standards, dwelling groups, fences and retaining walls, home occupations, erosion and sediment control. In the Secondary Business district, a five-foot-wide landscaped buffer is required along street frontage with a large canopy tree or two small ornamental trees every 50 feet of frontage. When a parking lot fronts a street, the five-foot-wide landscaped buffer must provide a 50 percent visual screen within three years of planting. The amount of off-street parking depends on the use of the property. Professional offices and financial institutions require one parking space per 400 square feet of gross floor area, for example, while medical or dental offices require one parking space per 150 square feet of gross floor area. Exterior lighting must be designed to prevent over-lighting, energy waste, glare, light trespass, and sky glow. The Highway Sign District regulates the types of signs allowed in the corridor by recognizing the needs of auto-oriented businesses while trying to avoid the clutter and confusion often associated with linear highway development. Mixed-use and non-residential development standards were adopted in 2019 to more clearly inform the design of these types of structures.
2017 Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan
The Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan outlined a step-by-step approach for addressing workforce housing needs in Whitefish. It recognized commercial zones as areas of opportunity for increasing the supply and diversity of housing choices for the workforce. Zoning for Affordability was a recommended strategy with the most relevance to the corridor planning area. Specifically, the plan recommended allowing deed restricted affordable housing by right and free market housing through planned unit developments and/or conditional use permits in the Highway 93 South corridor. With the adoption of the Legacy Homes Program in 2019, the City has taken steps to implement this strategy. As of July 2019, any multi-family residential dwellings that are 100 percent deed restricted for long-term affordability are permitted in the Secondary Business zoning district. Additionally, up to four free market multi-family dwelling units above ground floor commercial are also permitted. Otherwise, free market multi-family residential is allowed throughout the Secondary Business district with a conditional use permit. Single-family housing (whether attached townhouses/condominiums, or detached houses) can be developed through the planned unit development process in the Secondary Business district.

2017 Highway 93 South Whitefish Corridor Plan and Zoning Amendment/Flathead County Highway 93 South Zoning Overlay
Residents and landowners south of Whitefish City limits and within the corridor planning area sponsored development of the Highway 93 South Whitefish Corridor Plan and Zoning Amendment, prepared by Land Solutions, LLC. Flathead County adopted new zoning and a zoning overlay for the area based on this document.

Previously, zoning was primarily Suburban Agriculture within a mile of the City, with minimum lot sizes of five acres. Further south along the corridor land was zoned Agricultural with 20-acre minimum lot size. In 2017 the County rezoned to extend the Secondary Business district from Highway 40 to Russell Road (retail sales and services typically needing large display or parking areas, large storage areas, outdoor commercial amusement or recreation); and added a Business Service district south of Russell Road and beyond Blanchard Lake Road (nonretail limited commercial services and light industrial uses – light manufacturing, office/warehouse showrooms, contractors, wholesale trades).
South of the commercial zoning, Agricultural zoning was changed to Suburban Agriculture. The County also added a Highway 93 South Whitefish Overlay, now named more generally the Highway Overlay. The overlay includes design standards for architecture, landscaping, buffering, signage, building, lighting, parking and circulation that are modelled on the City’s standards for the Secondary Business district but rarely enforced.

2015 Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan (Revised 2018)
The Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan study area included the downtown area north of East 6th Street, but included recommendations between East 6th and East 13th Streets relevant to the corridor plan. It did not support adding driving lanes on Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 north of East 13th Street but did propose a protected bikeway along the entire length of Highway 93 South to the City limits. It also supported addition of another southbound driving lane on Baker Avenue between East 2nd and East 13th Streets. The plan envisioned a downtown “Gateway” to be located at East 13th Street and Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 South including transition wayfinding elements to announce the entrance to downtown.

2013 City of Whitefish Parks and Recreation Master Plan
The Parks and Recreation Master Plan included goals related to trail/path connectivity, water access, and park development and acquisition. The 2016 Connect Whitefish Plan described under the Transportation Plans section superseded this plan’s goals related to trail/path connectivity, but its goals to improve access to the Whitefish River and to develop and add to the park system remain relevant to the corridor planning area. In particular, the plan called for development or upgrades of Canoe Park, River Park, River’s Edge Park and Riverwood Park.

North Valley Hospital Campus Neighborhood Plan Revised 2009 (original plan adopted 2004)
This document outlined a plan for the North Valley Hospital campus, which included the hospital and related medical offices northeast of the Highway 93 and Highway 40 junction. It was written as an amendment
to the 2007 Growth Policy and all proposed future uses are medical as designated by existing zoning for site. The plan included some goals relevant to the corridor planning area: to in no way promote or encourage commercial development south of the Highway 40 intersection, and to continue to prohibit commercial development within the hospital campus. It also outlined policies to encourage campus design that acknowledges the geographic and aesthetic position of the site as a community gateway and to encourage good design on the adjacent commercial zoned properties.

1998 South Whitefish Neighborhood Plan, amended 2000

The South Whitefish Neighborhood Plan was developed following a request for extension of city services to the neighborhood, which encompasses the Highway 93 corridor between approximately Akers Lane on the east side of the highway and Pheasant Run on the west side of the highway, south to the Highway 40 junction. The plan included policies regarding major street alignments, recommendations for a design review program to enhance the south entrance to Whitefish, and the extension of Baker and Columbia Avenues south to parallel Highway 93. A separate transportation plan was developed to support these recommendations in 1999 and is described in more detail under Transportation Plans.

Blanchard Lake Area Zoning District 1993

In 1992 the Whitefish City-County Planning Board initiated establishment of the Blanchard Lake Area Zoning District to be consistent with a Flathead County Commissioners directive to establish countywide zoning. The district was 18 square miles of land located southwest of Whitefish and included the Highway 93 corridor south of Highway 40. Previously the area had no zoning. Within the corridor planning area, zoning was Suburban Agricultural and Agricultural. Suburban Agricultural zones are intended to protect and preserve smaller agricultural functions and to provide a buffer between urban and unlimited agricultural uses, encouraging concentration of such uses in areas where potential conflict of uses will be minimized. Agricultural zones are intended to protect and preserve agricultural land for the performance of a wide range of agricultural functions, and to control the scattered intrusion of uses not compatible with an agricultural environment, including but not limited to residential development.

County staff recommended no commercial zoning along Highway 93 because it would have conflicted with Whitefish Master Plan policies, which were against expansion of commercial development along the highway south of Whitefish. Staff noted commercial zoning in this area (which is 12 times the size of downtown Whitefish) would adversely impact downtown Whitefish and would not be of a scale characteristic of the area. Additionally, strip commercial development in a rural area would conflict with the primary function of the highway, which was designated and built to provide fast travel between areas.

3.3 Economic Development Reports

Baker Avenue City Property Development Program Plan 2002

This report prepared by the Jobs for Whitefish Taskforce and the Tom Hudson Company described the lack of economic diversity in Whitefish that followed decline in the timber harvesting and railroad activities of the town’s early days. According to this report,
the economy had become dominated by the tourism/visitor sector by 2002 and should be diversified to improve resiliency to regional and national changes. Tourism continues to dominate the Whitefish economy today and wages have not kept pace with the cost of living in Whitefish.

The focus of the study was the future use of city-owned property on Baker Avenue, land within the Highway 93 South corridor now zoned as Business Park. The study found the property would be best used to fulfill Whitefish City business development goals and established the following top priorities for use of the Baker Avenue property:

- More career-oriented, higher paying jobs;
- Support growth of and complement existing local businesses;
- Fit Whitefish character; and
- Support diversification of new businesses.

The team also established secondary business development priorities, some of which included:

- Provide goods and services to local and regional customers;
- Provide “career” jobs;
- Address need for public services; and
- Provide mixed use, including housing

Flathead County, Montana Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2017

The Flathead County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) guides the economic growth of Flathead County including the City of Whitefish. The purpose of the CEDS is to help “… create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies, and improve living conditions.” The CEDS reinforced the need identified in the 2002 study to diversify Whitefish’s economy to become less reliant on tourism.

3.4 Transportation Plans

2016 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan

The 2016 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan established policies, actions and projects for improving connectivity, safety, wayfinding, maintenance, programming, and funding of non-motorized transportation facilities. Within the corridor planning area, proposed projects included a two-mile bicycle route with signing and marking between 6th Street and the Highway 40 intersection; improved connectivity for the Whitefish River Trail, which would cross the highway when complete; a shared-use path that crosses the highway at 7th, 13th, and 18th Streets; and bus shelter locations along Highway 93.

2010 Whitefish Urban Corridor Study of US 93

This Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) study was developed in coordination with the City of Whitefish and concurrently with the Whitefish Transportation Plan. The study evaluated how corridor needs have changed since a final environmental impact statement for the highway between Somers and Whitefish was completed in 1994. It encompassed the Highway 93 corridor and Baker Avenue from 13th to 2nd Street and is discussed in more detail in the description of Segment A in Chapter 4. Issues, Opportunities, and Vision. Overlap with this plan is between 6th and 13th Streets.

The study included a screening level assessment of design configurations and strategies that were: 1) considered in the US Highway 93 Somers to Whitefish West Environmental Impact Statement; 2) developed for the corridor since the Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision was issued; and 3) other options that
may have been applicable. Two configuration options were reviewed more extensively based on assessments; corridor improvements were recommended and prioritized under either configuration. Of interest for this Corridor Plan are the following road configurations considered:

- **Modified Alternative C (Offset) Configuration**: Between 13th and 2nd Streets, two lanes northbound and one lane southbound on Spokane Avenue/Highway 93; two lanes southbound and one lane northbound on Baker Avenue; widen the Baker Avenue bridge to accommodate three lanes of traffic; two lanes eastbound and one lane westbound on 13th Street; a new traffic signal at the intersection of Baker Avenue and 13th Street.

- **Contra-Flow Configuration**: Between 7th and 2nd Streets, two lanes northbound and one lane southbound on Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 (two lanes north and southbound between 7th and 13th Streets); two lanes southbound and one lane northbound on Baker Avenue; widen Baker Avenue bridge to accommodate three lanes of traffic; connect Baker and Spokane Avenues on 7th Street with a new bridge over the river providing two lanes eastbound and one lane westbound.

**2010 Whitefish Transportation Plan**
The 2010 Whitefish Transportation Plan identified transportation problems and deficiencies throughout the City and considered a bypass to Highway 93. It did not recommend the development of a bypass corridor for Highway 93 through Whitefish because it would not significantly reduce traffic on the highway, would not solve future traffic issues, and, most importantly, had a lack of any state highway support/funding. Instead the plan recommended strengthening the existing transportation grid system, providing additional east/west connectivity, and requiring roadway corridor development in vacant land if, and when, the land develops. Specific improvements recommended for the corridor planning area include the following:

- Improve the intersection of 13th Street and Highway 93;
- Install a traffic signal at 13th Street and Baker Avenue;
- Extend Columbia Avenue south from 13th Street to JP Road;
- Extend Baker Street south from 19th Street to JP Road; and
- Construct a bridge across the river to connect Baker Avenue and Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 at 7th Street (recommendation made
with reservations due to the high cost and environmental impacts); extend 7th Street east of Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 to connect Spokane and Kalispell Avenues.

The Plan also included recommendations for corridor preservation, access management, the Safe Routes to School program, transportation concurrency for non-motorized facilities, public transit opportunities, and traffic calming. The Transportation Plan update is being updated in 2021.

2001 Southeast Whitefish Transportation Plan
The study area for the 2001 Southeast Whitefish Transportation Plan included areas east of Highway 93 between Highway 40 and 2nd Street. The plan addressed two major concerns: 1) how vehicles access town from the southeast, especially from Voerman Road and Park Avenue; and 2) how the road system should develop southeast of town, assuming a transition from agricultural to residential uses. As such, it made several recommendations for future local streets and collectors, most of which are east of the corridor planning area. Within the corridor planning area, the plan recommended extending 7th Street across the river to connect Baker Avenue and Spokane Avenue/Highway 93.

1999 South Whitefish Transportation Planning Project
The 1999 South Whitefish Transportation Planning Project was a companion follow-up document to the 1998 South Whitefish Neighborhood Plan. It proposed the following transportation corridors as alternatives to Highway 93:
- North-south connectors between Greenwood Drive and JP Road and between Baker Ave and JP Road; and
- East-west connectors at JP Road west to Karrow Avenue, extensions of 18th and 13th Streets, and new roads at three other locations with no existing roadways.

The plan also recommended design standards for roadways including location of sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and signals.

1994 US 93 Somers to Whitefish West FEIS/ROD
This 1994 Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision considered six build alternatives through Whitefish between 2nd and 7th Streets. The preferred alternative, Alternative C-3, included a one-way couplet with two lanes northbound on Spokane Avenue/Highway 93, two lanes southbound on Baker Avenue, and a new 7th Street bridge to connect Baker and Spokane Avenues.
For Highway 93 between the Whitefish River and Highway 40, the environmental impact statement considered turn lane, median, or combo alternatives. The environmental impact statement also considered an alternative route for Highway 93 to bypass Whitefish, but the bypass concept was eliminated from future consideration. The selected alternative was the combo, where some segments would have a center two-way left turn lane and some segments would have a depressed grass or raised median to separate the travel lanes. The preferred configuration was a four-lane facility with a raised median when traffic volumes warrant it. The record of decision noted that if a five-lane configuration (four-lane with center turn lane) were built (which it was), it would be wide enough to accommodate a future raised median (urban section). For the highway south of Highway 40, the environmental impact statement included a separated shared-use path as a component of all alternatives considered.

3.5 Climate Action Plan
In 2017 Mayor Muhlfeld joined other U.S. mayors by committing Whitefish to uphold the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. The City Council adopted a 26 percent reduction target for greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. In 2018 the City Council adopted its Climate Action Plan outlining 94 specific actions that include improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities, as well as better opportunities to use transit. The Highway 93 South corridor can play a large role in realizing these goals. Decisions related to land use, transporation, and the environment should be considered through the lens of the strategies outlined in the Climate Action Plan.

3.6 Population and Economic Trends
Data on population and economic trends were collected and analyzed in 2018 and 2019. In spring 2020, the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic resulted in State-wide shelter-in-place orders and temporary closure of non-essential places of business including restaurants, hotels, and retail stores. Some businesses were completely shut down for two months and re-opened with restrictions beginning in June 2020. The long-term effect on population, visitors, and the economy in Whitefish and beyond remains unknown at this time. Any decisions based on the historic trends described here should be made acknowledging this uncertainty.
Population and Housing

Population data for the City of Whitefish is available from the U.S. Census Bureau in 10-year increments, with the most recent data coming from the 2010 census; population is estimated in the intervening years and is available from the Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). Future population projection data is available at the county level from the Census Bureau and Montana Department of Commerce.

The ACS five-year population estimate for the City of Whitefish of 8,295 residents in 2019 is a 30 percent increase since 2010 (above). The ACS five-year population estimate for the Whitefish zip code area, which includes the city and surrounding areas, was about 13,931 in 2018, the most recent year an estimate is available for zip code areas. The area’s population continues to grow at a steady pace with the potential for accelerated growth over the next twenty years. The trend does appear to have accelerated, at least in the short term, as a result of the pandemic. Following a dip in sales from April through June 2020 when much of the country was closed down and sheltering in place, more real estate sales closed in the Whitefish zip code area during the month of July 2020 than in any other month over the last three and a half years according to the Montana Regional Multiple Listing Services. There were even more closings in August, September, and October 2020. Whether this acceleration in sales continues in the years ahead remains to be seen, but the number of real estate sales that closed in March 2021 was higher than what closed in July 2020.

Note that U.S. Census data does not account for the number of second or vacation homes owned by non-residents in Whitefish or the surrounding area. The 2016 Whitefish Area Workforce Housing Needs Assessment indicated that about one-third of homes in the Whitefish area are owned by non-residents. Part-time occupants of these homes use City services seasonally but are not accounted for in census data.

The portion of the corridor planning area within City limits represents eight percent of Whitefish’s total population and housing units (586 people and 370 housing units).
proportion has increased from six percent in 2010 indicating the corridor planning area within City limits has increased in importance in meeting the need for housing in Whitefish. The type of housing units located in the corridor is also important to its role in the City’s overall economic health and future growth. Because of the significant number of visitors to Whitefish in both summer and winter, the community includes hotel, motel and camping facilities as well as housing units dedicated to short term rental. In 2010 about 30 percent of the total housing units in the 59937 zip code, 18 percent of the total housing units in Whitefish City limits, and six percent of the total housing units in the corridor planning area within City limits were categorized by the U.S. Census Bureau as seasonal units.

Employment
Employment in Whitefish leading up to 2020 was concentrated in the sectors that support tourism with almost 42 percent of total jobs in accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment, recreation, and retail trade sectors (Appendix B, Table 1: Jobs by Industry - Whitefish and Flathead County, Montana 2015). In 2002 more than a third of all jobs in Whitefish were located in the corridor planning area. That proportion has since dropped to about 28 percent of the City’s jobs in 2015 (Appendix B, Table 3: Changes in Total Employment - Study Area, City of Whitefish, Flathead County). Between 2002 and 2015 Whitefish total employment increased by an estimated 970 jobs, or almost 30 percent, but only four of those 970 jobs were added in the corridor planning area. More than a third of the total job growth occurred in tourism related categories.

Tourism
As indicated above, tourism is the largest economic sector in Whitefish. The Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau estimates overnight visitors to Whitefish grew by about five percent annually from 2010 to 2017 to almost 678,000 visitors. Within City limits the corridor planning area contains 29 percent of guest rooms in the larger Whitefish market area which includes lodging outside City limits such as at Whitefish Mountain Resort. However, initial surveys of local lodging operators by the Convention and Visitors Bureau following temporary closures due to COVID-19 indicated advanced lodging reservations for summer 2020 were down significantly compared to the previous year. In contrast, summer 2021 is expected to be intensely busy as people begin to travel and take vacations again. One lodging
operator reported being completely booked for July and August 2021 as of April 2021. Visitation in Whitefish has always been short, cyclical, and unpredictable. It appears the pandemic has added another level of unpredictability to businesses serving visitors and tourism. Longer term impacts could affect the viability of corridor lodging and other visitor-serving businesses.

In 2016, non-Montana resident visitors spent over $500 million in Flathead County (Appendix B, Table 5: Estimated Nonresident Visitor Spending - Flathead County). Average spending per visitor in Flathead County was used to estimate visitor spending by category for Whitefish visitors based on best available information. Total visitor spending in Whitefish for 2017 was estimated to be over $145 million (Appendix B, Table 6: Estimated Overnight Visitor Spending - City of Whitefish 2017). A Whitefish specific visitor spending survey would provide data more closely reflecting the spending habits of Whitefish visitors.

Retail Performance
In addition to visitor spending, local and regional residents also spend money to eat, shop and participate in activities in Whitefish. If the amount of money average households in Whitefish will spend is the demand (resident market capacity in Table 7: Retail Leakage Analysis - 2017, Appendix B), then retail performance or sales (estimated actual spending) is the supply. In Appendix B, Table 7, a negative number in the column labeled Difference indicates residents are leaving Whitefish to shop at building material and garden stores. This data does not account for the relocation and expansion of Nelson’s Ace Hardware in the corridor planning area in 2019, a move that responded to this opportunity. For most categories, however, spending exceeds estimated capacity. This is typical of a tourism-based economy when only the market capacity of residents is considered. The actual market capacity or demand should be based on a combination of resident and visitor spending.

There are two sources of information to estimate visitor spending capacity. The first is based on the distribution of visitor spending in Flathead County (estimated by the University of Montana Institute for Tourism & Recreation [ITRR]) applied to Whitefish visitation. The second is to compare the first estimate to the actual resort taxes collected in the categories subject to the tax. Resort tax is not collected on motor vehicles and parts dealers, furniture and home furnishings, electronics and appliances, building materials, garden equipment and supplies, or gasoline, so this comparison only applies to retail stores, food service, and drinking places. The comparison between estimated (ITRR) and actual (Resort tax) spending indicates visitor spending is underestimated for the retail categories in...
which resort tax is collected (Appendix B, Table 8: Estimated Tourist Spending - 2017 Resort Tax Collection - 2.85 percent).

When the estimated resident and visitor spending capacity is combined and compared to the estimated actual spending, overall market performance indicates demand exceeds supply in several more categories (negative numbers in the Difference column, Appendix B, Table 9: Estimated Retail Leakage with Actual 2017 Resort Tax Spending). In addition to the building materials, garden equipment and supply stores category, the gasoline store and overall retail store categories show supply is not meeting demand. Within the retail store category, several subcategories are also not meeting demand including food & beverage, general merchandise, and miscellaneous retail (Appendix B, Table 10: Retail Store Detailed Leakage Analysis Resident and Nonresident Visitors - 2017). With the 2019 closure of Shopko in the general merchandise subcategory, this deficit is expected to increase.

This analysis is based on estimates and assumptions relating to typical household and visitor spending patterns and average store performance before the coronavirus pandemic. More specific actual spending for non-resort tax retail categories in Whitefish is not currently available. However, the analysis indicates the combined spending of residents and visitors before the pandemic could support additional retail options for general merchandise and food & beverage in Whitefish. It remains unknown whether changes due to the pandemic will be short or long-term. Capturing the demand for new retail spending could occur in any of the areas and retail districts of Whitefish (downtown Whitefish, Highway 93 South corridor, or Wisconsin Avenue corridor, etc.) and depends on community policy decisions related to development patterns.

3.7 Transportation Facilities
The transportation network within and around the corridor planning area plays a significant role in its physical development and growth. This network of streets, roads and highway should be coordinated to form a system that provides efficient internal circulation as well as facilitates through traffic. Streets serve two basic functions: 1) moving multiple modes of traffic, and 2) providing access to adjacent lands. Each street is classified and designed for the specific function or combination of functions it is meant to serve. This functional

Building material store in the corridor.

Food and beverage businesses in the corridor.
Sidewalks and trails in the Highway 93 corridor.

classification system forms the basis for planning, designing, constructing, maintaining and operating the street system. For these reasons, urban streets are generally designed and developed in a hierarchy comprised of the following types:

A major arterial has the following attributes:
• is a major road or highway
• has moderate to high speeds
• has high traffic volumes typically in excess of 15,000 vehicles per day
• provides access to the regional transportation network
• moves traffic across the county and between cities and communities
• has limited access to abutting lands.

Highway 93, also known as Spokane Avenue north of East 13th Street, is the major arterial in Whitefish and the corridor planning area. Between Blanchard Lake Road and East 13th Street, the highway has two northbound driving lanes, two southbound driving lanes, and a center two-way left turn lane. North of East 13th Street, the highway narrows to just one northbound and one southbound driving lane with no center lane. Bikes are poorly accommodated on the shoulder of the road and many bicyclists choose to ride on the sidewalk. The sidewalks are continuous along both sides of the highway but vary in condition, aesthetics, and the degree to which they are buffered from vehicle traffic. Pedestrian crossing opportunities are limited to marked crosswalks at the East 13th Street, Commerce Street, JP Road, and Highway 40 signalized intersections.

A minor arterial includes the following characteristics:
• is a major road
• has moderate speeds
• collects or moves traffic from one major part of the community to another or to and from the major arterial system
• has traffic volumes ranging from 5,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day.

Baker Avenue is the minor arterial within the corridor. Baker has one northbound and one southbound driving lane. There is a five foot wide bike lane painted on both sides of the road shoulder and there is continuous sidewalk on the east side of the road. The sidewalk on the west side of the road extends from West 6th Street south to halfway between West 15th and West 18th Streets. There are marked crosswalks at the West 13th and West 10th Street intersections. The planned extension of Baker Avenue south to JP Road would also
likely be classified as a minor arterial.

In contrast, a collector has the following traits:
• is a secondary street
• has moderate speeds
• has low to moderate traffic volumes of 1,000 to 5,000 vehicles per day.
• collects local traffic from neighborhoods and carries it to adjacent neighborhoods or to the arterial system
• typically serves a neighborhood with 150 or more dwellings.

Collectors in the corridor include West 7th Street, East and West 13th Street, a small section of Columbia Avenue, and JP Road east of the highway. West 7th Street has a sidewalk on the north side of the street only. There are sidewalks on both sides of East and West 13th Street and pedestrian crossing opportunities at Highway 93 and Baker Avenue, but no designated bike lanes. JP Road east of the highway has sidewalks on both sides of the roadway. Planned extensions of Columbia Avenue south to Greenwood Drive and of Whitefish Avenue south to Shiloh Avenue likely would be classified as collectors, as well.

Finally, a local street includes the following features:
• is a minor street
• serves individual sites, buildings or lots
• provides access to residential neighborhoods
• feeds into collectors or provides destination access off collectors.
All other roads in the corridor not mentioned above fall into this category.

Traffic
Traffic data is collected by MDT and traffic consultants working for the City or developers of proposed projects. Traffic counts conducted along Highway 93 between 2003 and 2018 indicate traffic volumes increased an average of one percent annually over 15 years (Appendix C, Table 2). Initial work to create a traffic model for an update to the Transportation Plan (in progress) indicates the annual growth rate may be increasing. Assuming a growth rate of between one percent and 1.4 percent, traffic volumes can be expected to increase another 10 to 15 percent between 2019 and 2030.

As part of this plan development, Abelin Traffic Services (Abelin) created a traffic model for the corridor planning area using existing and potential future scenarios. The model was used to produce intersection and corridor simulations for traffic on Highway 93 South with a variety of different roadway and lane configurations. Currently several intersections in the corridor have a poor Level of Service based on the wait times for vehicles in the

Southbound sidewalk on Spokane Avenue near 8th Street.  
Bus stop along Pheasant Run west of Highway 93 South.
morning and evening at those intersections (Table 3.3).

Vehicles at intersections with a Level of Service “A” experience very low delays, or less than 10 seconds delay per vehicle. A Level of Service “C” is the limit of acceptable delay, with delays of 20 to 35 seconds per vehicle. Delays of 35 to 55 seconds per vehicle result in a Level of Service “D” and are the start of traffic breakdown. A Level of Service “E” results in unacceptable delays of greater than 80 seconds per vehicle. Commercial and residential development projects already approved but not yet constructed in the corridor could push current Level of Service grades lower unless improvements are made.

While intersection Level of Service is useful to some extent, it should be noted that as an indicator of vehicle wait time it may not be the most important characteristic for small towns to consider. In locations where community character is a priority, seasonal traffic delays could be acceptable knowing the preferred road design is more important than quickly moving traffic through town.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location on Highway 93</th>
<th>Existing Morning</th>
<th>Existing Afternoon</th>
<th>Morning With Approved Projects</th>
<th>Afternoon With Approved Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highways 93</td>
<td>Sec/Veh</td>
<td>LOS</td>
<td>Sec/Veh</td>
<td>LOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway 40</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Road</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce Street</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th Street</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - 2010 Whitefish Transportation Plan
Traffic Signals
There are four traffic signals located in the corridor planning area at the intersections of Highway 93 with Highway 40, JP Road, Commerce Street and 13th Street. Providing intersection traffic controls at regular intervals of one-quarter to one-half mile along a roadway corridor provides a balance between access and through movement of vehicles. If traffic signals are spaced too closely together (less than one-quarter mile between signals) or at irregular intervals, the through movement along a corridor is compromised. If traffic signals are spaced too far apart, then access to and from adjacent properties becomes difficult. Ideally, traffic signals should be spaced a consistent distance apart to promote vehicle platooning along the primary route and traffic signal coordination. New signals are usually installed only when they become warranted by traffic volumes or projected growth in an area.

The existing traffic signals in the corridor planning area are located with regular half-mile spacing on section lines except for the Commerce Street signal which is about three-tenths of a mile from the 13th Street signal and about seven-tenths of a mile from the JP Road signal. The Commerce Street signal provides good access to the Mountain Mall but is not ideal for accessing areas east of the highway other than the mall. Greenwood Drive is at half-mile spacing with existing traffic signals (other than the Commerce Street signal) and would provide good access to the east side of the highway. However, due to its proximity to the Commerce Street signal, a new traffic signal at Greenwood Drive is not recommended unless it were to replace the Commerce Street signal. Removal of the Commerce Street signal would have consequences for access to the Mall and would require further evaluation.

3.8 Services and Utilities
Public Utilities and Services
City water and sewer services are available to properties throughout the corridor between East 6th Street and City limits near Highway 40. South of City limits in Segment C property owners must rely on private wells and septic systems. There are separate stormwater collection systems (which include drains, mains, culverts, detention areas, and discharge points) installed throughout much of the corridor within City limits, and these discharge to the Whitefish River. South of City limits, collection, storage and discharge
of stormwater is up to the property owners. Electrical power is provided by Flathead Electric Cooperative throughout all segments of the corridor.

Private Utilities and Services
Private utilities and services in the corridor include natural gas and high-speed internet offered through wireless, cable, DSL and fiber connections for business use in the corridor. Shipping is available through UPS, FEDEX, and other nationwide providers.

3.9 Land Use and Zoning
Existing Land Use
On the north end of the corridor planning area, between East 6th Street and the Whitefish River crossing, the parcels fronting the highway are used primarily for providing professional services, lodging, and other commercial purposes. Exceptions are found between East 6th and East 8th Streets where there is a small retail jewelry store that is legally non-conforming, a conditionally permitted fly-fishing store and guide service, and a vacant building. East of the highway, parcels can be accessed via an alleyway; most parcels east of the alley are single-family residential on Kalispell Avenue. Exceptions are the Whitefish Motel between East 8th and East 9th streets and some vacant parcels north of the East 7th Street right-of-way. On the east side of Kalispell Avenue are more single-family residential uses, as well as an electrical station between East 6th and East 7th Streets. Parcels facing Baker Avenue south of the river are primarily used for single-family residential. Two professional offices are conditionally permitted between East 8th and East 10th Streets.

From the Whitefish River and East 10th Street south to City limits, uses are a mix of commercial, professional, medical, lodging, restaurants, residential, churches, and hospital. Vacant buildings and lots are interspersed throughout and are depicted on the map to the right.

South of City limits to the south end of the corridor planning area, land uses are mixed with single-family residential lots alternating with professional and medical offices and other small businesses. Beyond the county zoned business service district, there are other businesses such as a native plant nursery and storage facilities, while much of the land use remains rural residential. Behind the parcels
future land use

The 2007 Growth Policy designated future land uses for the Whitefish area based on the community’s vision for the future and projected growth. From East 6th Street to Great Northern Drive and North Valley Hospital, land use adjacent to the highway is designated for General Commercial purposes, defined by auto-oriented commercial and service uses. Primary access is meant to be by automobile with ample parking provided on site.

The Planned Industrial land use designation off Flathead Avenue and West 18th Avenue west of Baker Avenue is meant for vital industries that do not compete with commercial development for land and do not need drive by traffic to generate business. The Hospital land use designation is applied where medical office development is desired. The North Valley Hospital and related medical offices and services fall into this category.

Further from the highway to the east and west, the future land use designation is Urban on the north end of the corridor, Urban and Suburban Residential in the middle of the corridor length, and Rural Residential or Rural south of the Highway 40 intersection. There is also a small area designated for High-Density Residential, which is meant to accommodate multi-family apartments, condominiums, and townhomes. Urban is a residential designation with mostly one- and two-family types of residences with densities of two to 12 units per acre. Suburban Residential is primarily lower density residential (less than half a unit to two and a half units per acre) with single-family homes and some low-density town homes. Rural Residential is less dense again, with two and a half to 10 acre lots per home. Rural areas are designated for farmlands with extremely low density residential.

Zoning

Most of the corridor planning area is zoned for Secondary Business or Business Service District/Highway Overlay in parcels fronting the highway. These are backed by lots zoned for Two-family Residential between East 6th and East 13th Streets and High Density Multi-family Residential, Business Park, and Industrial and Warehousing between West 13th Street and the City limits; One-Family, One-Family Limited, Estate, Country, or Rural Residential, and Suburban Agriculture in other areas.
3.10 Environment
The natural environment includes several components that may influence where development and what type of development is appropriate in the corridor planning area. These environmental features are protected by federal, state, or local regulation, and/or they enhance the area’s unique beauty and have value to the community. These include steep slopes and topography, natural vegetation, wetlands and riparian areas, the Whitefish River and floodplains, and depth to groundwater.

Topography/Steep Slopes
Slopes greater than 30 percent grade are not considered suitable for development unless the design or construction methods used can eliminate the hazards associated with building on steep slopes (Whitefish Subdivision Regulations §12-4-4). Slopes greater than 10 percent grade will likely need a geotechnical review before a subdivision is approved.

Natural Vegetation
Landcover in the corridor planning area where not developed is a mix of montane grasslands and mixed conifer forests. Montane grasslands in northwest Montana are dominated by rough fescue with Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and western wheatgrass abundant or present. The mixed montane conifer forests in the corridor planning area are primarily dominated by Douglas-fir with western larch, grand fir, ponderosa pine and lodgepole pine. There are also small stands of wetter forest in the corridor planning area that include western hemlock and western red cedar.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas
Montana Natural Heritage Program mapping indicates a linear complex of emergent and scrub-shrub wetlands extending northwest from the Highway 40 intersection, through Great Northern Heights subdivision, to the Assembly of God property west of Park Knoll Road. Wetlands and riparian areas associated with the Whitefish River are present in a few locations along the north and east side of the corridor planning area. There was a small emergent wetland and pond mapped within the Alta Views development (which may have been a feature of previous golf course, now filled); an excavated stormwater pond in the Riverwood Park subdivision; a small excavated pond east of the Dalen Dental property, a large excavated pond south of Mountain Mall, and an impounded stormwater pond on Baker Avenue below the City’s Emergency Services Building.

Around wetlands a buffer of 100 feet for single-family residential development and 125 feet for multi-family residential and commercial development, plus a 10-foot setback from the buffer must be maintained unless the wetland type or size is exempt from the water quality protection regulations (Whitefish Zoning Regulations §11-3-29).

Whitefish River and Floodplains
The Whitefish River and its associated floodplain bisect the northern part of the corridor with bridges at both Baker Avenue and Spokane Avenue. The river forms the eastern boundary of the corridor planning area from Columbia Avenue south to just upstream of JP Road, at which point it turns further east and away from the corridor. Structures are not allowed in the river buffer or setback areas. The buffer is 75 feet or to the top of bank (whichever is greater) and the setback is no less than 20 feet beyond the buffer. The purpose of the buffer is to protect the water quality of the river, while the setback is intended to protect the buffer from human disturbance.

High Groundwater
Areas with potential for high groundwater occur throughout much of Whitefish, including in the corridor. Areas with high groundwater are not suitable for development unless the hazard is eliminated or overcome by design and construction methods (Whitefish Subdivision Regulations §12-4-4).
Wetland Areas and Topography

Wetland and Riparian Areas
- Lake
- River
- Freshwater Pond
- Freshwater Emergent Wetland
- Freshwater Scrub-Shrub Wetland
- Riparian Scrub-Shrub
- Riparian Forested

- High Ground Water Areas
- Hwy 93 South Corridor Study Area
- Whitefish City Limits

Source:
Montana Natural Heritage Program, City of Whitefish Critical Areas Ordinance, Flathead Basin Mapping Project, 2009
Three large diameter culverts convey the Whitefish River under Spokane Avenue between East 9th and 13th Streets.
4. ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & VISION BY SEGMENT

4.0 Land Use, Transportation, Environment and Open Space

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

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

4.1 Segment A

Background

Segment A extends from East 6th Street to the Whitefish River on Spokane Avenue (Highway 93) and from the Whitefish River to West 10th Street on Baker Avenue. On Spokane Avenue, the segment serves as a transition between the highway commercial district to the south, a residential neighborhood to the north and east, and the downtown business district further north. Zoning is Secondary Business (WB-2), but lot sizes are more similar to downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods than to commercial lots south of the river. The road right-of-way on Spokane Avenue varies between 80 and 120 feet wide with one driving lane in each direction. There is no designated bike lane and the sidewalk is five feet wide and directly adjacent to the shoulder along most of Spokane Avenue. Between East 7th and East
8th Streets, the west side of Spokane Avenue is undeveloped riparian riverbank. The roadway in this segment is in poor condition and needs resurfacing. Where Spokane Avenue crosses the Whitefish River, three culverts convey the river under the roadway rather than a bridge. Culverts are notorious for getting clogged with debris as well as degrading water quality and impeding navigation and the movement of fish and aquatic organisms.

On Baker Avenue, zoning is primarily Two-Family Residential (WR-2), with a short section of Low Density Multi-Family Residential (WR-3) between the Whitefish River and West 6th Street west of Baker Avenue, and then Secondary Business east of Baker Avenue between West 8th and West 10th Streets. The right-of-way is between 65 and 70 feet wide and bikes are accommodated on the narrow shoulder, separated from traffic by a painted line. Much of the sidewalk on Baker Avenue is separated from the curb by a five foot wide strip of grass.

MDT’s 2010 Whitefish Urban Corridor Study of US 93 settled on two different highway configuration options for future reconstruction to improve Highway 93 traffic flow. Rather than just widening Highway 93/Spokane Avenue to four lanes through downtown Whitefish, alternatives were considered that added Baker Avenue to the highway system with an additional traffic lane on each road. Both alternatives are described and illustrated on pages 23 and 24 of the previous chapter.

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

The 2015 Downtown Business District Master Plan Update recommended Spokane Avenue remain two lanes (one in each direction) to accommodate a protected two-way bike lane on the east side of the roadway, preserve existing mature boulevard trees, and avoid congestion at the intersection with East Second Street that could occur where two northbound driving lanes merge into one.
Bridge Design

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

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

Segment A Issues

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

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

2. Transportation Issues
   • The 2009 Transportation Plan called for West 7th Street to be extended with a new bridge across the Whitefish River between Baker and Spokane Avenues; constructing a bridge where the river is its widest could be cost prohibitive. Property on the west side of the river also would need to be acquired.
   • The Transportation Plan also recommended extending East 7th Street between Spokane and Kalispell Avenues. There are existing buildings abutting the undeveloped City-owned East 7th Street right-of-way that would lose some of their parking and an existing stormwater retention pond, sewer lift station, and steep slopes add to the challenge of the road extension.
   • During busy summer months traffic constricted by downtown signals may back up from East 2nd Street as far south as East 9th Street or Riverside Avenue.
   • Permanent easements for a public trail along the river have not been obtained from all parcels, although some revocable easements exist. Trail access across the highway is difficult as the trail itself is significantly lower than the highway grade.
   • Pedestrian sidewalks are narrow and not separated from highway traffic on Spokane Avenue.
   • There is no protected bike lane on Spokane Avenue and the bike lane separated from traffic by a painted line on Baker Avenue ends at the Whitefish River Bridge and is often obstructed by parked vehicles.
   • The Downtown Master Plan calls for a two-way protected bike lane along the Whitefish Promenade between East 2nd and East...
Conceptual plan for how an undeveloped parcel in the floodplain and encumbered by a City sewer main could be purchased and developed into a City riverside park with permanent trail easements or ownership. The location would be affected by and need to be modified for any future bridge crossing of the river at 7th Street.
Trail under the highway and to connect existing sections of trail.
• Identify funding source to purchase available open space and improve public access to the river; see previous page for a conceptual rendering of a potential riverside park.
• Improve public access to Whitefish River.

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

Segment A Opportunities
The following opportunities were highlighted during the planning process:

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

2. Transportation Opportunities
• Design road profile for Spokane and Baker that would accommodate protected bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and potentially a third driving lane while retaining and adding more canopy street trees and landscaping.
• Combine highway accesses to improve traffic safety and flow.
• Purchase/obtain permanent trail easements for properties along river trail.
• Improve public access to river for launching and taking out watercraft.
• Reduce commercial truck traffic through downtown Whitefish by routing trucks on an alternate route, if feasible.

3. Environmental and Open Space Opportunities
• Replace culverts at Highway 93 river crossing with a bridge, which would also provide an opportunity to extend the Whitefish River
Community members envision a bridge replacing the three culverts that currently convey the Whitefish River under Spokane Avenue south of Riverside Avenue. The bridge could act as a transition feature between the highway commercial area south of the river and the downtown core north of the river.
Zoning Districts in Segment B.

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

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

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

1. Land Use issues
   - There are inconsistencies between zoning and the Growth Policy future land use map (urban, commercial, and rural zoning in areas designated Suburban Residential).
   - The commercial strip is unattractive and does not reflect the unique character of Whitefish, the built environment lacks visual interest.
   - Low and moderate density residential neighborhoods are frequently located directly adjacent to high intensity commercial uses with no transitional or
buffering land uses.
- The corridor does not have enough entertainment and recreation options, local and hotel guest serving businesses, cultural and educational facilities, restaurants, and public places.
- There are legal, non-conforming signs (billboard, excessive size, internally lit, or on one post for example).
- Overhead powerlines and power poles create visual clutter.
- Commercial parking lots are highly visible.
- More screening, landscaping, and canopy trees are needed between the highway and adjacent commercial uses.
- There is no cohesive theme to tie everything together (planters, banners, lights, signs etc.).
- Wayfinding signage is minimal.
- Small lease spaces for starter businesses (permitted uses such as cafes, web- or tech-based offices, etc.) are limited.

2. Transportation Issues
- There is traffic congestion, vehicle noise, and a reduced level of service at intersections; long wait times are predicted to get worse at some intersections when future development projects are constructed and traffic volumes increase (see a description of the 13th Street intersection with Highway 93 next page).
- The closest continuous traffic count station to Whitefish does not accurately reflect seasonal traffic variation in the city.
- Highway speeds may be unsafe for the number and spacing of access drives.
- Two-way left-turn lane combined with multiple and frequent access drives provides business access but results in potential vehicle conflicts.
- Roads are primarily designed for automobile traffic and do not adequately accommodate bicyclists or pedestrians.
- Parking lots for adjacent commercial uses lack connectivity, requiring vehicles to re-enter the highway to move to an adjacent business.
- Lack of road network grid connections:
  - Greenwood Drive east to Monegan Road across river;
  - Whitefish Avenue south to Shiloh Avenue;
  - Columbia Avenue south to Greenwood Drive; and
  - Baker Avenue south to JP Road.
- Separated bike and pedestrian paths are discontinuous, including between the river trail and highway sidewalks and bike path, as well as various river trail segments.
- Public river access is minimal.
- There are infrequent and unsafe pedestrian crossing opportunities and a lack of safety islands and other protections.
- There is a lack of tree canopy shade for pedestrians.
- There is a need for more transit options, park...
13th Street Intersection Improvements

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

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

The model was also used to produce simulations of the potential lane configuration change to help visualize the reduced wait times. Simulations of the existing intersection with future approved projects and with a second southbound lane added indicate an improvement in vehicle wait times.
& ride lots, bus stops, bus shelters, and bike facilities.
  • There is minimal use of West 10th Street between Baker and Spokane Avenues.
  • Spacing of existing traffic signals may need adjustment to accommodate installation of future signals.
  • The entry/exit for the hospital from the highway across from Western Building Center seems unsafe.
  • Lanes are not always well delineated (striping is not well maintained, there are no reflectors).
  • The utilitarian “cobra” style highway streetlights lack character.

3. Environment and Open Space Issues
  • There is minimal open space, green space, or public parks.
  • Litter accumulates along the side of the road and is not picked up frequently enough.
  • Vehicle speed and volume results in vehicle-wildlife collisions.

Segment B Opportunities
The following opportunities were identified in Segment B:

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

2. Transportation Opportunities
  • A landscaped median could improve traffic safety and flow, as well as corridor aesthetics. The MDT Highway 93 Environmental Impact Statement indicated a raised median in this segment would be appropriate.
  • There remain several large undeveloped parcels in the segment that could contribute to improving road and trail connections when developed.
• A traffic model for the corridor indicates opportunity to improve level of service and reduce vehicle wait times at two intersections: 13th Street and Highway 40.
• There is an opportunity to better accommodate people who want to use modes of transportation other than personal vehicles by adding bike lanes, improving pedestrian crossings and sidewalks, and providing facilities for transit as identified and prioritized in the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan.
• The existing street grid system could be further expanded.
• Existing access drives could be combined and parking lots connected to improve traffic safety and flow on the highway.

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

Segment B Vision

The commercial corridor in Segment B will maintain its unique character and include a diversity of businesses. Land uses will continue to be primarily commercial but will not appear as a monotonous or continuous strip. Intense uses will be focused around key intersections with less intense uses and open spaces in between those intersections. The corridor will accommodate bicycles, pedestrians, and transit as well as vehicles. Traversing the corridor for all users will be more enjoyable because there will be abundant green space, trees and landscaping with shade, views of the mountains, enhanced pedestrian crossing opportunities, appropriately scaled decorative street lighting, landscaped medians, and an interesting built environment. The Whitefish River will be accessible, and the Whitefish River Trail will be continuous and connected to a protected bike lane along the highway. Additionally, traffic will be better managed because there will be multiple routes to get through the corridor, and the number of highway accesses will be reduced. Transit will be available and convenient.
A conceptual rendering of the types of features that should be pursued, required, or encouraged in Segment B. The public right-of-way includes an intermittent, landscaped center median, curb protected bike lanes, abundant shade trees in the boulevard, and sidewalks with direct access to adjacent buildings. New development is oriented to the street with parking located behind buildings and visually interesting landscaping along highway frontage.
4.3 Segment C

Background

Segment C of the corridor study area extends south from the four corners of the Highway 93 and Highway 40 intersection for approximately one and a half miles to the extent of the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy planning area. It also extends a quarter of a mile east and west from the highway and includes Emerald Drive, Russell Road, and the section of Highway 40 between Hospital Way and Highway 93. Land use in the segment is under the jurisdiction of Flathead County, but many people who live and work in the corridor affiliate themselves with Whitefish. Adjacent to the highway is a mix of professional offices, light commercial, single-family residential and undeveloped wooded and open spaces. Further from the highway, uses are primarily residential and agricultural. Property owners rely on private wells and septic systems. City water and sewer service currently extend only to the north side of Highway 40.

Similar to Segment B, this segment of the highway has five lanes: two driving lanes northbound, two southbound, and a center two-way left-turn lane. The paved shoulder is 10-feet wide but is used infrequently by pedestrians and bicyclists, presumably due to the high volume of vehicles traveling at high rates of speed. The 1994 Environmental Impact Study for US 93 included a separated shared-use path as a component of all alternatives considered. The speed limit in this segment of the corridor is 65 mph and the annual average daily traffic in 2018 was over 17,000 vehicles per day. As a result, drivers waiting to turn onto the highway have a difficult time judging gaps between cars and may have to wait a long time for enough space. Some drivers will turn onto the two-way left-turn lane and wait for an opening before merging with traffic. The MDT considered crash data at the Blanchard Lake Road intersection and did not identify a trend that qualifies it for safety improvement project funding. However, the Traffic Safety Section for the Missoula District is including the intersection in a Level of Service of Safety analysis expected to be completed in 2021.

City and County Planning

The 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy has long range planning goals and policies for the areas in Segment C outside of city limits. Whitefish’s Growth Policy was never formally adopted by Flathead County. From 2005 to 2014, Whitefish was responsible for administering land use decisions in the
Whitefish Planning Jurisdiction, an area extending two miles out in all directions from the City limits that included a mix of City and County zoning districts. In 2014, this extra-territorial zoning jurisdiction went back to Flathead County after the interlocal agreement was rescinded by the County. The County subsequently rescinded the 1996 Whitefish City-County Master Plan and currently bases findings for land use decisions on the 2007 Flathead County Growth Policy (updated 2012), which lacks future land use mapping. In 2015, Flathead County changed Whitefish zoning in the area to County zoning with the new rural Whitefish zoning district. In 2017, Flathead County adopted the South Whitefish Overlay zone (since renamed the Highway Overlay zone), which includes many of Whitefish’s standards for signage, landscaping, and dark skies. It also extended commercial zoning south beyond Blanchard Lake Road where it had previously been zoned for Suburban Agriculture and converted the southern portion of the corridor planning area to Suburban Agriculture from Agricultural.

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

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

- Work with the County to coordinate land use planning. Montana State law allows municipalities to define an urban growth boundary to which city services could be extended, but an interlocal agreement with counties for planning outside city limits is not required. Counties must consider and be consistent with adjacent municipal zoning and follow their own growth policy, but not necessarily comply with the municipal growth policy. For example, the new County zoning in Segment C is consistent with the adjacent Secondary Business zoning in the City but is not consistent with the 2007 Whitefish Growth Policy future land use designation of Rural Residential.
- Purchase vacant or important land to preserve and direct how it is developed. The City may potentially be able to use its bonding authority to fund land purchases. It could also partner with a non-profit land conservation organization, or citizens could lead an initiative to obtain funding. Large areas of undeveloped land are somewhat limited in Segment C, but there are currently properties around the Highway 40 intersection that, if preserved as green space or developed for public use, would help the community realize its vision for that part of the corridor. The feasibility of open space bonding for the City was assessed by the Trust for Public Lands leading up to the Haskill Basin Conservation Easement project. General obligation or revenue bonds are possible, but there is an associated cost to taxpayers. Bond issuance would require a City Council resolution and the question submitted to City voters at a City election. Voters did approve an increase in and use of resort tax funds for land conservation in Haskill Basin, but the resort tax is not up for reconsideration again until 2025. The Trust for Public Lands, Flathead Land Trust, Land and Water Conservation Fund Stateside, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks are among potential partners that could be investigated further.
- The City could be proactive about annexing land into City limits much like the City of Kalispell. Once annexed, development of these lands would be subject to City zoning and development standards, including architectural review, highway setbacks, landscaping and screening, building and parking orientation, lighting, and signage. Historically, City Council policy and adopted land use plans set the extent of the urban growth boundary for City services at Highway 40 so as not to encourage additional commercial development south of the intersection. However, in June 2021 City Council adopted a resolution to expand the urban growth boundary south to the intersection of Highway 93 with Blanchard Lake Road to include most commercially zoned properties south of Highway 40.

The goals and policies of this plan establish the community vision for this segment of the highway corridor, regardless of whether the properties remain under the jurisdiction of the County or come into the City through annexation. The tools described above provide some options for achieving this vision.
Segment C Issues
The following issues in Segment C were highlighted during public outreach, open houses, steering committee meetings, and the online survey:

1. Land Use Issues
   - There are inconsistencies between zoning and Growth Policy future land use designations (commercial zoning in areas designated Suburban and Rural Residential, Suburban Agriculture zoning in areas designated Rural).
   - Land use in the corridor is under the jurisdiction of Flathead County; without annexation the City has no authority to direct how development occurs. The segment acts as a gateway to Whitefish; commercial uses are permitted along the highway in this segment of the corridor, and commercial development on lots along the highway is occurring with no oversight from the City.
   - The County recently rezoned the corridor in this segment at the request of some landowners; feedback from others who live in the segment indicate not all residents were in favor of the change.
   - The County’s Highway Overlay zone applies to development in Segment C and has standards for landscaping, screening buffers, signs, architecture, lighting, and orientation of parking consistent with existing standards in the rest of the Highway 93 South corridor, but oversight and enforcement is insufficient.
   - City sewer and water services are only available north of Highway 40; all development south of Highway 40 must currently rely on septic systems and private wells.
   - Due to reliance on septic systems, commercial development is somewhat limited to types that can be easily served by individual private well and septic (auto and boat sales, service, storage; gas station and convenience stores; professional, medical and dental offices); however, it is possible to engineer solutions for more intense water users and wastewater producers such as hotels, bars and restaurants, or gas stations.
   - Without changes, commercial development is likely to progress in a linear (strip)
fashion, rather than in clusters or nodes of development with less dense uses in between.
- Commercial development in this segment contributes to sprawl south from Whitefish; meanwhile, there is a significant amount of undeveloped and commercially zoned land within City limits that could accommodate additional commercial development.
- Land and development fees are less expensive, and there is less construction and permitting oversight in the County than within City limits.
- Commercial development is at odds with many people’s perception (whether accurate or not) that the area south of City limits is more rural and single-family residential in character.

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

3. Environment and Open Space Issues
- Water quality may be negatively impacted by the number and age of septic systems.
- There are no tree retention requirements for parcels along the highway.
- Land denuded of vegetation can negatively impact water quality.

Commercial development could have better landscaping and buffering from Highway 93 in Segment C.
Segment C Opportunities

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

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

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

3. Environment and Open Space Opportunities
   - There is undeveloped or underdeveloped land at two of the four corners of the Highway 40 intersection with Highway 93 that potentially could be purchased to preserve open space, or easements obtained for greenspace.
   - City services could be extended as far south as Blanchard Lake Road to provide more landowners with an alternative to septic systems.
   - Land annexed into the City could be required to retain trees along the highway frontage; County landscaping and buffering regulations could be better enforced.

“This is an ideal location to welcome people into Whitefish...[it is an] important strategic location...” – survey response.
Segment C - Vision

Segment C of the corridor will provide a gradual transition from the County rural areas to the highway commercial district in the City. Alternative modes of transportation will be available, usable, and prominent. Traversing the corridor will be safe and pleasant for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles. Where there are commercial uses, any parking or storage areas will be well-screened from the highway with existing tree and shrub canopy, added landscaping, and topographic features such as earthen berms. Access to the commercial properties will be from cross or backage roads in addition to the highway. Uses generating frequent daily vehicle trips will be discouraged. Commercial structures will blend well with the natural surroundings as a result of exterior materials, scale, and building articulation, with land reserved for open or green space. The area will continue to support a rural residential lifestyle and use of agriculturally designated lands.
Highway 93 South looking northbound in Segment C near Fox Trot Lane.
5. RESTRUCTURING HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

5.0 History and Attributes of the Common Commercial “Strip”

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

“Stretching for miles in what seems to be an undifferentiated landscape of signs, driveways, parking lots, and cheap buildings, the American commercial strip is one of the most exasperating and yet ubiquitous urban forms ever created. Occurring in nearly every settlement of any size in the country, the strip is everywhere the same and everywhere an eyesore.”

– Brenda Case Scheer
Professor and Former Dean of Architecture and City and Metropolitan Planning at the University of Utah

A common commercial “strip” illustrating many of the characteristics Whitefish does not want for its Gateway Corridor.
Highway commercial strips developed nationwide after World War II following the introduction of federal home mortgage subsidies and expansion of the interstate highway system. These nationwide programs stimulated relocation of households to the suburbs and driving became the primary way of getting around. Commercial zoning was applied nationwide along miles of roadways. Abundant, cheap land meant inexpensive, single-story buildings could be developed at low densities. Buildings were placed to the rear of lots to accommodate parking and signs in front. The layouts tend to be unfriendly to pedestrians and bicyclists.

In Whitefish, the commercial corridor along

Highway 93 developed over time. Water and sewer services were extended as large lots south of downtown were annexed into the city. The types of businesses that located in the corridor needed large lots for display and parking and were not dependent on walk-in customers or presence of nearby stores. The corridor serves motorists and travelers but also provides opportunities for recreation including a bowling alley, climbing gym, and fitness centers. There was also a nine-hole golf course at one time. Initially constructed as a two-lane highway, the roadway was expanded to five lanes in 1998 to accommodate increased traffic volume.
5.1 Tools to Improve the Whitefish Gateway Corridor

Communities need a district that serves the intent and purpose of highway commercial, but often these districts come with the undesirable aspects of commercial strips. While the Secondary Business district is more attractive and functional than many commercial strips, it can be improved. This chapter contains tools to improve its form and function, including re-branding the “strip” into what we will call the “Whitefish Gateway Corridor”. The tools fall into two categories: tools to improve the public right-of-way and tools to improve private land use beyond the public right-of-way. The public right-of-way includes the driving and turning lanes of Highway 93, its shoulders, curb and gutter, sidewalks, and landscaped boulevards. Private land use occurs on properties to either side of the right-of-way and is zoned primarily for commercial uses.

Public Right-of-Way Tools

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

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

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

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

A full conceptual plan for raised medians and access management is available in an attachment to the traffic report in Appendix C. The concept for a raised median and access management north of JP Road is shown on the next page. Further analysis is needed on a property-by-property basis to determine where medians are appropriate and to preserve adequate access to corridor businesses. The conceptual median plan does not account for new projects approved and developed in 2020-2021.
To complement installation of medians, connectivity between adjacent properties would need to be enhanced and highway access shared. The number and frequency of access driveways must be reduced to limit the number of turning movements onto and off the highway. The parking lot at the southwest corner of West 13th Street and Highway 93 (next page) is a good example of access that benefits thoroughfare capacity and traffic flows. Access is primarily from two cross streets with highway access limited to right-in, right-out traffic.

Adding or lengthening existing acceleration and deceleration lanes may also help improve function on the highway. Increasing the number of crossing opportunities, adding mid-crossing pedestrian refuges, and providing designated and protected bike lanes could improve function for pedestrians and bicyclists. Expanding the
Abelin also recommended a future traffic control pattern that would include traffic control (signals or potentially roundabouts) at quarter-mile intervals (existing and potential new signals are shown to the right). Existing signals are generally located on half-mile spacing and new signals would only be installed when they become warranted by traffic volumes. The recommended spacing of traffic control takes advantage of existing roadways typically located along section lines. Ideally, future traffic should be controlled at Highway 40 (existing), Great Northern Drive (new), JP Road (existing), Park Knoll Lane (new), Akers Lane (new), Greenwood Drive (new), and 13th Street (existing). This spacing pattern would involve removal of the existing signal at Commerce Street, which provides effective access to Mountain Mall but is not well-placed for accessing areas east of Highway 93 along Greenwood Drive. Removal of the Commerce Street signal could negatively affect Mountain Mall, so future analysis of traffic control locations should more thoroughly consider public access needs.
Intersection Control: Roundabouts

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

Why a Roundabout?
A well-designed, strategically placed roundabout improves:
- safety: slower speeds and fewer points of conflict reduce the frequency and severity of accidents (see conflict points in a roundabout and a traditional intersection to the right);
- operations: delays are reduced due to the smooth flow of vehicle traffic rather than the stop-and-go traffic of normal intersections; and
- aesthetics: the central island can be landscaped to help beautify the intersection.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location on Highway 93</th>
<th>Morning - Future</th>
<th>Afternoon - Future</th>
<th>Morning With Roundabout</th>
<th>Afternoon With Roundabout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sec/Veh</td>
<td>LOS</td>
<td>Sec/Veh</td>
<td>LOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway 40</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Road</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th Street</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>19.7*</td>
<td>B*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Highway 40 Signalized Intersection vs. Highway 40 Roundabout Intersection
To reduce the visual impact of large parking lots in front of buildings set back far from the highway, Whitefish City Code's special provisions for mixed use and nonresidential building development standards (§11-3-43, WCC) require buildings to be oriented towards the primary street frontage. Parking lots must not be located between the building and the primary street frontage. Buildings must be setback a minimum of 20-feet. When buildings are further than 20-feet from the right-of-way, the space beyond the minimum setback must be landscaped or provide public amenities such as plazas, benches, bicycle racks, pedestrian access, garbage cans or other amenities for pedestrians. These regulations did not come into effect until mid-2019 and the Starbucks just south of Mountain Mall is one of the few examples of properties in the corridor developed in compliance with these regulations.

Land Use Tools
Regulatory tools should be used to improve the unattractive land use components of commercial strips, including the following:

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

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

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

The Food Co-op in Bozeman, Montana uses planter boxes to provide screening and visual interest around its parking lot.
To mitigate the visual impacts of existing parking lots located between the right-of-way and the building, the updated regulations will be applied as uses change or as improvements are proposed. When no new uses or upgrades are planned, property owners should be encouraged to improve the aesthetics of parking lots by installing planter boxes, for example, perhaps through creation of a corridor business association beautification effort.

The improvements to Parkside Credit Union at the corner of Baker Avenue with Flathead Avenue shown (left) demonstrate the value of good landscaping. Revisions to the landscaping regulations should also help break up the monotony of the commercial strip by requiring a variety of heights, masses, and colors of plants used, or by limiting the proportion of turf or grass used. When landscaping is primarily turf or grass, visual interest is limited (lower left). In contrast, use of shrubs and small trees in landscaping provides visual interest and screening around parking lots. Limiting the amount of Kentucky blue grass and other species that require a lot of irrigation could also help achieve water conservation goals. Incorporating public amenities (seating, access, connectivity, open spaces) within the landscaping along highway frontage would increase pedestrian activity, which also adds to visual interest.

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

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

The Highway Commercial sign district attempts to regulate the visual impacts of
signage in most of the corridor. All of Baker Avenue is included in the Highway Commercial district, but north of West 13th Street the posted speed limit is 25 mph and many lots are smaller than in the remainder of Segment B. It is more appropriate for Baker Avenue north of West 13th Street to be incorporated into the Resort Community Business or Old Town sign districts (or within a new sign district) that considers vehicle speed and lot size. Additionally, there are single-post monument signs in Segment B which can no longer be installed but are allowed to remain until they are modified or removed. Owners should be encouraged to remove and replace these signs. Non-conforming billboards in Segment B and Segment C (photos this page) should be brought into compliance as part of implementing this plan.

A typical commercial strip has deep lots and individual accesses from the highway. Pedestrian access is difficult, and vehicles must re-enter the highway to visit adjacent businesses. Converting large “super” blocks to several smaller blocks with a finer grain street network can help create visual interest as well as increase street frontage for businesses. It can also provide a more walkable area and connect neighborhoods to commercial areas. Access to the commercial properties would be from the side or rear which better connects neighborhoods and pedestrians. Additionally, congestion on the highway is reduced because vehicles do not need to re-enter the highway to get to multiple businesses.

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

There are also tools to help improve the function of commercial development lining
These illustrations from Strip Commercial and Mixed-Use Development (Hillsborough County, Florida 2014) show a typical commercial strip above, and how it could be transformed into a more walkable strip below.

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

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

The current regulation for Multiple Uses Same Lot (§11-3-14B, WCC) requires a conditional use permit to develop a property with multiple buildings. Multiple buildings on large lots can help reduce the visual impact of existing parking lots near the road with the addition of small buildings along the highway, encourage mixed uses, reduce vehicle trips and emissions, and potentially replace the need for a large monolithic building with smaller, less imposing structures. To facilitate this type of development and preserve the public’s ability to comment on such proposals, the regulation should be revised such that multiple buildings are allowed
in the Secondary Business District with an administrative conditional use permit.

While linear strip malls with multiple tenants are notoriously unattractive, well designed modest multi-tenant buildings are better for the environment than multiple single-use buildings and might be a way for new businesses to start. A proximity of permitted uses such as coffee shops, automobile service centers, web and tech-based businesses and other types of professional offices make it possible to reduce vehicle trips and provides better pedestrian access. Multi-tenant buildings can also share sewer infrastructure costs, as well as heating and cooling costs. To avoid production of multi-tenant buildings that look like strip malls and ensure their attractiveness, additional architectural standards for multi-tenant buildings should be developed.
Looking northbound on Highway 93 at the intersection with Highway 40.
6 GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Given the vision for the corridor and considering the tools available to affect change over time, the following goals and objectives were developed by segment to provide a framework for reshaping the corridor over the next 10 to 20 years.

An aerial perspective of Segment A looking southbound at Spokane Avenue from East 8th Street.

6.0 Segment A Goals & Objectives

Land Use

**Goal A.1:** Establish a theme for Segment A to indicate the entrance to the downtown business core two blocks north and the transitional nature of the segment between highway commercial, surrounding residential, and downtown.

**Objective 1:** Increase the shade canopy, number of street trees, and amount of landscaping in the boulevard along Spokane Avenue.

- Continue to work with Montana Department of Transportation to construct a cross-section of Spokane Avenue allowing for the retention of healthy mature trees, as well as planting new canopy trees within the right-of-way.

**Objective 2:** Expand the use of pedestrian-scale lighting and wayfinding signage consistent with downtown and add amenities such as benches through Segment A.

**Goal A.2:** Revise the sign district along Baker Avenue to be consistent with speed limits.

**Objective 1:** Review appropriateness of Resort Community Business or Old Town sign districts for use in Segment A.

**Goal A.3:** Encourage commercial and mixed-use development appropriate to the scale and transitional nature of the segment.

**Objective 1:** Create new transitional zone, overlay zone, or sub-district within the segment along Spokane Avenue with development standards varying from the existing district. Within Segment A along Spokane Avenue a mix of uses should be encouraged acknowledging the segment’s proximity to downtown and the river, direct flow into residential neighborhoods, the smaller lot sizes, limited parking, and slower speed limits.

- Commercial uses requiring abundant parking and display area are not compatible with the small lot sizes and slower speed limits.

- Any changes to land use in the segment should not cause additional traffic congestion on Spokane Avenue.

Transportation

**Goal A.4** Improve safety and capacity, decrease demand, and improve aesthetics of the road right-of-way in Segment A.

**Objective 1:** Continue work with Montana Department of Transportation on Spokane Avenue.
Environment and Open Space

Goal A.9: Highlight the multiple values of and provide better public access to the river and increase public green space.

Objective 1: Develop the river trail for recreation, transportation, public access to open space, river and river habitat.

Objective 2: Acquire riverfront property to develop as a public park, and/or obtain permanent easements from private landowners along the river for trails, public parks, and river access.

• West side of river from Baker Avenue;
• East side of river from Spokane; and
• Southwest side of river downstream of Spokane Avenue.

Objective 3: Develop Canoe Park with signage, parking, and other amenities to be more usable as a public space.

Goal A.10: Review requirements for commercial landscaping to use a mix of primarily native species with minimal watering requirements to minimize need for irrigation and support the City’s water conservation ordinance.

Objective 1: Develop a drought tolerant, native planting guide as a reference for commercial property developers.
Future Land Use Designations

Segment A

This corridor plan provides an opportunity to amend land use designations to be consistent with existing zoning. There is one area in Segment A where the zoning is inconsistent with the land use designation documented in the Growth Policy. Southwest of 10th Street and Baker Avenue the zoning is WB-1 Limited Business, but the underlying land use designation is Urban (residential). Since the business zoning is unlikely to change on this property, the land use designation should be changed to General Commercial as part of this plan.

City Implementation Activities

1. Acquire or obtain permanent easement for property from landowners along river for trails, public parks, and river access in Segment A.
2. Revise sign district along Baker Avenue in Segment A.
3. Review commercial landscaping requirements to minimize irrigation.
4. Request MDT speed study and consider speed reduction on Spokane Avenue.
5. Extend East 7th Street between Spokane and Kalispell Avenue.
6. Develop new transitional zone, overlay, or sub-district for Segment A along Spokane Avenue to account for character differences due to proximity to downtown and residential neighborhoods, smaller lot sizes, lack of parking, and slower speed limits.
7. Further develop Whitefish River Trail and Canoe Park to be more accessible.
6.1 Segment B Goals & Objectives

Land Use

Goal B.1: Improve the visual character of the built environment in Segment B.

Objective 1: Revise development standards to improve aesthetics and encourage pedestrian activity.
- Expand tree canopy in the boulevard.
- Add a Highway 93 landscaping setback of up to 30 feet to the WB-2 zoning district between East 13th Street and the Highway 40 intersection with consideration and avoidance of disproportionate impacts to smaller lots caused by the setback.
- Create landscaping with visual interest by minimizing the expanse of two-dimensional lawn grass and increasing the use of tall bunch grasses, shrubs of varied color and shape, and canopy trees with varied heights (for example, see photos on page 71).
- Remove landscaping exemption for new automotive sales lots or modifications to existing lots and allow use of planter boxes;
- Encourage existing development to come into compliance with newly adopted standards for building orientation toward the street, parking to the rear or side of structures, and framing intersections with buildings, landscaping, or plazas.
- Review Whitefish parking standards relative to national standards and potentially reduce parking requirements for some commercial uses.
- Step building rooflines back from highway where needed to minimize obstruction of mountain views.

Objective 2: Reshape the structure of Segment B to improve corridor aesthetics.
- Break up large undeveloped lots with through streets to create smaller blocks as development proceeds.
- Encourage multiple uses on large lots such that smaller commercial buildings could be added to the large parking lots of existing commercial developments fronting the highway (without creating new lots) and review shared parking standards.
- Encourage development of residential and mixed uses in pockets where appropriate, as well as entertainment, recreation, and dining uses.

Objective 3: Encourage more open space/park space in new project developments.

Objective 4: Incentivize infill development and updating or improving older structures; explore reestablishing the City’s business façade improvement program.

Objective 5: Encourage formation of a corridor business association to develop cohesive theme and moniker for Segment B as the Whitefish Gateway Corridor that signifies entry to the City (pedestrian scale lighting, banners, plantings, wayfinding signs, etc.).

Objective 6: Improve commercial signage in Segment B.
- Revise the sign district along Baker Avenue north of 13th Street to be consistent with speed limits.
- Encourage owners to replace grandfathered free-standing, single-post signs.

Goal B.2: Improve compatibility of adjacent land uses in Segment B.

Objective 1: Better buffer low density residential zones from adjacent commercial; encourage denser residential and/or offices in commercial transition areas and along new arterial roads such as Columbia or Baker Avenue, as they are extended.

Goal B.3: Encourage development and businesses in Segment B to help diversify the
Objective 1: Make it easier for starter businesses and light assembly/manufacturing to locate in the corridor by:
- Fostering development of suitable, affordable lease spaces for the types of starter businesses permitted in the WB-2;
- Improving architectural standards for multi-tenant commercial buildings to avoid development of new linear strip malls (permitted uses in the WB-2 would not change);
- Developing outdoor storage standards for light assembly and manufacturing to ensure compatibility with surrounding businesses;
- Developing business incubator and business assistance center; and
- Considering development incentives and tools to support business development (technical assistance, financial assistance, tax incentives).

Objective 2: Promote addition of amenities in the corridor such as public spaces that encourage gathering, coffee shops and lunch spots for employees and residents.

Transportation

Goal B.4: Improve traffic flow and safety through Segment B while also improving aesthetics of the road right-of-way.

Objective 1: Develop a median installation plan based on Abelin's conceptual median plan to provide access management for the Highway 93 south corridor.

Objective 2: Combine highway access drives where feasible and consider reducing the speed limit from 45 mph further south than Greenwood Drive.

Objective 3: Facilitate construction of intersection improvements at 13th Street on Highway 93 South and Baker Avenue, pending the outcome of the Downtown Whitefish Highway Study currently underway by Montana Department of Transportation.

Objective 4: Optimize timing and spacing of signals at half- or quarter-mile spacing along the corridor when traffic signal warrants are met at intersections without signals.

Objective 5: As corridor development proceeds, ensure extension of Columbia Avenue south to Greenwood Avenue; Whitefish Avenue south to Shiloh Avenue; and Baker Avenue south to JP Road. Include east-west connectors such as extending Greenwood Drive east across Whitefish River (construct new bridge) to Monegan Road to develop more of a grid system as development occurs.

Objective 6: Replace existing cobra-style lighting with (dark sky compliant) decorative highway lighting such as the lighting installed along Highway 93 West.

Objective 7: Work with utility companies, Montana Department of Transportation, and corridor property owners to investigate and consider burying overhead utility lines (identify approximate cost and funding source).

Objective 8: Require new development and encourage existing users to connect adjacent parking lots so moving from one to another does not involve re-entering the highway.

Objective 9: Consider parking lot design standards that accommodate electric vehicles and ride-share services.

Objective 10: Request Montana Department of Transportation redesign the entrance to and exit from North Valley Hospital on Highway 93 South as part of any future highway improvement project.

Objective 11: Better delineate driving lanes, whether with more frequent maintenance of lane striping, or with permanent delineation tools such as recessed reflectors.

Objective 12: Request and encourage Montana Department of Transportation to establish a continuous count station in Whitefish to establish more accurate knowledge of average and peak traffic volumes throughout the year.

Objective 13: Discourage projects along Highway 93 South that do not have direct access to a controlled intersection until a raised median has been installed.

Goal B.5: Improve opportunities and experiences for bicycling, walking, carpooling, and transit in Segment B.

Objective 1: Continue implementation of Connect Whitefish Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan recommendations for bike and pedestrian facilities.

Objective 2: Add protected bike lanes, safer and more frequent pedestrian crossing opportunities (including possible mid-block crossings and safe stopping spaces halfway across within the raised median), and amenities including pedestrian-scale lighting.

Objective 3: Facilitate development of frequently spaced bus pull-outs and shelters with hop-on/hop-off bus service.

Objective 4: Increase number of canopy shade trees in the boulevard and the extent of the urban canopy.

Objective 5: Ensure safe and comfortable pedestrian access to a mix of uses near each other so people can access buildings from the sidewalk or park once and walk to multiple destinations. This includes connected parking lots or access roads, pedestrian-scale lighting, and landscaping buffers between sidewalks.
Objective 6: Identify locations and provide bike locking stations in concert with transit infrastructure; create park & ride lots for car-poolers and transit users.

Objective 7: Extend and connect existing sections of Whitefish River Trail to each other and to highway bike lanes and sidewalks as described in the Connect Whitefish Master Plan; provide wayfinding for people to connect between highway and trails.

Objective 8: Add a bike/pedestrian path or convert a portion of West 10th Street between Baker Avenue and Spokane Avenue to a bike/pedestrian facility with connection to the future Spokane Avenue bridge underpass.

Environment and Open Space

Goal B.6: Increase opportunities for public access to natural areas and green space in Segment B.

Objective 1: Improve access and pedestrian-scale wayfinding to Whitefish River as described in the Connect Whitefish Master Plan.

Objective 2: Encourage development of landscaping corridors perpendicular to the highway connecting it to the Whitefish River with green space.

Goal B.7: Improve environment of the road right-of-way in Segment B.

Objective 1: Encourage additional Adopt-a-Highway litter pick-up efforts (April – October); involve corridor business association, organizations, and families.

Objective 2: Incentivize tree retention for properties prior to submittal of a development permit application.
  • Revise landscaping standards to better incentivize retention of healthy, mature trees.

Goal B.8: Review requirements for commercial landscaping to use a mix of primarily native species with minimal watering requirements. with the intent to minimize need for irrigation and support the City’s water conservation ordinance.

Objective 1: Develop a drought resistant native planting guide for commercial properties.

Climate Action Goals

Many of the goals indicated for all three segments of the corridor are categorized as either Land Use or Transportation goals. While not specifically identified as environmental goals, most have the added benefit of reducing environmental impacts and helping the City achieve its Climate Action Plan goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Land Use goals related to mixed or multiple uses in close proximity to each other, shared and connected parking lots, smaller blocks and an expanded street network all act to improve walkability and the ability of people to reduce vehicle trips and of developers to make more efficient use of resources. Transportation goals related to improving traffic flow and the experience and opportunities for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users would also result in improved fuel efficiency, reduced vehicle trips, and a reduction in associated greenhouse gases.
Future Land Use Designations Segment B

Several factors were considered to determine future land use designations for the corridor planning area. They include consistency between zoning, existing uses, and land use designations in the Growth Policy; existing and future streets and infrastructure such as water and sewer services; planning best practices for buffering and transitioning between different uses, densities, lot sizes and structure types; and adjacent land uses such as commercial, urban, and suburban relative to each other. Inconsistencies between zoning and future land uses are shown on the map below. The zoning districts applicable to each future land use designation according to the Growth Policy are listed on the next page.

In Segment B there are large tracts of land with zoning inconsistent with land use designated as Suburban Residential in the Growth Policy. They include the Great Northern Heights neighborhood on the west side of the highway and properties west of commercial highway uses between Park Knoll Road and Akers Lane. Land designated Suburban Residential is intended for lower density residential areas with one house per four-tenths of an acre to two and a half acres and appropriate zoning districts include Country Residential (WCR), Suburban Residential (WSR), and Estate Residential (WER). Great Northern Heights neighborhood is zoned One-Family Residential (WR-1) which is an urban-type density that allows one house per 10,000 square feet or about one-quarter acre. It also includes townhouses approved using the planned unit development process. To be consistent with this zoning, the neighborhood land use designation should be Urban, which is the appropriate future land use for WR-1 One-Family Residential zoning.

The residential zoning west of highway commercial uses between Park Knoll Road and Akers Lane is One-family Limited Residential (WLR) which allows a density of one house per 15,000 square feet or one-third acre. This is also not consistent with the Suburban Residential land use designation and should be modified to Urban land use. Between the two areas described above are largely undeveloped lots with Country Residential and Estate Residential zoning, consistent with the Suburban Residential land use designation. However, an extension of Baker Avenue south from 19th Street to JP Road has been envisioned for decades as a tool to expand the road network and relieve congestion on Highway 93 (2010 Transportation Plan, 1999 South Whitefish Transportation Planning Project). Conceptual layouts of Baker Avenue would bisect these parcels from north to south and would be classified as an arterial based on anticipated traffic volume and function. Because of the traffic volume and commercial uses permitted to the east, denser uses along the arterial are more appropriate than the low-density
residential use intended for the Suburban Residential land use designation. Encouraging uses that transition from commercial to mixed uses with denser residential along the arterial, to lower density, large lot residential to the west will help reduce future land use conflicts and traffic noise impacts. For that reason, the land adjacent to either side of a conceptual Baker Avenue extension should also change to an Urban land use designation. The Urban designation includes an isolated remnant lot zoned for agriculture and the lot directly north of the Great Northern Heights single-family neighborhood. These changes are consistent with the future land use designations east of the highway. Areas zoned Country Residential west of the Baker extension remain Suburban Residential.

### City Implementation Activities

1. Develop outdoor storage standards for light assembly and manufacturing;
2. Add architectural review standards for multi-tenant commercial buildings;
3. Revise the Special Provisions for Lots to allow multiple commercial uses on the same lot in Segment B with an administrative conditional use permit and revise shared parking regulations for those multiple uses;
4. Revise landscaping and parking standards:
   - Variation in heights, masses, colors of species used, limit use of turf or grass;
   - A mix of native species with minimal watering requirements;
   - Wider areas of landscaping on highway frontage and include public amenities;
   - Landscaping for automotive sales lots;
   - Better buffering of low-density residential from commercial uses;
   - Reduced parking spaces for some commercial uses;
   - Connection of adjacent parking lots;
   - Consider accommodation of electric vehicles and ride-share services;
5. Incentivize tree retention;
6. Add a Highway 93 South specific landscaping setback of 30-ft to the WB-2 zoning district in Segment B; and
7. Revise the sign district along Baker Avenue north of 13th Street.
8. Request MDT speed study and consider speed reduction on highway in Segment B.
9. Work with MDT and public/private transit providers to develop bus pull-outs and hop on/hop off bus service.
6.2 Segment C Goals & Objectives

Land Use

**Goal C.1**: Encourage Flathead County to enforce zoning, Highway Overlay design, and sign standards for commercial development in Segment C.

**Objective 1**: Petition and encourage Flathead County to develop a zoning compliance permit for development in the Highway Overlay zone (and/or County-wide) as a tool to ensure new development adheres to County zoning standards.

**Objective 2**: Work with Flathead County to ensure development south of Highway 40 meets City and County objectives.

**Goal C.2**: Discourage land uses in Segment C outside of Whitefish City limits inconsistent with the community’s vision for the segment or with the goals, policies, and statements in the 2012 Flathead County Growth Policy (see page 17 for a list of the relevant goals, policies, and statements). Support consistent land uses.

**Goal C.3**: Limit future commercial and light industrial development to properties currently zoned Secondary Business and Business Service District.

**Objective 1**: Oppose any expansion or parcel-by-parcel creep of either Secondary Business or Business Service zoning districts beyond current limits.

**Objective 2**: Strongly discourage commercial or light industrial uses with large volumes of daily vehicle trip generation.

**Objective 3**: Encourage, support, and ensure the County maintains the intent of the Business Service district to be developed as an island rather than a strip; retain suburban agricultural zoning further south on Highway 93.

**Objective 4**: Maintain and protect the rural character and agricultural use of lands zoned suburban agricultural.

**Goal C.4**: Foster joint planning between the City and Flathead County.

**Objective 1**: Start a dialogue with Flathead County and the cities of Kalispell and Columbia Falls to facilitate tri-city land use and transportation planning with the County.

**Objective 2**: Amend the annexation policy to encourage developers petitioning for annexation of commercial properties to use the Planned Unit Development process or propose conditional zoning for the property consistent with the community’s vision for the Whitefish gateway.

**Goal C.5**: Ensure any properties annexed into the City in the future are developed in a manner consistent with the community’s vision for the gateway segment of the corridor.

**Objective 1**: Create a new highway commercial transition zone to be applied to annexations in areas currently zoned Secondary Business, with traffic intensive uses moved from permitted to conditional uses to be consistent with the community’s vision for Segment C and to better buffer adjacent residential properties from negative impacts.

**Objective 2**: Amend the annexation policy to encourage developers petitioning for annexation of commercial properties to use the Planned Unit Development process or propose conditional zoning for the property consistent with the community’s vision for the Whitefish gateway.

**Goal C.6**: Prioritize infill within City over commercial development in the County.

**Objective 1**: Provide City water and sewer services only to properties within City limits. For properties outside City limits, annexation is a condition of receiving City services.
Goal C.7: Bring non-conforming signs, off-premises, and billboards into compliance with sign regulations.

Transportation

Goal C.8: Improve traffic safety through Segment C including potentially reducing speed and improving intersection safety.

Objective 1: Consider speed limit reductions north of Blanchard Lake Road and west of Whitefish Stage Road and petition Flathead County to request a speed study from Montana Department of Transportation

Objective 2: Follow up Montana Department of Transportation’s Level of Service of Safety analyses to resolve any safety issues identified at intersections of Blanchard Lake Road with Highway 93 and Hospital Way and Emerald Drive with Highway 40.

Objective 3: Consider alternatives to signalized control of traffic, such as a roundabout, at the intersection of Highway 93 and Highway 40 to improve future level of service.

Objective 4: Encourage Montana Department of Transportation to consider addition of right turning/deceleration or acceleration lanes at intersections identified as needing such improvements.

Objective 5: Support Flathead County’s efforts or work directly with Montana Department of Transportation to consolidate highway accesses where feasible and require new development to share access with adjacent uses.

Objective 6: Require new development and encourage existing uses to connect adjacent parking lots so moving from one to another does not involve re-entering the highway.

Goal C.9: Improve opportunities and experiences for bicyclists, pedestrians, carpoolers, and transit users in Segment C.

Objective 1: Work with Flathead County and MDT to develop a separated shared-use path within the Highway 93 right of way as far from the road shoulder as is fiscally and physically practical (identify funding source, develop a joint City/County operations and maintenance agreement with Montana Department of Transportation).

Objective 2: Work with County, transit providers, and Montana Department of Transportation to develop facilities (for example: park & ride lot, bus pull-outs, shelters and stops) and more frequent transit service.

Environment and Open Space

Goal C.10: Preserve forested and open spaces to help maintain the rural feel of the segment.

Potential Future Transitional Business District

A potential transitional business zoning district could be applied to properties currently zoned B-4 County Secondary Business, if and when those properties are annexed into the City. The district would move high traffic uses currently permitted in B-4 to conditional uses, while encouraging commercial uses generating lower vehicle trips and destination centered to minimize congestion and maximize traffic safety. Such a transition zone might allow the following types of uses as uses by right:

- Building and contractor related companies and storage yards
- Churches
- Daycares
- Light assembly and light manufacturing
- Medical clinics
- Nurseries and landscape materials
- Professional offices
- Recreational facilities, private and commercial
- Recreational guides and outfitters
- Multi-family over ground floor commercial
- Veterinary hospitals
- Wholesale and warehousing

The following types of currently permitted uses could be conditional uses:

- Automotive, boat, and RV sales, rentals, parts, repair or service
- Automotive service stations, including convenience stores
- Bars/Lounges
- Boat and RV storage
- Hospitals, nursing, retirement homes or personal care facilities
- Hotels or motels
- Animal kennels
- Machinery and small equipment sales, rental, or repair
- Microbreweries or micro-distilleries
- Ministorage
- RV parks, campgrounds, or amusement parks
- Residential accessory apartments or caretaker units
- Restaurants

In addition, it is suggested buildings over 10,000 square feet require conditional use permits. A 50-100 foot landscaped buffer should be required along Highway 93 frontage, with 20 foot setbacks required on property fronts, sides, and rears abutting residential or agricultural properties.
Objective 1: Consider acquisition of open space to preserve or use as public park space and identify potential funding sources; consider regulations for properties annexed into the City that require tree retention and more open space in new projects.

Objective 2: Encourage preservation of environmentally sensitive areas such as stormwater conveyances, wetlands, and steep slopes that contribute to the character of the segment.

Objective 3: Support the County in its efforts to enforce its landscaping, signage, and buffering requirements.

Objective 4: Maintain existing suburban residential zoning in corridor.

Goal C.11: Protect water quality.

Objective 1: Provide connection to City sewer to properties within the urban growth boundary, when requested.

Objective 2: Ensure County enforces state stormwater management standards; apply City stormwater management standards in future annexations.

Goal C.12: Minimize need for irrigation in corridor landscaping.

Objective 1: Encourage a mix of primarily native species, especially those with reduced watering needs.

Future Land Use Designations

Changes to the future land use designations are consistent with and acknowledge existing zoning. The changes also reaffirm areas zoned for residential uses should remain residential, and emphasize those areas are not appropriate for commercial or business zoning. Where already zoned for Secondary Business, the land use designation changes from Rural Residential to a new Highway Transitional designation. Where zoned for Business Service the land use designation changes from Rural Residential to Business Service Center. Where zoned residential (Suburban Agriculture- Five Acre Lots), the land use designation is changed from Rural to Rural Residential to be consistent with current zoning. All other future land use designations remain unchanged from the Growth Policy.

The new Highway Transitional land use designation would be created and the existing Business Service Center land use designation modified to indicate the applicable zoning district is WBSD - Business Service District as
part of this plan. A description of the two land use designations follows.

**Highway Transitional**
This designation is for commercial areas south of Highway 40 along the Highway 93 South Corridor that have recently applied Flathead County Secondary Business zoning. Historically agricultural and low-density residential, the area is transitioning to higher intensity commercial uses with the new commercial zoning. Key characteristics are unobstructed mountain views and high traffic associated with a major intersection of two highways. Development should be sensitive, well-designed, and well-landscaped low intensity uses that respect the area as the gateway to Whitefish from the south. Due to highway speeds and traffic, commercial development should be destination centered rather than auto oriented, and uses generating relatively high daily traffic should be discouraged. Necessary frontage roads should be developed, and accesses consolidated to minimize congestion and maximize traffic safety. A wide and well landscaped buffer along the highway and robust landscaping on commercial developments will ensure a gradual transition to the more intensive highway commercial uses further north in the General/Highway Commercial areas. In addition to commercial uses such as offices, medical facilities, and light industrial/manufacturing/warehousing, single family detached and attached homes are acceptable. Apartments above commercial uses are also encouraged. More intense commercial uses will require the additional public scrutiny of conditional use permits. The applicable zoning district is WB-T, Transitional Business.

**Business Service Center**
This is a non-retail service commercial and light industrial designation. Major uses would be distribution, light manufacturing and component assembly, office-warehouse-showroom types of operations, contractors, building and material suppliers, wholesale trades, mini-storage, and other commercial services of a destination nature. Suitable locations would be adjacent to arterial or collector streets or a highway. Structures would be of moderate to high architectural quality, and clearly not “industrial” in appearance. Landscaping will be extensive with good quality and effective screening and buffering. Applicable zoning district is WBSD, Business Service District.
City Implementation Activities

1. Oppose any expansion of commercial zoning in Segment C.

2. Petition and encourage Flathead County to develop a zoning compliance permit as a tool to ensure new development adheres to County zoning standards.

3. Discourage any proposed projects in Segment C that are inconsistent with the City’s vision for this segment of the corridor; support those that are consistent.

4. Acquire land or obtain permanent easements for open space near Highway 40 intersection.

5. Start a dialogue with Flathead County and the cities of Kalispell and Columbia Falls to facilitate tri-city land use and transportation planning with the County.

6. Request Flathead County ask Montana Department of Transportation to conduct speed study on Highway 93 between Blanchard Lake Road and Highway 40, and on Highway 40 between Whitefish Stage Road and Highway 93.

7. Work with Flathead County to develop a separated shared-use path along the highway (identify funding source, develop a joint City/County operations and maintenance agreement with Montana Department of Transportation), develop bus pull-outs, shelters and car-pooling facilities, and expand transit service.

8. Create a highway transition zone with development standards for future annexations. In the interim, encourage developers petitioning for annexation of commercial properties to propose conditional zoning for the property consistent with the community’s vision for the gateway to Whitefish.

9. Amend annexation policy to encourage owners or developers of County zoned commercial property who petition for annexation to propose conditional zoning for the property that is consistent with the community’s vision for the gateway entrance to Whitefish.

10. Bring non-conforming signs and billboards into compliance.
7 IMPLEMENTATION

7.0 Introduction

The community vision, goals, and objectives for this plan will help inform future decisions made by the City of Whitefish, as well as Flathead County, and Montana Department of Transportation within the Highway 93 South Corridor. The Action Items in this chapter will help implement the goals and objectives of this plan over time. Action Items are grouped by the entity best positioned to take the action. For example, zoning code amendments will be undertaken by City staff, while transportation improvements on Highway 93 South will ultimately depend on action by the Montana Department of Transportation. Several actions must be taken cooperatively by the City and the County, while others will only come to fruition through public-private partnerships. Within each group, near term Action Items are presented before mid-term and longer term Action Items.

Once adopted, the implementing actions in this plan will become City Council goals assigned to the department responsible for taking the action. As part of that process, Department staff must provide quarterly updates to City Council on the status of each goal. In this manner, the City will be held accountable for and able to track progress towards implementing this plan.

City Actions: Regulatory and Administrative

**Tool: Zoning Amendments**
The development and addition of new or revised standards and potentially new transitional or overlay districts to the zoning code will help achieve some of the plan’s goals. City planning staff will draft zoning code amendments with input from stakeholders, and public hearings will be held at both the Planning Board and City Council to solicit further input and refine the changes. The City Council will then ultimately vote on whether to adopt the proposed amendments.

City - County Coordination: Land Use Planning

**Tool: Facilitation**
The University of Montana’s Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy or other facilitator could be engaged to initiate a dialogue, improve the working relationship, and foster joint planning between the City of Whitefish and Flathead County with the intent of achieving Segment C goals and objectives. Ideally, planning for transition areas between cities and counties should be done with cooperation between jurisdictional entities. Many Montana cities and counties have interlocal agreements to help facilitate coordination. Unfortunately, no such agreement exists between Whitefish and Flathead County, nor is such an agreement required under Montana State Law. The State requires municipalities to have an Extension of Services plan and define an urban growth boundary to which city services could be extended. Whitefish has adopted such a plan, and it shows significant areas outside of city limits that will eventually annex into the city. Under State land use law, counties must consider and be consistent with adjacent municipal zoning and follow their own growth policy, but not necessarily comply with the municipal growth policy. This has resulted in some County zoning south of Whitefish inconsistent with the City’s Growth Policy. In addition to land use, transportation planning for areas outside City limits could also benefit from greater intergovernmental cooperation.

City - County - MDT Coordination: Transportation Improvements

**Tool: Corridor Plan Adoption**
Transportation improvements within the highway right-of-way, whether for improved safety, traffic flow, bike and pedestrian facilities, or aesthetics, will depend on decisions and actions by Montana Department of Transportation. This plan includes numerous goals and objectives for transportation improvements. Adoption of this plan provides information on the community’s vision and goals for the corridor which should help guide transportation project decision making and future actions.

**Tool: Shovel-Ready Projects**
Projects that are prioritized in adopted plans and which are “shovel-ready” can more easily capitalize on federal grant dollars that
become available. A shovel-ready project has usually been through the required planning and approval processes and can initiate construction upon securing investment. It also refers to projects that will have immediate impact on employment rates and the economy. Upon adoption of this plan, the City can take action to prepare a shovel-ready project based on the goals described within it.

Public-Private Partnership Actions: Land Acquisition and Expansion of Road and Trail Networks

**Tool: Funding Sources**

There are several funding sources potentially available to the City for land acquisition and parks or trail development. These funding sources could be combined in partnership with funding sources from other entities as described below to help realize some of the goals of the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan.

The City has a three-percent Resort Tax collected from lodging, retail, bars, and restaurants. Authorized by Montana Code Annotated §7-6-1501, the resort tax was originally approved by Whitefish voters in 1995 and extended in 2004 through January 2025. Assuming another extension is approved with allocation changes by 2024, 10 percent of the collected tax could be allocated to the Parks Department and would allow for acquisition of land for open space and trail easements. However, these additional funds would not start being collected until February 2025 and will take many years to accumulate sufficient funding to purchase land considering there are other competing Parks projects.

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a tool the City has used since 1987 to spur growth, provide public infrastructure and facilities, and eliminate blight. The original TIF expired in 2020, but the City is evaluating feasibility of an additional TIF district or districts from which to collect property tax in excess of its base valuation. While TIF funds can be used for land acquisition, it is unlikely such funds would be immediately available as it takes many years to build incremental value.

The City’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a potential source for land acquisition for public parks, trails, and preservation of open space. It generally includes a variety of federal, state, and local funding sources designated to fund improvements with priorities and criteria for allocations established by the City in its annual budget document.

General Obligation bonds are funded by a property tax levy approved by voters. Income from the tax levy is used to retire the bonds. They are usually used for larger projects and could be considered for land and open space acquisition. However, since voters must approve the levy and any bonds, the funds may not be available to respond quickly to a land acquisition opportunity.

Finally, grants may be awarded by federal and state agencies for public improvements that meet the guidelines for specific programs such as the Transportation Alternatives Program, the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program, the State’s Recreation Trails Program (recreational trails), the Montana Trail Stewardship Grant Program (new trails and shared-use paths), or the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Grants Program (acquisition and development of public parks and other outdoor recreation sites).

**Tool: Partnership with Other Entities**

The Trust for Public Lands, Flathead Land Trust, Land and Water Conservation Fund Stateside, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks are among potential entities with which the City could partner on land acquisition efforts. Alternatively, or in parallel, citizens could lead an initiative to raise funds which could then be used in combination with City funds for land acquisition.

The City often partners with private developers when projects are proposed involving subdivision, the planned unit development (PUD) process, or conditional use permits (CUPs). As the project is reviewed against approval criteria, City staff and elected officials have an opportunity to ask for or require new public infrastructure be constructed to offset future impacts of the project provided a nexus can be shown. This is typically how expansion of the public road network through private property is achieved. For example, Whitefish Avenue was recently extended south from Akers Lane as part of a residential PUD. Once the developer builds the road extension, the road right-of-way is dedicated to the City of Whitefish and it becomes public property. Private developers could also dedicate open space near the highway or the Whitefish River corridor or complete public use trails as part of a major development proposal.
7.1 Action Items

**City Action:**

**Revise landscaping standards.**
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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent businesses, and property owners

**Resources:** Planning staff drafts revisions, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval

**Goals:** A.10, B.1, B.7, and B.8

**City Action:**

**Review parking standards.**
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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent businesses, and property owners

**Resources:** Planning staff reviews standards and drafts revisions, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval

**Goals:** B.1 and B.5

**City Action:**

**Develop outdoor storage screening standards for light assembly and manufacturing.**
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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, WB-2 and WI businesses, and property owners

**Resources:** Planning staff drafts standards, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval

**Goal:** B.3

**City Action:**

**Revise sign district along Baker Avenue north of East 13th Street.**
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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent businesses, and property owners

**Resources:** Planning staff reviews sign districts, drafts revised sign district boundaries or new district, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval

**Goals:** A.2 and B.1
City Action:

**Update architectural review standards for multi-tenant commercial buildings.**

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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years  
**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Architectural Review Committee, residents, WB-2 businesses, and property owners  
**Resources:** Planning staff works with Architectural Review Committee to revise standards for multi-tenant commercial buildings, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval  
**Goal:** B.3

---

City Action:

**Develop new transitional zone, overlay, or sub-district within Secondary Business district for Segment A.**

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.

**Timeframe:** In tandem with development of a new zone, overlay, or sub-district for downtown as recommended by the Downtown Business District Master Plan.  
**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, residents, business and property owners  
**Resources:** Planning staff drafts new zones, overlays, or sub-districts for Segment A business district and residential areas to the north in consultation with interested stakeholders, gains stakeholder support, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval  
**Goal:** A.3

---

City Action:

**Revise Special Provisions for Lots.**

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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years  
**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent businesses, and property owners  
**Resources:** Planning staff revises special provisions, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval  
**Goal:** B.1

---

City Action:

**Revise WB-2 zoning district.**

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 landscaping setback of up to 30-feet from Highway 93 South specific to the WB-2 Secondary Business zoning district between East 13th Street and the Highway 40 intersection. Consider and avoid disproportionate impacts to smaller lots from the setback.

**Timeframe:** One to two years  
**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent businesses, and property owners  
**Resources:** Planning staff revises landscaping setback, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval  
**Goal:** B.1
**City Action:**

**Create a highway transition zoning district.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Within a year of plan adoption.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent County businesses, and County property owners

**Resources:** Planning staff drafts transitional zone, invites feedback from stakeholders, and presents to Planning Board and City Council for approval

**Goal:** C.5

---

**City Action:**

**Amend annexation policy.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Within a year of plan adoption.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent County businesses and property owners

**Resources:** Planning staff drafts policy statement, presents to City Council and stakeholders in a work session, amends as directed, and works with developers to understand the community vision

**Goal:** C.5

---

**City Action:**

**Further develop Whitefish River Trail and Canoe Park to be more accessible.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Two to five years for Canoe Park; Five to ten years for trail development contingent on replacement of Spokane Avenue culverts with a bridge.

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, adjacent businesses and property owners, and City residents

**Resources:** Parks and Public Works staff coordinate to develop capital improvement projects for their respective Department budgets

**Goal:** A.9

---

**City Action:**

**Oppose expansion of commercial zoning in Segment C.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Ongoing

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish and Flathead County

**Resources:** City Planning Director, Planning Board, and Elected Officials to communicate and work with County Planning Director, Planning Board, and Elected Officials

**Goal:** C.3
**City Action:**

Discourage any proposed projects in 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.

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.

**Timeframe:** Ongoing

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County

**Resources:** City Planning Director and Elected Officials to communicate and work with County Planning Director and Elected Officials

**Goal:** C.2

---

**City - County Action:**

Foster dialogue and coordinated planning between the City of Whitefish and Flathead 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 transporation corridor development standards.

**Timeframe:** Initiate within one year of plan adoption and continue relationship building on an ongoing basis

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, City of Columbia Falls, City of Kalispell, and Flathead County

**Resources:** City Planning Director and Elected Officials to communicate and work with County Planning Director and Elected Officials

**Goal:** C.4

---

**City - County Action:**

Petition and Encourage Flathead County to develop a zoning compliance permit.

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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County, developers

**Resources:** City Planning Director and Elected Officials to communicate and work with County Planning Director and Elected Officials

**Goal:** C.1

---

**City Action:**

Develop new road extension standards.

Address through amendments to the City Code’s zoning and/or subdivision requirements or Public Works Engineering Standards for new development to have direct access to a controlled intersection or frontage/back roads off of Highway 93, or require construction of any extensions.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish and adjacent businesses/property owners

**Resources:** Planning and Public Works staff, Planning Board, City Council

**Goal:** B.4
Consider speed limit reduction on Highway 93 South in Segment C.
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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County, and MDT

**Resources:** Planning and Public Works staff and elected officials in Whitefish initiate the request with Flathead County staff and elected officials; the County would then ask MDT to conduct the study

**Goal:** C.8

---

Establish a continuous count station to collect traffic data specific to Whitefish.
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.

**Timeframe:** Two to three years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish and MDT

**Resources:** Public Works staff to communicate and work with MDT to identify an appropriate location and develop a nearby station

**Goal:** B.4

---

Better delineate driving lanes on Highway 93 South between Highway 40 and East 13th Street.
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 other method MDT identifies.

**Timeframe:** Two to three years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish and MDT

**Resources:** Public Works staff work with MDT to prioritize and construct project

**Goal:** B.4

---

Develop a plan for a shovel-ready project for Highway 93 South between East 13th Street and the Highway 40 intersection with which to seek federal grants.
Using Abelin’s conceptual median plan as a starting point, the City should develop a median installation plan in coordination with Montana Department of Transportation to provide access management for the Highway 93 south corridor. The intent is to plan a shovel-ready project to be used to apply for federal funding opportunities when they arise. The project should also include protected bike lanes, more frequent and safer pedestrian crossings (consider potential for a grade-separated crossing), transit pull-outs and shelters, more trees and landscaping in the boulevard, pedestrian-scale lighting, and decorative highway lighting.

**Timeframe:** Two to five years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish staff and consultants, corridor businesses and residents

**Resources:** Public Works and Park staff work with stakeholders to develop median installation plan in coordination with MDT

**Goal:** B.4
**City - County - MDT Action:**

**Improve intersection safety at Blanchard Lake Road and the entrances to North Valley Hospital.**
The City will encourage Montana Department of Transportation to improve left turn safety at the entrance to North Valley Hospital from and to Highway 93 South, 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.

**Timeframe:** Five to ten years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County, MDT, residents, and corridor business owners

**Resources:** Public Works and Planning staff to work with MDT and stakeholders to design, fund, and construct improvements

**Goals:** B.4 and C.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City - MDT Action:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construct intersection improvements on East 13th Street at Baker Avenue and at Highway 93 South.</strong> 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 by a City traffic consultant 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Timeframe:** Five to ten years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, residents, and corridor business owners

**Resources:** Public Works staff communicate and work with MDT and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goal:** B.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City - County - MDT Action:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop a separated shared-use path, park-and-ride lot(s), and bus stops along the highway in Segment C.</strong> The Highway 93 South corridor in Segment C is under the jurisdiction of Flathead County and Montana Department of Transportation. The City should work with the County and Department to develop a separated shared-use path, identify existing parking lots that could be used part-time for park-and-ride lot(s), and consider new park-and-ride lots and bus stops in Segment C. The City and County would need to develop a Memorandum of Understanding for operation and maintenance of the shared-use path with Montana Department of Transportation. The City should also work with transit providers to increase service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Timeframe:** Five to ten years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County, MDT, residents, and business owners

**Resources:** Planning and Public Works staff work with MDT, County, and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goal:** C.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City - MDT Action:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design and construct a Spokane Avenue cross section to improve capacity, reduce demand, and improve aesthetics.</strong> 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 (consider grade-separation), 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Timeframe:** Eight to fifteen years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, residents, and corridor business owners

**Resources:** Planning, Parks, and Public Works staff communicate and work with MDT and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goals:** A.4 and A.5
Consider roundabout at Highway 93 South and Highway 40 intersection.

Initial traffic modelling by the City's traffic consultant 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.

**Timeframe:** Ten to twenty years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County, MDT, residents, and business owners

**Resources:** Public Works and Planning staff to communicate with and support MDT analysis of intersection improvements and consult with stakeholders

**Goal:** C.8

---

Extend East 7th Street from Spokane Avenue to Kalispell Avenue.

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.

**Timeframe:** Eight to fifteen years, in tandem with Spokane Avenue improvement project

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, residents, owners

**Resources:** Public Works staff work with stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project in coordination with MDT

**Goal:** A.4

---

Designate Baker Avenue between East 13th and East 2nd Streets as the truck route through downtown Whitefish.

As part of any Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 South improvement project and depending on the outcome of the Downtown Whitefish Highway Study currently underway by Montana Department of Transportation, 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 residential neighborhoods. Road widening to accommodate truck traffic may require acquisition of right-of-way, a process that will likely add years to the timeline.

**Timeframe:** Ten to twenty years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, residents, and corridor business owners

**Resources:** Public Works staff communicate and work with MDT and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goal:** A.4

---

Replace Spokane Avenue culverts with a bridge on Spokane Avenue.

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.

**Timeframe:** Eight to fifteen years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, Flathead Conservation District, residents, and business associations

**Resources:** Public Works, Planning, and Parks staff work with MDT and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goal:** A.6

---

Extend East 7th Street from Spokane Avenue to Kalispell Avenue.

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.

**Timeframe:** Eight to fifteen years, in tandem with Spokane Avenue improvement project

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, residents, owners

**Resources:** Public Works staff work with stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project in coordination with MDT

**Goal:** A.4

---

City - MDT Action:

**Designate Baker Avenue between East 13th and East 2nd Streets as the truck route through downtown Whitefish.**

As part of any Spokane Avenue/Highway 93 South improvement project and depending on the outcome of the Downtown Whitefish Highway Study currently underway by Montana Department of Transportation, 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 residential neighborhoods. Road widening to accommodate truck traffic may require acquisition of right-of-way, a process that will likely add years to the timeline.

**Timeframe:** Ten to twenty years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, residents, and corridor business owners

**Resources:** Public Works staff communicate and work with MDT and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goal:** A.4

---

City - MDT Action:

**Replace Spokane Avenue culverts with a bridge on Spokane Avenue.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Eight to fifteen years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, Flathead Conservation District, residents, and business associations

**Resources:** Public Works, Planning, and Parks staff work with MDT and stakeholders to prioritize, fund, design, and construct project

**Goal:** A.6

---

City - County - MDT Action:

**Consider roundabout at Highway 93 South and Highway 40 intersection.**

Initial traffic modelling by the City's traffic consultant 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.

**Timeframe:** Ten to twenty years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, Flathead County, MDT, residents, and business owners

**Resources:** Public Works and Planning staff to communicate with and support MDT analysis of intersection improvements and consult with stakeholders

**Goal:** C.8
### City - MDT Action:

**Consider speed limit reduction on Spokane Avenue in Segment A and on Highway 93 South in Segment B.**

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.

**Timeframe:** One to two years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish and MDT

**Resources:** Planning and Public Works staff and elected officials formally request speed studies in the corridor

**Goals:** A.4 and B.4

---

### Public-Private Partnership Action:

**Develop frequently spaced bus pull-outs and shelters with hop on/hop off bus service within and between Segment B and downtown.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Two to five years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, public transit providers, business associations, and other private sources of funding for hop on/hop off bus service

**Resources:** Planning and Public Works staff to continue working with the Mountain Climber to improve local and regional service, consult with stakeholders to identify potential private funding sources for more frequent local service, and work with MDT to develop pull-outs/shelters.

**Goal:** B.5

---

### Public-Private Partnership Action:

**Increase the frequency of Adopt-a-Highway litter pick-up efforts (April – October) along Highway 93 South.**

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.

**Timeframe:** Two to five years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, MDT, corridor businesses or associations, volunteer organizations, and other interested individuals

**Resources:** Planning and Parks staff to solicit interested volunteer groups and coordinate with MDT to increase frequency of litter pick-up.

**Goal:** B.7

---

### Public-Private Partnership Action:

**Acquire property or obtain permanent easements along Whitefish River and around the Highway 40 intersection.**

The City should engage with public land trusts, local philanthropists, and engaged citizens to purchase land or obtain permanent easements to be used for trails, public parks, and access to the river, natural areas, and green space.

**Timeframe:** Five to ten years

**Stakeholders:** City of Whitefish, public land trusts, state agencies, Flathead Conservation District, residents, City and County property owners

**Resources:** Planning and Parks staff and elected officials engage with public land trusts and local philanthropists to identify parcels and funding source, purchase, and conserve land

**Goals:** A.9 and C.10