

Whitefish City-County

Growth Policy



November 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING APPROACH	5
VISION STATEMENT	9
CHAPTER 1: NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT	11
AIR QUALITY.....	11
<i>Table 1.1</i>	13
Air Quality Goals:	14
Air Quality Policies:	14
Air Quality Recommended Actions:	15
WATER QUALITY	15
<i>Table 1.2</i>	21
Water Quality Goals:	21
Water Quality Policies:	22
Water Quality Recommended Actions:	22
CRITICAL AREAS.....	23
<i>Other Types Of Critical Areas</i>	29
Critical Areas Goals:	30
Critical Areas Policies:	30
Critical Areas Recommended Actions:	31
CHAPTER 2: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT	33
EMPLOYMENT.....	33
<i>Table 2.1</i>	34
<i>Table 2.2</i>	35
<i>Table 2.3</i>	36
RETAIL TRADE	38
<i>Table 2.4</i>	39
LOCALIZED FARMING	39
DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT MASTER PLAN	40
Economic Development Goals:	44
Economic Development Policies:	45
Economic Development Recommended Actions:	45
CHAPTER 3: LAND USE ELEMENT	47
MAINTAINING CHARACTER	47
HISTORIC PRESERVATION.....	48
ZONING	50
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS.....	51
WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT	52
GROWTH	53
PRESERVATION OF OPEN/RURAL LANDS.....	60
DEVELOPMENT DENSITY.....	62
ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS	63
JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES	65
FUTURE LAND USE.....	65
Future Land Use Goals:	68
Future Land Use Policies:	69
Future Land Use Recommended Actions:	71
SPECIAL APPENDIX TO THE LAND USE ELEMENT	72
<i>Explanation of Methodology for Determining Entitlements</i>	72

Approved Entitlements Map	74
Development Potential Map	75
Future Land Use Map: Full View.....	76
Future Land Use Map: North Detail	77
Future Land Use Map: South Detail	78
Conservation Easements Map.....	79
CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY FACILITIES ELEMENT.....	80
MUNICIPAL WATER SERVICE	80
Municipal Water Service Goals:	83
Municipal Water Service Policies:	83
Municipal Water Service Recommended Actions:	84
WASTEWATER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT.....	84
Wastewater Collection and Treatment Goals:	87
Wastewater Collection and Treatment Policies:	87
Wastewater Collection and Treatment Recommended Actions:	87
STORMWATER MANAGEMENT	87
Stormwater Management Goals:	89
Stormwater Management Policies:.....	90
Stormwater Management Recommended Actions:.....	90
FINANCING AND IMPROVEMENT MECHANISMS.....	90
Financing and Improvement Mechanisms Goals:	93
Financing and Improvement Mechanisms Policies:	93
Financing and Improvement Mechanisms Recommended Actions:	93
SOLID WASTE	93
Solid Waste Goals:	94
Solid Waste Policy:	95
Solid Waste Recommended Actions:	95
EMERGENCY SERVICES	95
Emergency Services Goals:.....	97
Emergency Services Policies:.....	97
Emergency Services Recommended Actions:.....	98
MAJOR MUNICIPAL FACILITIES	98
HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE	99
Human Infrastructure Goals:.....	100
Human Infrastructure Policies:	100
Human Infrastructure Recommended Actions:	100
PARKS AND RECREATION	100
Parks and Recreation Goals:.....	102
Parks and Recreation Policies:	102
Parks and Recreation Recommended Actions:	102
OPEN SPACES	102
Open Spaces Goals:.....	103
Open Spaces Policies:.....	103
Open Spaces Recommended Actions:.....	104
PUBLIC SCHOOLS	104
SUSTAINABILITY	105
Sustainability Goals:	107
Sustainability Policies:	107
Sustainability Recommended Actions:.....	108
<i>Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Master Plan Map</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Parks Service Area Map</i>	<i>110</i>
CHAPTER 5: HOUSING ELEMENT.....	111
Housing Element Goals:	119
Housing Element Policies:	119
Housing Element Recommended Actions:	120

CHAPTER 6: TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT	121
A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP.....	121
FUNCTIONAL STREET CLASSIFICATION	122
VEHICLE TRIPS AND TRIP COUNTS	123
BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM.....	123
PARALLEL COLLECTOR STREETS.....	124
EAST – WEST STREET ACCESS LIMITATIONS	125
SCHOOL TRAFFIC	126
BIG MOUNTAIN ROAD.....	127
GRADE SEPARATED RAILROAD CROSSINGS.....	127
NEIGHBORHOOD SENSITIVE STREET STANDARDS	128
DOWNTOWN BYPASS	133
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION	134
AIR TRAVEL	134
RAIL TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT.....	135
INTER-CITY BUS TRANSPORTATION.....	135
Transportation Element Goals:	135
Transportation Element Policies:	136
Transportation Element Recommended Actions:	136
CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION/INTERGOVERNMENTAL ELEMENT	138
PLANNING DOCUMENTS ADOPTED BY REFERENCE.....	138
GROWTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION	139
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION	140
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION	142
GROWTH POLICY AMENDMENTS AND UPDATES.....	143
IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	145
APPENDIX	146
GLOSSARY OF PLANNING TERMS	146

INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING APPROACH

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Yogi Berra

This Growth Policy has been prepared and adopted under the authority of and in accordance with Part 6, Chapter 1, Title 76, Montana Code Annotated (MCA). A Growth Policy is required by Montana law for any local government to manage growth and development through zoning and subdivision regulations.

The purpose of this document is to set forth a broad body of public policy that is founded in a community vision, and that addresses growth and development issues through the various topic areas (elements) of natural resources, economic development, land use, community facilities, housing, and transportation. This document contains community goals, and policies and recommended actions for achieving those goals. The final element, Implementation/Intergovernmental Coordination, sets forth the manner in which the Growth Policy is to be implemented. While the Growth Policy itself does not enact regulations or establish programs, it provides the legal and rational basis, or “nexus” for regulatory or programmatic measures to implement the Growth Policy.

Beginning in January, 2006, the staff of the Whitefish Planning & Building Department began working with a Growth Policy Steering Committee appointed by the Whitefish City Council. With the input and vision generated from the community, the Committee and staff worked together for the next 16 months to produce a “working draft” of the Growth Policy that could then be transmitted to the City-County Planning Board for their review and at least one public hearing as provided for in the 76-1-602, MCA. It is important to note that the Steering Committee was formed in order to broaden community participation in developing the Growth Policy by including a wide range of community interests. The work of the Steering Committee was an additional step for greater community involvement well beyond what is required by state law.



A meeting of the Whitefish Growth Policy Steering Committee in April, 2007. The Committee was appointed by the Whitefish City Council, and met regularly from January, 2006 to April, 2007 to formulate a “working draft” of the Growth Policy to pass on to the City-County Planning Board. The Committee took public comment at every meeting.

In order to ensure that the Growth Policy is founded in a community vision, the Committee and staff undertook an extensive public involvement program, including 16 separate “visioning sessions” held through the summer and fall of 2006. A web site was established to disseminate information and to collect comments. A preliminary public review draft of the first three Growth Policy elements was distributed in February, 2007. That release was followed up by a community event at the O’Shaughnessy Cultural Arts Center that was attended by approximately 100 persons. A number of other measures were taken to promote community awareness and involvement. This Growth Policy will be supplemented by at least two technical memoranda, one of which will document the public involvement program in detail.



Visioning session held at the Saddle Club in July, 2006. Sessions were facilitated by a city staff planner, and results recorded on a flip chart for all to see. Following each session, results were summarized and posted on the Growth Policy web site. Attendance at visioning sessions ranged from around 12 to over 50. Average attendance was approximately 20 persons per session.

Document Format

As explained above, the Whitefish City-County Growth Policy is “vision driven”. Out of vision come issues that must be addressed to make the vision a reality. Issues include clean air and water, small town feel, scenic views and vistas, neighborhood scale and character, open spaces, affordable housing, and many others. Issues were identified both by those attending the visioning sessions and by the Steering Committee. This document examines those key issues within each planning element. Out of the issues come the goals and policies to deal with or resolve the issues, and then come a series of recommended actions for specific programs or regulations to address the issues.

Goal: In planning, a goal is a statement of an end to which effort is directed. A goal is a very general statement and there are no milestones or benchmarks to measure when and if a goal has been met. Example are, *To provide a wide variety of safe, decent, and affordable housing for the residents and workforce of the community,* and, *Preserve and enhance the character and qualities of this community.*

Policy: A policy is a statement of priority or principle that guides projects, programs, or operations over time. An example would be, *The city shall make environmental protection a primary objective of its land development program,* or, *In capital*

improvement programming, top priority shall be projects that implement the Downtown Master Plan.

Recommended actions: Actions are specific steps that are taken to address or resolve an issue identified through community involvement or the plan drafting process. Actions are their own benchmarks; they are either carried out or they are not. An example of an action would be, *Initiate a program to educate homeowners on the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and the dangers these chemicals pose to water quality.*

Planning Approach

The approach to community planning followed in this document is derived from the community visioning sessions. Although citizens attending the sessions were generally uncomfortable with the rapid pace of growth in Whitefish, they made it clear that they did not want the Growth Policy to establish an “urban growth boundary” that would geographically set the ultimate build-out limits of the community. Nor did they want a “growth cap” or “population threshold” to set limits on the population or number of dwelling units Whitefish is to eventually have. There was no consensus to “close the door” or adopt a “no growth” plan. Instead, visioning session participants identified the attributes of the community that they valued the most, and that they wanted to see preserved even as the community grows. Among these were:

- ❖ Small town feel and character
- ❖ Open spaces
- ❖ Scenic vistas
- ❖ Wildlife and wildlife habitat
- ❖ Public safety (described mostly as low crime rate and the ability to walk and bike in relative safety)

Once these community attributes were identified, the consensus was to build a plan around what the community values, and let the “numbers” (of people, or households, etc.) fall out of that. **What this means for a planning approach is simply that the Whitefish community will not use population and housing projections to dictate how many people or how many homes they must plan for.**

This is not to say that population and housing projections cannot be valuable. They can be useful indicators of policy and program effectiveness, and the MCA requires that they be included in a Growth Policy. Actual projections, using both linear and proportionate share methods, are included in the 2006 Resource Analysis that is adopted herein by reference. Generally, these projects put the year 2025 City of Whitefish population at between **8,439** and **12,649** depending on the assumptions used in the linear method. Total 2025 population projected for the planning jurisdictional area is **14,065** to **23,348**. By comparison, the 2005 population estimate released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2006 was around **7,000**.

Sustainability

In addition to the community vision, this Growth Policy is also founded on the concept of sustainability. For purposes of the Growth Policy, sustainability is defined as meeting the

needs of the present while ensuring that future generations will have the same or better opportunities. The idea of embracing sustainability as a Growth Policy premise was considered by the Steering Committee and staff to be the economically, environmentally, and socially responsible thing to do. There is little purpose in producing a community plan that relies on the continued and escalating use of fossil fuels and that fails to take into account the impact that “greenhouse gases” are having on the planet. While scientists and statesmen continue to debate man’s role in global climate change, the Steering Committee and city staff felt strongly that this issue should be raised at the local level, and that members of the community should be empowered to make the choice for sustainability if they so desire.

The concept of sustainability touches many areas of a community plan. In land use and transportation planning, sustainability would support a compact growth pattern, discourage sprawl, and provide opportunities for mixed and multiple uses of land to reduce or eliminate vehicle trips. Sustainable development preserves transportation choices such as walking, transit, and cycling, as opposed to leaving a private automobile trip as the only viable transportation choice.

Sustainability is also a factor in housing and the local economy. The more members of the local workforce that can find suitable housing in the community, the fewer vehicle trips will be needed to commute to work in nearby communities---or for those living outside of Whitefish to commute here for work. Organic farming and the availability of locally grown food is a community character issue, a personal health choice, and a matter of sustainability. Local products require far less fossil fuel for transport to the consumer. Sustainability promotes smart, energy efficient homes that may reuse rainwater, decrease impervious surfaces, preserve natural native vegetation, and make use of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.

Community facilities and services have huge implications for sustainability. Design of and construction of streets, stormwater management, park planning and design, solid waste source reduction, and choice of fleet vehicles all have an influence on the community’s sustainability. This Growth Policy offers the Whitefish community a choice to reduce or eliminate its “carbon footprint”, and to take its place among progressive communities across the nation that are becoming models of sustainability.

VISION STATEMENT

Throughout the summer of 2006, the City of Whitefish conducted a series of visioning sessions. Some 16 individual sessions were held in various locations across the community, including City Hall, the Armory, Moose Lodge, Golden Agers Community Center, Saddle Club, Bohemian Grange Hall, and others. Attendance at each session ranged from a dozen to over 50.

Discussion centered around six basic questions:

1. What do you like about Whitefish? What do you value about the community that you want it preserved as the community grows?
2. What do you not like about Whitefish? What challenges do you see facing the community as it grows?
3. How do you see the community supporting itself (economically) in the future? Should public policy attempt to diversify the local base economy?
4. What urban forms (developments, neighborhoods) would you like to see emerge as the community grows?
5. Where should the community grow? What specific areas of the community are most suitable for future growth? (Karrow corridor, Lion Mountain, Texas/Colorado area, east of Monegan Road, etc.)
6. How big do you want Whitefish to get, or how small do you want it to stay? Should an urban growth boundary or population/dwelling unit targets be set?

Each session lasted approximately two hours, and points, ideas, issues, and comments were recorded on a large-format flip chart. Following each session, the results were summarized by staff and distributed to Steering Committee members. Many Committee members attended the sessions to observe the discussions first hand. From these sessions, a vision for Whitefish has emerged.

The citizens of Whitefish value the scale, character, and small town feel of the community and will preserve those values as the community grows. We will preserve and enhance our open spaces, wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, and traditional neighborhoods that make our community special. We will make a special effort to keep our air and water clean. We will keep downtown Whitefish the commercial, governmental, and cultural center of our community, and we will maintain its friendliness, accessibility, and scale.

As Whitefish grows, it will face many challenges. We will manage traffic and keep our community safe for pedestrians and cyclists. We see that the social and economic diversity of our community is threatened, and we will strive to maintain it. We will not

allow growth to out-pace the vital facilities and services that support us all. And we **will** provide affordable housing so that our teachers, police officers, fire fighters, sales and service people, and others whose services we depend on, can continue to be a part of this community.

The local economy is heavily reliant on visitation, and will continue to be in the foreseeable future. And while we embrace the visitation economy, we will strive to find innovative ways to diversify the local economic base to provide jobs for those who want to continue to live and work in Whitefish. We see the scenic beauty of our community and the high quality of life we enjoy as being assets to attract clean, compatible business and industries to Whitefish.

New growth will provide opportunities for new urban forms to emerge. We welcome new and infill development that is compatible with the character and qualities of Whitefish, that respects existing neighborhoods, and that maintains connections to existing and planned streets, pathways, schools, parks, and open spaces.

New growth will take place in many different areas of the community. We will not channel growth to any specific areas, but will encourage growth in all areas where adequate services are or can be provided, and where the open spaces and environmentally sensitive lands that the community values can be protected.

While the small town feel and character of Whitefish are deeply valued by the community, we will not pre-set limits on housing units or population. We will not set geographic limits to urban or suburban growth. Instead, we will formulate the best plan we can for the good and welfare of the entire community. We will protect the community qualities that we value. We believe that good growth provides us with the means to address community needs and challenges such as affordable housing and infrastructure development, and does not exacerbate them.

CHAPTER 1: NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

Whitefish is defined by its natural resources. From Whitefish Lake, the Whitefish River, the area's many streams, its mountain backdrop, and its forests, natural resources of the North Flathead Valley provide help make Whitefish a world class destination as well as a great place to live and work. The limitless resource based recreation attracts visitors, and enhances the quality of life for the approximately 11,500 full time and seasonal residents who call the Whitefish area home.

At community visioning sessions, Whitefish residents expressed time and time again their desire for clean air, clean water, scenic vistas, protection for wildlife habitat, and forest lands. In expressing their preference for protecting natural resources, they also noted that there has not been sufficient natural resource protection in planning and development that has been carried out in this area. The bottom line: people of this community want better protection and consideration for the things they value.

A preference for resource protection, however, does not equate to anti-development. High quality, well planned residential and commercial development can preserve and protect natural resources. Indeed, developed property can become even more valuable when trees, natural stream buffers, and slopes are protected and properly managed. Streams and wildlife corridors can be set aside and managed as value amenities for development, as well as helping to preserve the character, quality, and livability of the community at large. In addition, a community that protects its natural resources and manages them for the benefit of future generations is a sustainable community, and one that will enjoy economic success and a high quality of life for generations to come.

Air Quality

Clean, clear air is important to any community, but it is vitally important to a community that depends heavily on visitation for its economic well being. Outdoor recreation is a major component of both the quality of life enjoyed by Whitefish residents, and the visitor experience as well. Hiking, biking, skiing and other vigorous outdoor pursuits require clean, breathable air. Also, the spectacular mountain backdrops of Whitefish, especially Big Mountain to the north, make a huge contribution to the community's image and visual appeal. Often enough during the winter months, the surrounding mountains are obscured by fog and low clouds, but if the North Valley's air quality ever became so poor that a brown cloud hung over the area on sunny winter days, visitation would likely be affected.

ISSUE: Whitefish is non-attainment for PM-10.

While the Whitefish’s air appears to be clear most of the time, this area is technically classified “non-attainment” for a size range of airborne particulates called PM-10. The size of particles in the air is directly linked to their potential for causing health problems. Particles that are 10 micrometers in diameter or smaller tend to pass through the throat and nose and enter the lungs. Once inhaled, they can cause serious respiratory problems, and exacerbate existing conditions of asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema in many people.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) groups particle pollution into two categories:

- ❖ “coarse particles” such as road dust or in emissions from dusty industries ranging in size from 2.5 to 10 micrometers, and
- ❖ “fine particles” such as those found in smoke, haze, and vehicle emissions measuring 2.5 micrometers or less. Fine particles can be directly emitted from a source, or they can form when gases emitted from sources like power plants, industries, and motor vehicles react in the air. (Source: U.S. EPA web site.)

The ambient air quality standard for PM 10 used by both the EPA and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is 150 micrograms per cubic meter (24-hour average) and 50 micrograms per cubic meter (annual average). The air quality monitoring station is at the end of 10th St. (old Baker Ave.) behind the Town Pump station on Spokane Avenue (Photo 1.1). The Whitefish air quality maintenance area is shown on Map 1.1. (To be inserted.) Although as previously stated, the Whitefish area in “non-attainment” for PM-10, staff has examined raw sampling data from 2002 to 2005 and finds no violations of 24-hour or annual standards. Monthly mean sample results can be found in Table 1.1.



Whitefish air quality monitoring station located near Spokane Avenue on the west side of the street, just north of 13th Street. Site is maintained by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

The monthly means found in Table 1.1 are averages of all hourly observations taken in that month. Monthly means are not used to determine “attainment” or “non-attainment” status. They are, however, a convenient indicator of overall air quality, and the data in Table 1.1 indicates that Whitefish’s air quality is generally good. In the three years of raw

data examined, no days were found to have exceeded the 24-hour standard of 150 micrograms, nor did any year exceed the 50 microgram annual standard.

Table 1.1

**Monthly Mean Air Quality Samples for PM-10*
Whitefish, MT
2002-2005**

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2002	19.0	25.1	29.9	43.3	32.8	21.9	24.6	N/A	N/A	32.9	32.4	N/A
2003	16.7	21.6	22.0	30.5	20.6	18.0	35.9	41.8	25.7	28.7	25.2	13.1
2004	11.3	22.7	41.9	30.8	18.0	18.2	25.4	24.3	24.8	31.3	32.8	19.8
2005	18.0	61.1	44.2	29.9	19.6	17.3	21.3	23.6	20.9	24.7	23.2	22.1

* All entries in micrograms per cubic meter.

At this time, the City of Whitefish has taken no formal action to become redesignated as an “attainment area”. However, as a non-attainment area, the City has taken measures to reduce particulate pollution, including requiring the paving of parking areas, streets, alleys, and driveways within city limits. The City has an on-going street sweeping program. Within city limits, the City and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) both use liquid deicers, although sanding material still finds its way onto city streets from vehicles entering Whitefish. Re-entrained road dust from material tracked onto local roadways by construction and excavation equipment, as well as other types of vehicles that have driven on unpaved surfaces, accounts for most coarse particulates during the winter months.

State and county officials have indicated that in 2006, standards for “coarse” particulates may be discontinued. In its place would be a more stringent standard for PM-2.5, which are much finer particles, and in Whitefish would come mainly from wood smoke (winter time heating and slash burning in the spring and fall) and vehicle emissions, but can also come from finely ground road dust. It is very likely that Whitefish, like many other western communities both large and small, would not initially attain this standard. Regardless of whether new PM-2.5 standards are enacted, it would still be to Whitefish’s advantage to pay closer attention to two major sources of finer particulates: smoke from wood fired stoves and automobile emissions.

ISSUE: Many homes in the Whitefish area rely on wood as either a primary or supplementary heating fuel.

At present, Whitefish has no program or standard that requires newly installed wood space heating stoves to meet the latest EPA emission standards. In some mountain communities such as Whitefish that are prone to temperature inversions, programs have been enacted to ensure that all new and replacement woodstoves meet current EPA standards for emissions. In these communities, installing a solid fuel burning device that

is not EPA certified is a violation of the building and general municipal codes. Some communities have teamed with the wood stove industry in public-private partnerships to start buy-back programs that replace older stoves with more modern, efficient, and cleaner ones. All stoves manufactured since 1988 must be EPA certified. These stoves use about 1/3 less wood to produce the same amount of heat, and emit 50% to 60% less air pollution than pre-1988 models.

ISSUE: Land use practices impact transportation choices, which impact air quality.

As Whitefish is not a “metropolitan planning area”, or MPO, under Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) standards (an urban area population of 50,000 or more is required), data on vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is not available. VMT can be expressed in absolute terms to describe the driving habits of an entire community, or on a per capita or per driver basis so that people can compare their own vehicle miles driven with the community average. Again, because VMT data is not available for Whitefish, VMT benchmarks will be difficult to establish. Still, there are effective ways that VMT growth can be slowed even as the community continues to grow.

When communities grow in a sprawling fashion and the places where people work and shop grow more and more homogeneous and move ever farther away from residential areas transportation choices become limited to the private automobile. People spend increasing amounts of time in their cars, lane mileage per capita increases, spending for roadway improvements increases, VMT increases, and so does air pollution. Communities cannot control the efficiency of the national fleet of cars and trucks, but they can plan for future growth in such a way that alternative transportation modes are possible, and even desirable.

Another way to fight VMT growth is to offer attractive transportation alternatives. Sidewalks, pathways, and bikeways all make a community more livable, and provide a viable alternative to the private auto for many local trips. Furthermore, improvements such as these make for a more sustainable community through less dependence on fossil fuels and a reduced carbon footprint. The hallmark of a sustainable community is one that keeps alternative transportation modes viable for its citizens. This concept will be explored in greater detail in the Land Use Element and Transportation Element of this Growth Policy.

Air Quality Goals:

1. Keep the Whitefish area’s air quality high for the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, and continue to explore ways to reduce air pollution even further.

Air Quality Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to require analysis of non-motorized transportation alternatives in development projects.

2. The City shall analyze impacts on VMT when evaluating any development proposal, and may require reasonable and effective measures to mitigate impacts attributable to increased VMT.

Air Quality Recommended Actions:

1. Require dust-free surfaces on all new driveways and parking and vehicle storage areas within the planning jurisdictional area.
2. Require developments to provide off-site pedestrian and bikeway improvements “up front” so that facilities are available concurrently with demand.
3. Continue to work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on air quality monitoring programs for the Whitefish area.
4. Continue to explore programs and regulations that will improve, or at least maintain, Whitefish’s air quality over time.
5. Initiate a program to establish reasonable benchmarks for VMT, and to reduce VMT growth as the city grows.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of a wood stove buy-back program.

Water Quality

Whitefish is defined by its water bodies as much as it is by its setting amid the mountains that surround the North Flathead Valley. Whitefish Lake, from which the community derives its name, provides valuable recreation, has attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in public and private investment, and is even a source of drinking water. The lake’s scenic beauty, with its forested shores and mountainous backdrop, sets a world class visual image. The Whitefish River forms an open space corridor with trails and parks that are treasured by the entire community, and bald eagles soar a few blocks from downtown because this same river provides food and roosting areas. Smaller streams such as Cow, Viking, Hellroaring, Swift, and Haskill Creeks provide critical resource value and wildlife habitat that contribute to Whitefish’s unique sense of place.



A bald eagle perches above the Whitefish River five blocks south of downtown. Eagles can regularly be seen perched in large trees along the river's edge, or soaring up and down the river.

ISSUE: As the Whitefish area continues to urbanize, threats to water quality increase.

Polluted run-off from streets, parking areas, and manicured lawns, and effluent leaching from drainfields all find their way to receiving water bodies. Whitefish Lake is directly threatened by contaminants associated with boat traffic as well as atmospheric sources of pollution from many miles away. All area water bodies are subject to sedimentation from uncontrolled or improperly controlled erosion.

ISSUE: Lakeshore protection standards alone are not enough to safeguard water quality of the Whitefish area's lakes.

Montana law requires that local governments provide for local lakeshore protection standards that regulate docks, excavations in and around the shoreline, and construction within a "lakeshore protection zone" that runs 20 feet inland from mean high water. Whitefish has adopted and administers such standards for Whitefish and Lost Coon lakes. Blanchard Lake is now within the Whitefish planning and zoning jurisdictional area and subject to those same regulations. The ordinary high water mark (OHWM) for Blanchard Lake has been established at 3,145 msl (1929 vertical datum). However, many area residents are disputing that mark and have observed that mean high water in Blanchard fluctuates far more radically than in the other two major lakes in the area. Lakeshore construction permits are heard and recommended by the Lakeshore Protection Committee, and ultimately issued or denied by the City Council.

While regulations within the lakeshore protection zone are comprehensive, standards applicable inland of the protection zone aimed at preserving water quality are almost non-existent. Drainage plans are only required when a development exceeds 5,000 square feet of impervious surface. There are no restrictions on the application of fertilizers and pesticides, limited standards for erosion control (none that apply to single-family residential development), and no tree retention requirements. Drainage from rooftops and parking and drive areas are allowed to drain into the lakeshore protection zone unabated

and unfiltered. However, Montana law makes it clear that regulations authorized by statute are “minimum requirements” and do not restrict local governments from adopting and enforcing stricter and more comprehensive standards.

ISSUE: Zoning regulations contain no protection standards for environmentally sensitive areas.

The Whitefish Zoning Jurisdictional Regulations contain no setbacks from the Whitefish River or from local creeks. Typically, local regulations will specify a setback from mean high water in order to protect riparian plants and the natural stream bank. Such regulations also have water quality benefits and tend to widen stream corridors for better utilization by wildlife. The only protection afforded river and stream banks at this time are the 310 permits administered by the Flathead Conservation District, and regulations contained in an urgency measure adopted by the City of Whitefish pursuant to the Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP). These regulations establish “protection zones” of 50’ from the Whitefish River and 25’ from creeks, small streams, and wetlands. Most critical areas ordinances that are based on scientific literature and research contain much wider setbacks, along with requirements to preserve buffer zones of natural vegetation.

Current Whitefish zoning regulations are also silent on hillside development standards. This is highly unusual for a resource-based visitation community like Whitefish. Most resort communities in the Rocky Mountain West have at least some standards for development in hillside areas in order to allow development in these areas, but to protect their character, qualities, and environmental functions as development occurs. Most communities also have a standard that defines maximum buildable slopes, and severely restricts or prohibits building on very steep sites.

ISSUE: In spite of many previous studies of Whitefish Lake, there is no comprehensive baseline water quality data with which to monitor pollutants and to focus clean-up and regulatory programs.

Whitefish Lake is the cornerstone of the area’s summer season visitation. While no data exists to accurately and directly quantify the lake’s contribution to resort tax revenue (Whitefish Lake Institute), other data indicate that lake usage is increasing. Visitation at Whitefish State Park alone increased 72% from 2001 to 2004 (Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks), and growth around the lake accounts for an ever increasing base of lake users. Over the past two construction seasons (2004-05) the City and County have issued 131 lakeshore permits, mostly for residential boat docks. But in 2006 alone, over 80 lakeshore construction permits were issued.

Since 1977, there have been at least six major studies of various aspects of water quality and pollution components in Whitefish Lake. While each of these studies is valuable in helping to establish a baseline assessment of the resource, together they do not represent the kind of thorough and comprehensive scientific baseline for future monitoring needs. A comprehensive status report for the lake is needed to assimilate and interpret the data

from all previous studies. The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), founded in 2005, has initiated a water quality monitoring program in partnership with the Flathead Lake Biological Station to supplement previous research efforts with consistent long-term data collection. This will allow trends and patterns to be identified over time and for nutrient dynamics to be understood. Land and water management decisions and strategies can then be evaluated within a balanced “community-ecosystem” approach. The WLI and FLBS will jointly present their initial findings to the public in June, 2009.

Perhaps the two most definitive studies of water quality in Whitefish Lake are the 1984 *Limnology of Whitefish Lake, Montana* (Golnar and Standford), and the follow-up study, *Whitefish Lake Water Quality, 2003* (Craft, Standford, and Jackson). Both studies were produced by the Flathead Lake Biological Station for the Whitefish County Water and Sewer District. But prior to both of those studies, the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences published a 1977 report on the trophic status of Whitefish Lake. That study classified Whitefish Lake as oligotrophic (clean, with very low nutrient content and productivity), and found it to be the best overall trophic quality of the 15 lakes and reservoirs studied in the state that year. In 1984, however, the Golnar and Standford study indicated that Whitefish Lake was in a transitional stage of eutrophication. While most productivity measures were within the ranges typical of an oligotrophic lake, other indicators showed the lake to be in a transitional eutrophic stage, and it was subsequently classified as “oligomesotrophic”. In simple terms, productivity was increasing and water quality declining.

The 2003 water quality study (Craft, Standford, and Jackson) basically replicated the sampling and analyses of the 1984 study. This report generally concluded that water quality in Whitefish Lake had continued its decline over the preceding 20 years. While acknowledging that cause and effect relationships are difficult to draw, it concluded that water quality must be addressed by limiting the input of nutrients, “especially by activities changing runoff patterns and increasing soil erosion and nutrient leakage from the watershed”. The report further noted that “removal of vegetation or the addition of impermeable surfaces anywhere in the watershed reduces the uptake of nutrients, increases the erosion of soils and can increase transport of water and nutrients into the lake.” An increase in primary productivity caused by human action is known as “cultural eutrophication”.

Another more recent study was conducted in 2005-2006 by the Whitefish Lake Institute. This study focused on volatile organic compounds (VOC), and specifically “examined the relationship between gasoline constituent loading in the form of BTEX (benzene, toluene, ethyl-benzene and xylene) and motorized water craft densities on Whitefish Lake.” While no Montana or federal drinking water standards were exceeded during sampling, a follow-up sample collected by WLI on July 4, 2007 revealed that benzene exceeded EPA listed maximum contaminant levels for drinking water at both the City Beach and State Park access sites. This only reinforces the conclusion of the initial study that VOC pose a potential health risk to swimmers and others who come into contact with the water in certain areas of the lake that should not be ignored. The study concludes by recommending that the City of Whitefish should consider the effects of BTEX loading

and “explore options for ensuring that BTEX levels do not exceed EPA Maximum Contaminant Levels.”

Unfortunately very little historical data exists for Whitefish Area aquatic resources prior to 1976. Historical information is, for the most part, anecdotal and contained in local historical texts such as *Stumptown to Ski Town* (Schaffer and Engelter, 1973) and *A History of Whitefish* (Trippett, 1956).



3,315 acre Whitefish Lake, seen here in the winter with Big Mountain Ski Area in the background, is known as the “jewel” of the Whitefish area. Although water quality in the lake has been declining over the last several years, it is still a source of municipal drinking water.

(Photo: Daniel Taylor)

What can be pieced together from these historical sources is that Whitefish Lake was not treated very well by a community in its infancy. Land clearing decreased water infiltration rates and eliminated marshy areas that acted as sediment filters. Sewage found its way into the lake through cesspools and direct dumping of outhouses and chamber pots. Garbage and cows around the lakeshore had impacts of their own, including germs in the local milk supply.

While Whitefish was (and still is) largely defined by the railroad, that industry too has caused its share of environmental problems. Clearing of the railroad grade around the turn of the century is widely suspected of having been the source of large amounts of fine sediment. Routine fueling and maintenance of engines put undocumented amounts of fuels and lubricants into the groundwater and the Whitefish River. And while the railroad in 1973 voluntarily cleaned up some oil pollution that was threatening the river, the extent of that cleanup is unclear. As a result, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and BNSF are still working on a designated State Superfund Site that contains a groundwater diesel plume, heavy metals, and volatile organic compounds.

ISSUE: Poor water quality impacts important native fish habitat

Whitefish has several lakes and streams that provide important habitat to native fish species such as the Westslope Cutthroat, the Bull Trout, the Whitefish, as well as other important non-native game fish such as Lake Trout, Bass, and Pike. Bull Trout were traditionally found throughout the Whitefish River and in Swift Creek, a tributary to Whitefish Lake, but their numbers have declined severely in recent years due to habitat degradation. They are now listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and are listed as a Montana „Species of Concern’ along with the Westslope Cutthroat trout.

Kokanee and even Grayling were historically found in the Whitefish Lake, but are now non-existent due to outside factors.



A small boy holds up a Northern Pike caught in the Whitefish River. In addition to water quality issues, the introduction of non-native game fish such as Pike and Lake Trout have also contributed to the decline of once-abundant native fish species such as Bull Trout and the Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

(Photo: Daniel Taylor)

Despite changes in fish populations, Whitefish Lake is still heavily used by both local and visiting sport fishermen each fishing season, as well as in the winter months for ice-fishing. It is stocked nearly every year with up to 50,000 native Westslope Cutthroat trout fingerlings, and it also holds resident populations of Brook Trout, Bull Trout, Lake Trout, Northern Pike, and Rainbow Trout. Healthy local fisheries are important to the quality of life for Whitefish residents, as well as for our visitor-based economy.

Protecting water quality for fish habitat should be a community priority.

ISSUE: Several Whitefish area streams are already listed as “impaired” by the state of Montana, and will soon face new TMDL standards.

The Whitefish River is on the state’s 303(d) list as a water body that is impaired (does not meet water quality standards) or threatened (has the potential to violate water quality standards in the near future). The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is required to develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for all water bodies on the 303 (d) list. The TMDL is the total pollutant load that a water body may receive from **all** sources (point and non-point) and still meet water quality standards.

Indications from DEQ are that the TMDL for the Whitefish River will be completed in 2007 at the very earliest. This is of particular importance to the City as the municipal wastewater treatment facility discharges to the river. When **all** pollution sources are considered in the TMDL, the City’s wastewater treatment operations could be affected. According to current water quality information from DEQ, other sources already include construction/land development, agriculture/silviculture, direct urban runoff, and storm sewer discharge. Also of concern are pollution loadings from tributaries such as Haskill and Walker Creeks.

Table 1.2

**Whitefish Area Water Bodies on
303(d) List of Impaired Water Bodies**

Water Body	Probable Causes (DEQ)	Probable Sources (DEQ)
Whitefish River	Metals, Nitrogen, Nutrients, Oil and grease, PCBs, Priority organics, Thermal modifications	Industrial point sources, Silviculture, Construction, Land development, Urban runoff/storm sewers
Whitefish Lake	Algal growth/chlorophyll a, Mercury, Metals, Nutrients, Organic enrichment/DO, PCBs, Siltation	Municipal point sources, Silviculture, Urban runoff/storm sewers, hydromodification, upstream impoundment, Flow regulation/impoundment, Atmospheric deposition, Sources unknown
Haskill Creek	Siltation, suspended solids, nutrients, Channel alteration, Habitat degradation, Riparian modification, Channel incisement, Bank erosion, Fecal coliform	Channelization, Erosion, Grazing related sources, Habitat modification, Hydromodification, Pasture grazing- riparian and/or upland, Removal of riparian vegetation

Water Quality Goals:

1. Recognizing that water is an essential resource, and that the maintenance of pure, uncontaminated surface and groundwater is paramount to the continued physical and economic well-being, protect and enhance water quality of the Whitefish area’s lakes, rivers, and streams.
2. Provide a clean, safe, and sanitary water supply for all residents, free from the threat of degradation or depletion.

Water Quality Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish that no development activity, private or public, shall cause soil erosion, sedimentation, nutrient loading, or stormwater discharge that adversely impacts other properties, roads, wetlands, or any water body. Zero sedimentation and zero nutrient loading shall be the target for all development activity.
2. The protection and enhancement of water quality shall be a primary objective in review of development projects, including detailed drainage plans. On site retention of stormwater shall be required in all areas without storm sewer, and encouraged in areas that have storm drainage facilities.
3. Effective erosion control and sedimentation prevention measures shall be incorporated into all construction impact mitigation plans for public and private developments.
4. Management of natural riparian vegetation in order to preserve its environmental functions is a top priority in development review and in construction mitigation. Preserving natural vegetation along lakes and stream banks shall take precedent over recreational access and development.

Water Quality Recommended Actions:

1. Ensure that baseline water quality monitoring programs are established for all Whitefish area lakes, rivers, and streams, and use the outcomes to target measures to improve water quality.
2. Formulate and adopt regulations that would “piggy back” onto the 20-foot lakeshore protection zone and 10’ structural buffer to address water quality issues such as erosion, sedimentation, nutrient loading, and pollutants from construction (paint, stains, corrosives, etc) farther landward adjacent to Whitefish, Lost Coon, and Blanchard Lakes.
3. Initiate stream bank regulations, including minimum setbacks and undisturbed buffer areas, that are expressly designed to protect and enhance water quality, and to keep stream banks and shorelines in their natural condition to the extent possible.
4. Enact water quality enhancement measures in the Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP).
5. Initiate an intense public information campaign on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish’s lakes and streams.
6. Study seasonal ordinary high water (OHWM) on Blanchard Lake for a period of five years in order to establish OHWM in accordance with Montana law.

7. Based upon the VOC study produced by the Whitefish Lake Institute,
 - Strongly encourage the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to consider banning carbureted two-stroke engines from Whitefish and Blanchard Lakes.
 - Encourage the City of Whitefish to provide a bilge purge area at the City Beach boat launch in order prevent gasoline constituents from entering the lake directly.
8. In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake.
9. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.
10. Execute an agreement with the Montana DEQ and the Flathead County Health Department to actively identify, pursue, and correct failing and substandard individual sewage disposal systems that are polluting surface and/or ground waters.

Critical Areas

Environmentally sensitive areas, or „critical areas’ as they are often called, are important to any community---no matter how rural, no matter how urbanized. Most critical areas perform some important environmental and/or ecological functions. Wetlands store flood waters and provide important wildlife habitat, including habitat for some endangered and threatened species. Natural stream buffers stabilize the stream bank, filter pollutants, and provide important riparian habitat. But in an urban environment, critical areas can be even more important because they also provide open space and visual relief.

Critical areas can be defined as those areas, due to their unique nature, that should either not be developed or developed in a very limited manner. Critical areas include: wetlands – both isolated and those associated with lakes, rivers and streams-- riparian corridors, geologically hazardous areas, floodplains, and fish and wildlife habitat. Communities protect the function and values of critical areas in order to:

- ❖ Protect the public from threats to human safety and to protect public and private property from natural hazards;
- ❖ Protect the environment and enhance quality of life; and

Montana State Constitution, Article IX, Section One “The state and each person shall maintain and improve a clean and healthful environment in Montana for present and future generations.”

- ❖ Preserve and manage those environmentally sensitive areas valuable to the public and provide ecological functions.

Particular to Whitefish, environmentally sensitive areas are an important reason why people visit the community. Wildlife viewing, birding, hunting, fishing and other forms of resource-based tourism are increasing in communities across the country. Whitefish is uniquely positioned to capture this market both within the planning jurisdiction, and due to its proximity to Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and other public

Montana State Constitution, Article II, Section Three “All persons are born free and have certain inalienable rights. They include the right to a clean and healthful environment ...”

lands. In addition, there are excellent examples all over the mountain west where critical areas have been preserved as value amenities in well-planned developments.

There are many ways to conserve critical areas either through regulatory or non-regulatory processes. These conservation methods may be at the federal, state or local level.

ISSUE: Federal regulations will not protect all important wetlands in the Whitefish area.

Wetlands are defined as “those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.” This wetland definition, developed by the US Army Corps of Engineers and the US Environmental Protection Agency (Federal Register, 1982), is based on hydrology, hydric soils and hydrophytic vegetation. Only areas that meet all three criteria are considered to be *jurisdictional* wetlands. The distinction of *jurisdictional* wetlands is an important one as only jurisdictional wetlands fall under federal law.

In recent years, federal wetland protection has been eroded; eroded by policy, by changing laws, and more recently, by the U.S. Supreme Court. This means that if state and local governments hope to preserve and protect the aquatic functions and wildlife habitat values of wetlands, they have to get into the wetland protection business themselves. For example, so called “isolated wetlands” no longer fall under federal wetland protection laws, yet these isolated or “pocket” wetlands are some of the most valuable wildlife habitat in Montana. Therefore, for purposes of this Growth Policy, wetlands must have all three of the following attributes: (1) at least periodically, the land supports predominantly hydrophytes, (2) the substrate is predominantly undrained hydric soils, and (3) the substrate is nonsoil and is saturated with water or covered by shallow water at some time during the growing season of each year.

ISSUE: Until recently, there has been no local review process to protect wetlands.

Wetlands, long regarded as wasted spaces, have, over the years both in Montana and across the country, been drained and filled for other purposes. Since 1800 it is estimated approximately 50 percent of the wetlands have been lost nationwide and in Montana 27 percent have been destroyed. Only recently has there been an acknowledgement of the important role wetlands play. The functions wetlands perform include:

- ❖ Floodwater storage
- ❖ Improve and protect water quality
- ❖ Provide critical habitat to fish and wildlife
- ❖ Sediment entrapment
- ❖ Groundwater recharge
- ❖ Maintenance of stream flows
- ❖ Shoreline stabilization

It is the intent of the wetland policies to provide the maximum protection reasonable from the encroachment of land use that would diminish the wetlands' diversity of values or degrade their quality.

The different types of wetlands are:

- ❖ **Depressional** – low spots on the landscape (isolated)
- ❖ **Lacustrine** – associated with the edge of a lake
- ❖ **Riverine** – associated with the edge of a river or stream
- ❖ **Slope** – the water source comes from groundwater seeping to surface
- ❖ **Artificially created wetlands** – those intentionally or unintentionally created

Wetlands do not include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from non-wetland sites, including, but not limited to, irrigation and drainage ditches, grass-lined swales, canals, detention facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, farm ponds, landscape amenities that were unintentionally created as a result of the construction of a road, street, or highway. Wetlands do include those intentionally created from non-wetland areas to mitigate conversion of wetlands.

Because of all of the important functions of wetlands and other critical areas, the City of Whitefish is formulating a critical areas ordinance that, among other standards, establishes a buffer from all wetlands meeting the general definition stated above. Upon adoption, critical area standards become part of the development review process, ensuring that wetlands and other critical areas are protected through plats, PUDs, conditional use permits, or building permits as applicable.

ISSUE: There is currently no holistic or comprehensive approach to wetland protection.

Several federal and state agencies are responsible for, and are involved in, wetlands protection in the United States and in Montana. These agencies include the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the US

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

There are many other organizations that work within a non-regulatory framework to protect wetland areas either through land donations, such as a land trusts, land set asides, such as a conservation easement, or through on-site restoration by the private property owner.

What is lacking, however, is a comprehensive and sustainable approach that combines regulatory, incentive, economic, and technological aspects of wetland protection. Wetland protection can and should be integrated with stormwater management. Low impact development (LID) practices could recycle roof and parking area drainage for landscape irrigation. Performance standards in regulations could reward developers for protecting wetlands because society as a whole places a value on them. When wetlands are placed on, or are a part of, a conservation easement, the property owner or developer can reap substantial tax benefits.

ISSUE: While the City of Whitefish has a floodplain development ordinance, it does not generally recognize the environmental value of floodplains.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) defines a floodplain as “any land area susceptible to being inundated by flood waters from any source.”

Floodplains can also be described as the low-lying land along the stream, the outer limits of which may be marked by steep slopes. The floodplain is generally the lowest part of the stream valley and thus is most prone to flooding. Floodplain soils are often poorly drained because of the nearness of the water table to the surface, saturation by floodwaters, and the deposition of fine silt particles over the years.

Floodplains are generally considered to consist of the floodway plus the adjacent floodway fringe outside of the floodway and within the base flood elevation (100-year floodplain). Floodways are generally protected and reserved for conveying flood waters. Floodplains generally involve the storage of flood waters as opposed to the conveyance, and limited development is often allowed in floodplains.

The City of Whitefish floodplain and flood control regulations are found in Title 14 of the WFCC. This code was adopted from standard model floodplain regulations and allows a number of uses and structures in the floodplain (floodway fringe) via a permit from the floodplain administrator. In general, the purpose of these regulations is to preserve life and property while still allowing significant use of land in floodplains. They do not appear to be geared toward any environmental objectives, and they certainly do not consider floodplains to be “critical areas” in any preservation or conservation sense. In order to further environmental objectives, the City could incorporate requirements and incentives to preserve streamside vegetation, limit tree removal and terrain disturbance, and similar standards. Ideally, floodplains would not be encroached upon, would remain in a natural state, and continue to perform their natural functions of storing flood waters.

ISSUE: Without streamside setbacks and buffer standards, riparian areas are subject to development and loss of environmental functions.

“Riparian areas are plant communities contiguous to perennial, intermittent and ephemeral rivers, streams or drainage ways. They have one or both of the following characteristics: 1) distinctively different vegetative species than adjacent areas; and 2) species similar to adjacent to areas but exhibiting more vigorous or robust growth forms.” (adapted from USFWS, 1997) Riparian areas may or may not include wetland areas.



Cow Creek provides a prominent open space corridor down the eastside of the city. It is also valuable wildlife habitat, and can only be properly protected with a natural buffer plus a structural setback.

Adjacent to rivers and streams, riparian lands have many significant environmental benefits. They help stabilize the stream bank, even during spring run-off and flood events. They provide shelter and critical habitat for wildlife, and tend to keep water temperatures down by providing shade. And like wetlands, they act as a natural filter to trap sediments and nutrients and prevent them from entering the stream in harmful concentrations.

ISSUE: Currently, Whitefish has no comprehensive hillside development ordinance that sets forth development standards while protecting the character, qualities, and environmental functions of hillside areas.

Until the City of Whitefish adopted an urgency measure for critical stormwater conveyances and critical areas in April, 2006, the City had no designated maximum buildable slope. Even within the city limits where building codes are administered, structures could be placed on slopes of 40% and more. The current interim critical areas ordinance prohibits development on slopes in excess of 30% (except with a reasonable use exemption to preserve a property right).

Mountainous areas, steeply sloping areas, are environmentally sensitive for a number of reasons. Any terrain disturbance can easily and quickly lead to erosion. Stormwater that ponds on flat ground until it is absorbed or evaporates, quickly runs off a steep slope

carrying sediments and (possibly) nutrients to the receiving water body below. The Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP) recommends stricter limits for construction on steep slopes, and that construction on slopes in excess of 30% “should not be allowed”. The WSSUP further recommends that trees on steep slopes be preserved and retained to the extent possible. Steep slopes are also susceptible to avalanches, rock falls, sliding, and subsidence.



Most hillside development ordinances would preclude placing structures on slopes like this one when there are clear and environmentally preferable alternatives. The proper management of forested hillsides is important for maintaining the health of the area’s watersheds.

Most resort communities in the Rocky Mountain West that rely on resource based visitation have comprehensive hillside ordinances in place, and in most cases, these communities establish buildable slopes at 25-30% or less depending on local conditions and community preferences. However, these ordinances normally do not prohibit development in hillside areas. Instead, they recognize the values and functions of hillside areas watershed, scenic, wildlife habitat, etc. and establish standards that protect those qualities.

ISSUE: The City of Whitefish has no comprehensive program to identify and protect critical fish and wildlife habitat within the planning jurisdictional area.

Natural systems are never closed systems---outside factors can and do influence the efficiency and effectiveness of their functions. By the same token, natural systems have more than one function, and most systems have multiple functions. It has been previously discussed in this element that wetlands perform certain functions such as filtering of sediments and other pollutants, and (in some cases) recharging groundwater. But it was also discussed that wetlands are some of the most valuable wildlife habitat available. Natural vegetation in riparian areas stabilizes stream banks, and the riparian zone stores flood waters, but it too provides vital habitat for birds, fish, mammals, and amphibians. Deer and other mammals use urban stream corridors on a daily basis, and south facing slopes can be critical winter range for mule deer and elk.



Bog areas like this one provide valuable habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. In addition to the bog itself, a buffer is also needed so that it will continue to function effectively.

Wildlife habitat in the Whitefish area is as valuable as it is diverse. Habitat for several threatened and endangered species is found right here within the jurisdictional area, including the gray wolf, peregrine falcon, bull trout, bald eagle, and grizzly bear. Habitat mapping has been done on a general scale that is suitable for planning purposes. However, further study is needed to determine exactly what species are using this area, how they are using the habitat available, what is critical, what is used for daily and seasonal migration, and how development would affect wildlife use. Without such studies, there is no way to forecast the cumulative effects that urbanization might have on wildlife.

Other Types Of Critical Areas

High groundwater, or shallow depth to ground water as the condition is often called, is more of a developmental constraint than a life and property hazard. High groundwater is not a significant environmental concern unless pollutants are introduced to groundwater through land use activities.

The actual impacts of high groundwater are in the design of storm water management systems and in construction measures taken to drain groundwater away from foundation walls. If stormwater is allowed to interact with groundwater, usually through pond structures that go below groundwater level, ground water can become contaminated with hydrocarbons and nutrients. If groundwater enters crawl spaces and basements, mold and rot can result, often causing health hazards for the occupants and significant property damage.

Geologically hazardous areas are defined as “areas that, because of their susceptibility to erosion, sliding, earthquake or other geologic events, are not suited to the siting of commercial, residential or industrial development consistent with public health or safety concerns”. This also supports the rationale for prohibiting development on steep slopes.

Landslide Hazard Areas are those subject to potential slope failure. These include slopes that are underlain by weak, fine grained unconsolidated sediments, jointed or bedded bedrock, or landslide deposits, including the top and toe of such areas. It is necessary to protect the public from damage due to development on, or adjacent to, landslides; preserve the scenic quality and natural character of the Whitefish area's hillsides, and to protect water quality as described previously in this element.

Seismic Hazard Areas. Earthquakes cannot be eliminated. The Whitefish area is in Seismic Zone III, which indicates significant seismic activity. The International Building Codes provide for specific measures to be taken for building structures in each designated zone.

Soil Suitability. Many of the soil types encountered in the Whitefish planning jurisdictional area have severe limitations for roads, dwelling units, and other types of development. Soil suitability must be taken into account at both the general community planning and site specific project design stages. Dense distributions of structures and roads should not be proposed for areas of severe limitations for those specific activities.

Critical Areas Goals:

1. Preserve and protect critical areas that are environmentally significant in terms of resource value and/or defining the community image and character of Whitefish.
2. Avoid risks to life and property associated with development and construction activity in hazardous areas.

Critical Areas Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to make preservation, enhancement, and management of environmentally sensitive areas a priority in the development and implementation of regulations and programs, and in capital facility planning and budgeting.
2. The City of Whitefish shall discourage public and private investment in known areas of natural hazards, and will make it a priority to avoid natural hazards in capital facility planning and programming.
3. It is the policy of the City of Whitefish that no development or construction along lakes, rivers, streams, and adjacent banks shall be allowed to:
 - Diminish water quality
 - Diminish and/or degrade habitat for fish or wildlife
 - Interfere with navigation or other lawful recreation
 - Create a public nuisance
 - Create a visual impact discordant with predominant natural scenic values,

- Alter the physical and environmental characteristics and functions of the shoreline (except as may be permitted by proper regulating and permitting authorities).
4. As a planning and development policy, the City of Whitefish shall work cooperatively with public and/or private developers to identify and mitigate negative impacts to endangered or threatened species of native plants or animals, big game winter range, spawning areas, recreational fisheries, waterfowl nesting areas, and diverse riparian areas, and forest habitat.
 5. The City of Whitefish shall require geotechnical engineering investigations, including mitigative measures for any hazards encountered, for building sites exceeding 25% slope and/or where other geologic, hydrologic, or seismic hazards are suspected.

Critical Areas Recommended Actions:

1. Initiate a public awareness program on the value and function of wetlands in both an urban and rural environment.
2. Map environmentally sensitive areas at an appropriate planning level so that developers and the general public are made aware of their presence.
3. Enact regulatory requirements for site specific wetland identification, evaluation, preservation, management, buffering, and enhancement in conjunction with new and expanded development.
4. Develop a comprehensive critical area ordinance (CAO) that:
 - Identifies the critical resources to be protected
 - Establishes benchmarks for each resource (current condition)
 - Establishes goals desired for each resource
 - Determines the existing impacts and threats that are contributing to the degradation, or potential degradation, of the resource, and determine the relative significance of each impact
 - Establishes performance-based standards to achieve desired goals
 - Establishes guidelines to achieve standards
 - Establishes guidelines and mitigation measures for stream crossings, terrain disturbance on steep slopes, and stream and wetland encroachments
5. Promote a greater understanding of what specific natural hazards are prevalent in the Whitefish area, and how they can be avoided or mitigated.
6. Add a menu of effective mitigation measures for high ground water to the building code through adoption of supplementary regulations.

7. Define a “maximum buildable” slope and establish it consistently in zoning and subdivision regulations and in the public facility design standards.
8. Initiate a program to establish baseline data on critical wildlife habitat at a sufficient level of detail to alert developers and landowners of wildlife issues.
9. For areas of severe soil limitations, as mapped by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), require site specific soil and subsurface investigations and mitigation measures for all developments.
10. Incorporate environmental standards into the City’s floodplain ordinance, and encourage floodplains to be retained in their natural state.

CHAPTER 2: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

For some people, the very concept of economic development has negative connotations. Many believe that economic development means “chasing smoke stacks”, or a “watch us grow!” booster mentality. To some, it means “government giveaways” in the form of land, water and sewer extensions, tax breaks, industrial revenue bonds, or other incentives to bring industry and jobs to town.

For purposes of this Growth Policy, “economic development” will be viewed quite differently. Economic development will be considered to include almost any activity, public or private, that brings income and jobs into the community. This means that economic development will be discussed and analyzed primarily in terms of the **base** economy.

However, in a visitation economy, even activities that are normally considered **non-basic**, or support activities, also bring new dollars into the community. Retail, eating and drinking establishments, entertainment, recreation, and many services also bring in new dollars when used by tourists. Therefore, this element will take a broader look at local economic development than what might be found in a Growth Policy for a community with a more traditional economy. Also, the Growth Policy provides an opportunity to look at economic development comprehensively. By focusing on economic development in a way that accounts for the interrelationships with transportation, land use, the environment, housing, and community facilities, this Growth Policy will represent a more effective body of public policy.

Employment

Employment by Industry

Examining local employment by industry, then comparing it to state-wide figures, provides a picture of how the local economy may create jobs differently than the state as a whole.

First of all, visitation continues to be the unquestionable driver of the local economy. The proximity to Glacier National Park, the Whitefish Mountain Resort, and the hundreds of thousands of acres of state and national forests and wilderness areas make Whitefish and Flathead County a top tourist destination. Locally, shops, restaurants, taverns, and services are geared to serve the large base of tourists that visit the Flathead Valley primarily in the summer and winter seasons. According to the Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, non-resident visitors spent over \$314 million in Flathead County in 2006 alone.

Table 2.1 presents the major employment categories by place of residence within the City of Whitefish. However, it must be kept in mind that because these figures are on a place

of residence basis, the actual jobs may not be located in Whitefish at all, but in neighboring communities. Still, some helpful analyses can be made.

Health and professional services, retail trade, and services associated with the tourism industry constitute the primary employers. Whitefish experienced a construction boom in and around the city during the 1990's. Construction jobs increased 32% from 136 in 1990 to 180 in 2000. The finance, insurance and real estate industry also experienced a dramatic increase of 88% growing from 106 people in the labor force employed in this sector to 200 in 2000. Manufacturing (primarily wood products), declined by 12% from 184 people in the manufacturing labor force in 1990 to 171 in 2000.

Table 2.1
WHITEFISH MAJOR EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES
(By place of residence)

	WF #	WF %	MT %
Ag, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting & Mining	25	1.1	7.9
Construction	180	7.6	7.4
Manufacturing	171	7.3	6.0
Wholesale Trade	49	2.1	3.0
Retail Trade	314	13.3	12.8
Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities	138	5.9	5.4
Information	64	2.7	2.2
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate (FIRE)	200	8.5	5.5
Professional Services	182	7.7	6.5
Educational, Health and Social Services	449	19.1	21.7
Arts, entertainment, recreation accommodation and food services	449	19.1	10.4
Other Services	80	3.4	5.3
Public Administration	53	2.3	5.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census

In comparing the percentages of people employed in each category locally versus the state, most categories show very little difference. One such difference is in the agriculture/forestry/mining category where only 1.1% of working Whitefish residents were employed, indicating that this category is not a significant job producer locally. Another difference is in the arts/recreation accommodation/food services, which reflects the visitation economy. Still another difference is in finance, insurance, and real estate, which is indicative of the area's rather high rates of growth.

Unfortunately, employment by industry figures for Whitefish are not available. However, some valuable generalizations about the local economy can be made by comparing Flathead County employment data to those for the state. Table 2.2 shows employment by industry (by location of the job, not by residence of the employee) for both the county and the state in the years 2001 and 2005. Significant figures for comparison are in *italics*.

The most obvious conclusion from this comparison is that Flathead County's economy does not mirror Montana's in a few key areas. Agriculture is one such area, accounting for only 3.7% of total county employment in 2004 compared to 9.4% state-wide. But other figures portend strong growth in construction and land development for Flathead County. Construction and finance, insurance, and real estate employment both grew as a percentage of county employment from 2001 to 2004, and widened their respective percentage leads on the state. For construction employment, 18.6% of the jobs added statewide from 2004 to 2005 were added in Flathead County. While employment in forestry and logging has remained fairly constant (only slight declines) over the period, it accounted for \$21.3 million in personal income earnings in the county in 2005, and wood product manufacturing contributed another \$85 million.

Table 2.2

**TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY
FLATHEAD COUNTY and MONTANA
2001 & 2005**

Year	2001				2005			
	Co.	%	MT	%	Co.	%	MT	%
Industry								
Agriculture	2,109	4.2	57,769	10.2	2,108	3.7	57,413	9.4
Forestry, Fisheries, & related	881	1.7	7,617	1.3	842	1.5	7,881	1.3
Mining	304	.6	7,060	1.2	394	.7	8,450	1.4
Construction	4,845	9.6	38,351	6.8	6,671	11.6	47,587	7.8
Manufacturing	4,180	8.2	24,601	4.3	3,657	6.4	23,244	3.8
Retail trade	6,805	13.4	70,766	12.5	7,488	13.0	73,058	11.9
FIRE	4,146	8.2	39,560	6.9	5,321	9.2	45,841	7.5
Education, Health, & Social services	4,889	9.6	63,439	11.2	6,079	10.6	70,484	11.5
Arts, Entertainment, Rec. Accommodation	6,341	12.5	60,976	10.8	7,189	12.5	68,306	11.1
Government & Related	4,719	9.3	90,241	15.9	4,909	8.5	92,756	15.1
Total Employment	50,674		565,989		57,538		613,425	

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis: Regional Economic Accounts

ISSUE: Employment in the development related sectors---construction, finance, insurance, and real estate --- is higher by percentage in Flathead County and the Whitefish area than it is for the state as a whole.

With declining employment in forestry and agriculture, and increasing employment in the construction trades and other development related industries, the question of sustainability arises. By how much and how fast must the Whitefish community continue to grow to support growth in the development related employment sectors? By having increasing numbers of people depending on continued growth and development for their

livelihoods, the community has created a constituency for continued rapid growth, whether or not that growth is in the best interests of the community as a whole.

Major Employers

In 2000, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry listed ten major employers by number of employees in the Whitefish area. Table 2.3 contains employee numbers for major employers for the year 2006. As indicated in the table, most of the major employers have expanded within the last four years. Since 2000, two new employers have been established in Whitefish that provide significant number of jobs. These include Resource Label Group that currently has 30 employees and is evaluating plans for expansion. If the company expands in Whitefish it could possibly result in a total of 150 jobs over the next few years. The other new major employer is the Lodge at Whitefish Lake, which opened late in 2006. The Lodge is a full service resort with conference facilities located north of the railway viaduct on Wisconsin Avenue.

Table 2.3

WHITEFISH AREA MAJOR EMPLOYERS

<u>EMPLOYER</u>	<u>2006</u>		
	Permanent	Seasonal or Part Time	TOTAL
North Valley Hospital	129	110	249
Burlington Northern and Santa Fe RR	225-230	--	225-230
Whitefish School District #44	210	30	240
Whitefish Mountain Resort	85	450 (Winter) 70 (Summer)	535 (Peak)
Grouse Mountain Lodge	N/A	N/A	--
City of Whitefish	76	25	101
Depratu Ford	55-60	1	56-61
Colonial Manor	74	11	85
Idaho Timber Co.	35	0	35
Montana Coffee Traders	75	0	75

Source: Interviews with companies & public institutes.

North Valley Hospital

North Valley Hospital serves as one of the two major medical facilities in Flathead County. The hospital employed 249 people in January 2006. NVH has built a new facility at U.S. 93 and Hwy 40 that opened in March, 2007. It is not anticipated that this will result in any immediate changes in employment levels.

Whitefish School District

The school district had a permanent employment level of approximately 210 full-time staff in 2006. They are full-time employees during the nine to ten month school year, but

salaries are prorated on a year-round basis. Approximately 30 part-time workers are hired and they range from almost full-time to just a few hours at special events.

Whitefish Mountain Resort

Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort has been in operation since 1945 and is the second largest in Montana behind Big Sky. The resort offers year round recreational opportunities with 20 miles of mountain bike and hiking trails. Winter Sports, Inc., owner and operator of Whitefish Mountain Resort, has an average of 85 full-time year-round employees and a peak of 450 seasonal employees in the winter. The resort recently updated its master plan that will guide development at the resort for the next 15 to 20 years. The revised plan includes some new facilities and expansion of others, but overall represents a lower level of development than what was approved in the previous master plan.

Grouse Mountain Lodge

The area's largest convention center and hotel opened in 1984. In 1993, staff numbered 110 permanent and 30 seasonal employees. By 2002 the total number of employees remained stable, although there was a slight shift from permanent to part-time positions.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad

Whitefish-based employment at BNSF reached a high of 510 people in 1963 (Burlington Northern at that time), but began to decline after that. In 1993, the railroad was still the largest employer in Whitefish even though employment had dropped to 375; a 26% decline over the previous 30 years. It has since slipped another 41% over the past ten years sitting at just 220 persons employed today. While the railroad is still a major industry, Whitefish no longer is the dominant railroad center of past years due to changing technology and reduced manpower requirements. Facilities have been centralized as divisional offices and personnel have been relocated to Spokane.

Idaho Timber

Idaho Timber Co. is still the largest wood products manufacturer in the Whitefish Planning Jurisdiction. There are two other major lumber manufacturers in Flathead County; Plum Creek, and F. H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Co., both located in the Columbia Falls area.

Labor Force

While total employment among Whitefish residents was 2,354 in the year 2000, unemployment data is not available for the same area (Whitefish city limits). On a county wide basis, unemployment rates fluctuate seasonally by as much as two percentage points, with higher rates during the winter months and the lowest rates in summer. In 2005, the months of January through March saw unemployment at 6.8% compared to 3.6% for July through August. Since 1998, the highest unemployment level for Flathead County was 7.0% in January of 1998 and 1999. In 2005, Flathead County had a relatively low annual unemployment rate of 4.2%, but statewide the average was only 3.8%. This is indicative of a somewhat seasonal economy related to construction and summer visitation. The latest monthly figures for May, 2006 show a total county labor force of 43,867 with an unemployment rate of only 3.6%. Anecdotally, the Whitefish area and

Flathead County in general are considered to be a “tight” labor market where skilled employees are often difficult to find and hire.

Retail Trade

There are two major retail areas in Whitefish, and in terms of total sales volume, the South Hwy 93 area outpaces the Downtown. However, the heart of retail activity in Whitefish since the turn of the century has been the central business district. It is generally bounded by Spokane Avenue, the railroad tracks, O’Brien Avenue, and Third Street. In recent years, there has been a shift in commercial development to US Highway 93 South, extending almost to the intersection of Montana Highway 40. Major development along the highway include a 170,000 square foot shopping mall that opened in 1985, several fast food restaurants, several motels, two major auto dealerships, two supermarkets and a building supply business.



Downtown has historically been the retail, governmental, and financial heart of the Whitefish community. The Downtown Master Plan seeks to sustain that stature through a series of strategic public and private investments.

According to the 2002 Economic Census, the retail sector had the largest local economic impact in terms of sales, but the health sector made the greatest impact in terms of payroll. The lodging and food services sector had the largest number of employees.

Table 2.4**SELECTED STATISTICS FROM THE ECONOMIC CENSUS**

	Number of Establishments	Sales & Receipts (\$1000)	Number of Employees	Annual Payroll (\$1000)
Retail Trade	69	122,265	624	11,012
Information	8	--	34	635
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	34	9,908	72	1,599
Professional, Scientific & Technical	46	10,130	135	3,608
Administrative, Support, Waste Mgt.	21	3,410	49	924
Educational Services	2	--	--	--
Health Care & Social Assist.	40	34,890	475	14,310
Arts, entertainment & Recreation	17	12,878	316	5,709
Accommodation & Food Services	61	33,782	952	10,116
Other Services (Except Public Admin.)	23	4,844	90	1,465

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002 Economic Census

Localized Farming

Having a source of locally grown fruits and vegetables is a tremendous benefit to any community. Local sources of produce afford consumers a choice of fresher and arguably better tasting products. Because they are grown nearby, they can be sustainably transported to market without using nearly the quantities of fossil fuels required to send products from around the world to local grocery stores. Certified organic farm products are popular fare at local farmers' markets. This "direct sale" puts more of the revenue in the growers' pockets by eliminating the "middle men" typically involved in brokering and distribution of produce. Finally, localized farming provides a viable, beneficial, and economically sustainable use on land in rural areas and/or on the fringe of the

community---land that does not have to be developed in order to produce a tangible return. In addition, organic farming preserves clean air and water through the avoidance of chemicals.

The actual impact of localized farming on the Whitefish economy is difficult to quantify. There are approximately eight to ten agricultural operations in the Whitefish area that derive most of their incomes from direct sales, (mainly at farmers' markets) and limited shipping of the products they produce. As fuel prices continue to rise and as consumers become more sensitive to the issues of processed and genetically altered foods, organic farming could become a growth industry. Flathead Valley Community College now offers courses in organic agriculture that include working on a certified organic farm.

But all agriculture in Flathead County faces challenges. Real estate prices continue to rise at a much higher rate than the price of farm products, driving up both the price of agricultural land and its taxable value. When residential subdivisions are built near existing farms, the new residents often complain about the agricultural activities and want services that are not compatible with some farming, such as aerial spraying for mosquitoes. Suburban development in rural areas also increases traffic, making it more difficult to transport farm equipment.

Downtown Business District Master Plan

Early in 2006, the Whitefish City Council adopted the Downtown Business District Master Plan (Downtown Master Plan, or Master Plan). This plan was a consultant generated effort that was two years in the making. It was a joint project between the Heart of Whitefish and the City that involved hundreds of local residents and business persons. It contains analyses of the built environment, vehicle and pedestrian circulation, land use, architecture, and streetscapes. The Master Plan provides “real world” strategies for improving the appearance, function, and vitality of the downtown area. The Master Plan has been adopted as a “neighborhood plan” pursuant to Montana law, and may be so adopted by reference to this Growth Policy.

From a physical standpoint, the plan recognizes a market-supported build-out scenario that includes 140,000 SF of new retail, existing and/or renovated retail totaling 175,000 SF, over 330 new residential units, and 740 structured parking spaces. How that space could be distributed throughout the downtown area is shown in a Capacity Diagram on page 5 of the plan. Growth potential of this magnitude would present the community with the opportunity to keep the business focus on downtown as opposed to continued development of the Hwy. 93 South corridor, or allowing additional commercial striping farther south along Hwy. 93 or along Montana Hwy. 40.

The real challenge for downtown is in maintaining its quality and attractiveness. The Master Plan places a very heavy emphasis on streetscape and pedestrian improvements to enhance the walkability of downtown as well as strengthen pedestrian connections to adjacent parklands and residential neighborhoods. Another challenge will be maintaining efficient and user friendly vehicular circulation while accommodating the reconstruction

of Hwy 93. The Transportation Framework in the plan avoids one-way street pairs, which hinder local shopping traffic and make access to individual retail blocks more difficult.

ISSUE: New “big box” commercial development could threaten Whitefish’s traditional commercial scale and character.

Commercial character can be defined as the make-up of area businesses, their physical appearance, their function within the community, and the image they set for the community as a whole. The commercial character of Bozeman, with its vital and growing downtown and high design quality in its outlying commercial nodes, is significantly different than the commercial character of Great Falls. The commercial character of Kalispell, serving a regional market with its big box stores and category killers along Hwy. 93 North, is very different from the commercial character of Whitefish, with its stronger downtown and a business mix based largely on visitation.

But the impact of big box stores in a community can go far beyond the physical elements of character. Large chain retailers can and have actually driven smaller localized independent retailers out of business. The independents often cannot compete with the chains, who have the advantage of national marketing campaigns, national and regional distribution, and pricing based upon huge volumes of merchandise. In order to better manage these economic impacts, while still allowing for open competition in the market, many communities have begun requiring economic impact analyses as a component of the large-scale retail permitting process. These analyses enable local officials to better gauge what types of local businesses will be most affected by big boxes, and how those impacts might be mitigated. Often, economic impact mitigation involves the cooperation and participation of the big box retailers themselves.

One of the primary objectives of the Downtown Master Plan is to preserve and enhance the special character and qualities of downtown Whitefish. One way of achieving this objective is to encourage unique, one-of-a-kind retail and restaurant establishments, while discouraging or outright prohibiting franchise or “formula” businesses, including “chain” stores and restaurants. Many communities around the country have accomplished this, and a variety of techniques have been employed to do so.



Whitefish's two supermarkets are among the largest single-tenant commercial buildings in the community. The store pictured will soon be undergoing a major renovation, expansion, and façade makeover.

In the Hwy. 93 South commercial corridor, formula businesses are mostly limited to fast food restaurants and two chain supermarkets. Therefore, if formula businesses are to be allowed in Whitefish, the existing commercial corridor would seem to be a location where their character impacts could be controlled through high standards for architecture, site planning, and signage.

ISSUE: Visitation ties economic development to community planning and environmental objectives.

Tourists visit Whitefish and the North Flathead Valley for its uniqueness and for the quality of the experience. Most of the visitation to the Whitefish area specifically is based upon outdoor activities, or what is sometimes called “resource based” tourism. According to the Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, there were 329,825 non-resident visitors to Whitefish in 2006. Of these visitors, 70% listed Glacier National Park, mountains/forests, or open space/uncrowded areas as their primary attraction. In addition 44% engaged in wildlife watching (among other activities), 48% did day hiking or backpacking, and 15% went fishing and/or fly fishing.

What these numbers tell is something that most everyone living in Whitefish already understands, and that is that the local economy is dependent upon clean air and water, scenic vistas, open spaces, and an abundance of fish and wildlife. Protecting these resources through properly managed development is not only good for the resource itself and a benefit to the community, it is vital to the economy as well.

In addition to environmental considerations, a number of general community planning objectives also support tourism. Goal 8 of the Montana Tourism and Recreation Strategic Plan 2008-2012 states that communities should enhance their “curb appeal” to attract more visitors. Specific actions include expanding the Montana Main Street program to improve downtown vitality and extend visitor stays and spending (Note: The Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan goes far beyond the Main Street program for

meeting this need.) The Strategic Plan also recommends local growth policies that preserve the unique character of the state and community, and that minimize sprawl. It further recommends that Montana communities:

- ❖ Improve the appearance of community entryways and highway commercial areas
- ❖ Improve the appearance and quality of parks.
- ❖ Address billboards and other unsightly outdoor advertising

The Strategic Plan recognizes that tourists visit communities, not just attractions. Seventy-five percent of the visitors to Whitefish are return visitors to Montana, and 76% say they will return within two years. What makes a community unique, attractive, and livable for its residents also make it a pleasant place to visit.

ISSUE: The same natural amenities that form the basis of the visitation economy could also be assets in attracting suitable business and industry to diversify community's economic base.

As generally concluded previously in this document, the local base economy in the Whitefish area shows trends toward expansion of visitation and development related business and trades. However, Whitefish, with its beautiful setting, natural resources, and recreational amenities, has a unique opportunity to selectively identify and recruit specific types of clean, community compatible industries that could diversify the economy and create beneficial job growth. The very same qualities and amenities discussed in the preceding section that support the visitation economy are also strong attractors for business and industries that can diversify the economic base.

Many communities identify compatible businesses and industries through asset mapping and a SWOT analyses. Asset mapping involves documenting the tangible and intangible resources of a community. It defines the capacity of a community to build the economy and sustain itself. A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is often carried out with the help of economic development professionals to target the specific types of industries the community should try to attract, and just as important, the ones which the community should not waste their time and resources on because they are at a distinct disadvantage when compared with competing communities.

But economies can be grown locally, and sometimes local business just needs the right resources. The Montana West Economic Development Center in Kalispell offers assistance to local business persons to tap into the many programs offered by the Business Resources Division of the Montana Department of Commerce. These include:

- ❖ Microbusiness Development Centers. The Montana network of regional MicroBusiness Development Corporations (MBDCs) provide financing, training, and business assistance to assist very small businesses expand or get started. The MBDC for this area is the Montana Community Development Corporation located in Missoula.
- ❖ The Entrepreneur Development Program offers business management education courses through the Small Business Development network.

- ❖ Small Business Development Centers provide free confidential business technical assistance, counseling, and low-cost training through ten statewide offices, including the Kalispell Area Chamber of Commerce.
- ❖ Commerce Loan & Development Fund. This program utilizes federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to stimulate economic development by assisting the private sector to create jobs for low and moderate income persons, primarily through loans.

Whitefish already attracts many entrepreneurs and “lone eagle” professionals that use technology to “bring their jobs with them”. These small businesses, many of them home-based, can spin off other enterprises, form associations with existing businesses, and grow jobs within the community if they have the resources to do so. Many communities have incubator programs to assist small one or two-person operations make the transition from start-up to an established business serving a regional and even national market.

Having North Valley Hospital located in Whitefish opens the door for independent and associated businesses in the bio-medical field. Small manufacturing and component assembly and distribution companies, including computer software and catalog sales, could find Whitefish to be an ideal location in which to offer skilled employees the high quality of life that they demand. This is an area where economic development strategies and land use planning must come together to ensure suitable locations for clean industries. In addition to providing a supply of land, architectural and site planning standards must be established so that these industries will contribute to the character and quality of Whitefish, and so that private investment is protected.

Another vital factor in growing the local economy is the availability of a skilled work force. In this regard, Whitefish is fortunate to have Flathead Valley Community College located close by on the north side of Kalispell. FVCC offers Associate degrees in Arts, Science, and Applied Science. The College also has career and technical programs offering certificates such fields as accounting technology, building trades, heavy equipment operation, marketing/sales, real estate, plumbing technology, and others. FVCC also offers “workforce training” in which the topics and curricula are designed to meet the specific needs of the employer.

Unfortunately, the chief impediment to growing and diversifying the local economy in Whitefish may be the cost of workforce housing. This issue will be explored in greater detail in the Housing Element of this Growth Policy.

Economic Development Goals:

1. Maintain a healthy and vibrant base economy that sustains an influx of dollars into the community.
2. Protect the natural resources and unique character and qualities of Whitefish in order to support the continued health of the visitation economy.

3. Seek ways to diversify the local base economy with compatible business and industries such that the character and qualities of Whitefish are protected.
4. Develop and promote Whitefish as a year-round convention and destination resort community providing amenities for the visitor and employment opportunities for area residents.

Economic Development Policies:

1. Support the role of Downtown Whitefish as the commercial center of the community through implementation of the Downtown Business District Master Plan.
2. The City of Whitefish shall make implementation of the Downtown Master Plan a priority in capital improvement planning and programming.
3. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to promote beneficial job growth in the base economy, and especially in those areas that tend to diversify the base economy beyond development related and visitation based business and industries.
4. Support organic and other localized farming as a means to broaden the community's economic base and to preserve and enhance rural character.

Economic Development Recommended Actions:

1. Implement code and master plan (Growth Policy) amendments recommended in the Downtown Master Plan.
2. Research regulatory amendments to discourage or prohibit formula business from locating in the downtown area.
3. Explore adding an economic impact analysis requirement to the permitting process for big box commercial facilities.
4. Review design and signage standards, propose amendments where necessary, and continue to support the current regulations on billboards.
5. Work with the DNRC and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to explore ways to promote resource based tourism without endangering vital natural resources.
6. Investigate alternatives and possible partnerships to identify and recruit clean, community-compatible industry to Whitefish.
7. Conduct asset mapping and SWOT assessment to identify clean industries and businesses compatible with the character and qualities of Whitefish.

- 8.** Actively pursue partners and grants to fund and establish a business incubator to provide technical and logistic support to new businesses that would diversify the community's base economy.
- 9.** Establish development and design standards in the WI and WB-4 zoning district sufficient to attract and protect private investment.
- 10.** Map active local agricultural operations as part of the land use data base.
- 11.** Establish low-density and rural zoning districts in local farming areas, and protect existing operations to the extent possible through agriculture indemnity statements on plats and prior notice conditions of approval.
- 12.** Explore incentives for the growth and retention of localized agriculture.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE ELEMENT

The first element of this Growth Policy, Natural Resources, points out the issues and constraints to development associated with the area's natural environment, and identifies the critical areas and features that Whitefish citizens want preserved as the area grows. The Economic Development Element looks at the issues surrounding how the community sustains itself. These elements drive the land use element. The land use element tackles the issues of where and how the community is to grow. Therefore, the remaining elements of housing, transportation, and community facilities are considered functions of the desired land use pattern, and are driven by the Land Use Element.

An important factor in this growth policy is the principle of sustainability, and making Whitefish a truly sustainable community. What this means is that the needs of today are met while at the same time ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities.

For many, the land use element and land use map are the most critical components of the entire Growth Policy. But even more important than where and by how much the community will grow is **how** it will grow. At what densities will new growth occur? What product types will emerge? How will existing neighborhoods be affected? Will new development preserve and enhance the community's unique character and qualities, or will they destroy them? Will Whitefish retain its small town feel and friendliness, or will it become just another "Any Town, USA". The land use element is also the component of the Growth Policy where emotions run their highest.

Maintaining Character

ISSUE: Maintaining the character and "small town feel" of Whitefish as the community experiences rapid growth.

Two important factors affect residents' perception of character and small town feel. First and most obvious is the type and amount of new growth that is occurring. The second is the rapid rate at which the community is growing. When asked if they are comfortable with the current pace of growth, participants at community visioning sessions responded overwhelmingly that they are not. Rapid growth can not only strain community infrastructure and services, it gives people little time to adapt to change. This can make them feel alienated and helpless --- like they have no control over how growth is reshaping their community.

A part of Whitefish's character is defined by its diversity of residential types and densities. This diversity was created over time as many different factors such as economy, lifestyle changes, and social structure influenced the type and densities of homes that were built. Today, a residential development can provide a large number of

homes all of the same type within a very short period of time, thereby making a profound change in the community and limiting the diversity of housing type.

Another factor that can threaten community character is development that is out of scale with surrounding neighborhood. Existing Whitefish land development regulations control density, setbacks, and lot coverage. Landscaping is required for multi-family and commercial developments. Structural height is allowed up to 35', and this can be much higher than homes in established neighborhoods. Also, floor area ratio (FAR) and landscape ratio (LSR) are not regulated, nor is total impervious surface. Lack of control of these critical factors of community character can and has resulted in structures that are far out of scale with their surroundings. With scale and character being such significant issues with the public, character based regulations and neighborhood conservation districts should be carefully considered.



Character based regulations would prevent structures that are out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood. These units under construction are approximately twice the mass of structures that comprise the existing neighborhood.

Historic Preservation

ISSUE: Downtown historic buildings and neighborhoods have little protection from re-development and infill.

With recommendations in the Growth Policy to encourage infill rather than sprawl, we must recognize that increased infill can also have a negative effect on unprotected historic neighborhoods and buildings. Historic buildings and neighborhoods are important to the character and history of Whitefish, and it is also an important economic element of the visitor industry. Many of the buildings downtown were constructed in the early 1900's, yet only the Railway Depot, the First Presbyterian Church, and the Ray E. Taylor house at 900 South Baker are on the National Historic Register.

Several older downtown commercial buildings are in need of renovation, including many that are currently highlighted as important historic landmarks on the Whitefish Walking Tour, and they could be in danger of being torn down for redevelopment. Many of

Whitefish's older residential neighborhoods have significant historic buildings that contribute to the traditional character and attractiveness of the area. Without prescribed protections and incentives, many of these beautiful buildings could succumb to infill redevelopment.



Casey's Bar, built in 1903, is Whitefish's oldest building. Like many other landmarks that contribute to downtown Whitefish's unique historic character, it has no protected status and could be susceptible to future redevelopment.

There are incentives available for the preservation of historic buildings. The most well known programs are the federal tax incentives, including the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC) program, which provides an income tax credit for 10% or 20% of eligible costs associated with historic rehabilitation, and the Conservation (or Façade) Easement Charitable Tax Deduction. The HRTC is designed to encourage the reuse of income producing properties, including commercial and industrial properties, and in most cases, rental residential as well. 20% of qualified rehabilitation costs can be used as a tax credit for buildings listed or pending listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). For non-residential buildings that were built prior to 1936 but that are not NRHP eligible, 10% of rehabilitation costs can be used. Participating projects must meet prescribed standards for rehabilitation, depending on which credit type is used. Additionally, owners of National Register eligible properties or owners of land that contains National Register eligible properties may be eligible to receive a tax deduction for conservation easements or the charitable contribution of a portion of the rights to their property to a non-profit organization committed to preservation.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation also provides a variety of preservation incentives and services, including loan assistance, granting programs for governments and non-profit organizations, and preservation consulting services. In addition, the National Trust offers comprehensive assistance for commercial revitalization of historic urban areas through its national Main Street Program. Incentives such as these can help preserve some historic buildings if no local regulations are in place.

Historic district overlay zones and other regulations can be implemented to more fully protect historic buildings and require new buildings in special districts to reflect historic

characteristics. However, the establishment of historic overlay zones and regulations should also be championed by the property owners in those districts who have recognized the potential of higher property values and income from the increased visitation that such designations can provide. It is difficult for a municipality to recommend such protections and regulations without at least some stakeholder support, therefore some educational endeavors are essential. A historic properties survey that inventories historic buildings is the first step to determining what can and should be protected. From that, an exploration of available options can be initiated, either through the promotion of local incentives and Federal programs, or the adoption of new historic overlay regulations.



The Railway District is home to many quaint historic bungalows. Recent development has leveled many older residential buildings in favor of modern mixed-use structures due to the WB-3 commercial zoning.

Zoning

ISSUE: Current zoning is often inconsistent with the existing character and densities of residential neighborhoods.

When the zoning district(s) applied to a neighborhood allows higher densities and different residential types than those that exist in the neighborhood, the most likely result is that new development and redevelopment will not reflect the character and qualities of the host neighborhood. This can be seen in many recent development applications in Whitefish. Zoning for higher densities may be perfectly acceptable if the stated objective is to allow the neighborhood to transition, but if the objective is to preserve the character and qualities of the existing neighborhood, that objective is not likely to be met.

Whitefish has some areas where the zoning does not match the neighborhood. Most of the “beach” area west of Iowa Ave. is zoned WR-2 (Two-Family Residential District). However, the predominant land use is single-family detached, and north of Skyles Place, the density decreases noticeably. However, WR-2 allows duplex residential dwellings on a 7,200 square foot lot, and single-family homes on as little as 6,000 square feet of lot area. Through use of the planned unit development (PUD), densities up to 12 units per acre, and up to 18 per acre with affordable housing, are possible by code. And while such densities are not usually granted in a predominantly single-family area, the threat of erosion of the existing scale and character remain very real. The area of West 3rd and 4th Streets immediately east of Karrow Ave. faces a similar situation.

Two other areas that are zoned inconsistently with existing character and densities are the neighborhood west of the Post Office and a two block strip on the west side of Kalispell Ave. between 4th and 6th Streets. Both of these areas are zoned WR-4 (High Density Multi-Family Residential), which allows densities and multi-family structures that by code could be far out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood. In the area along the west side of Kalispell Avenue, the zoning district boundary between WR-4 and WR-2 occurs at the street rather than at the alley which is considered to be better zoning practice. In addition, these two areas are designated High Density Residential on the 1996 Master Plan.



This neighborhood just west of the Whitefish Post Office is characterized by modest, well-kept, single-family homes. However, WR-4 zoning would allow multi-family dwellings by right, as permitted uses and only subject to review by the Architectural Review Committee.

Environmental Factors

ISSUE: Historically, preservation of environmentally sensitive lands and the recognition of constraints posed by environmental factors have not been high priorities in land planning and development.

While jurisdictional wetlands are protected to some extent by federal law, there are no required buffers to assure that wetlands continue to function as they did prior to development. Also, because of recent interpretations of the Clean Water Act, so-called isolated wetlands, or “pocket wetlands”, and “non-tributary wetlands”, are not considered to be jurisdictional. This means that in Montana, some of the most valuable wildlife habitat in the state is not protected by the federal government. This narrowing of the definition of jurisdictional wetlands by the courts and federal government means that more states and local governments are entering the wetland protection business in order to preserve hydrological functions and wildlife habitat.



The present zoning code contains no special set backs or buffer requirements for areas such as this along the Whitefish River. Critical Area Ordinances (CAO) are usually adopted to preserve the environmental integrity of sensitive areas such as this one.

Until April of 2006, Whitefish had no regulations limiting construction, terrain disturbance, and vegetation removal on steep slopes. Limiting development on steep slopes is a common and widely used practice among cities and counties concerned about preserving the environmental and visual qualities of their area. Restricting development on slopes exceeding 30% is recommended in the Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP) in order to limit potential erosion and resulting sedimentation of water bodies. There was also a recommendation in the 1996 City-County Master Plan to restrict development on slopes in excess of 30%, but no regulation or standard was ever adopted by code. Another fundamental environmental safeguard that Whitefish did not have until 2006 is buffer zones from the Whitefish River, local streams, and wetlands.

Critical area protection is vital to the principle of sustainability. These areas perform important environmental functions, such as the filtering of pollutants, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat, that benefit the community now and into the future. Many communities address environmental concerns through comprehensive critical area ordinances (CAO). These ordinances will typically identify areas and types of environmental features to be protected, set forth regulations and permitting procedures, and will also have incentives and educational programs to broaden the awareness and public appreciation for critical area protection.

Waterfront Development

ISSUE: Waterfront development that does not observe good conservation standards can negatively impact water quality, destabilize stream banks, and destroy valuable riparian vegetation.

Development within 20 feet of mean high water on Whitefish, Lost Coon, and Blanchard lakes is regulated by Lake and Lakeshore Protection Regulations, Title 13 of the Whitefish City Code. The authority for adopting and administering lakeshore protection standards is set forth in Title 75, Chapter 7, Part 2. Lakeshores, MCA. Oversight is provided by the Lakeshore Protection Committee, an 8-member committee appointed by

the City Council and Flathead County Board of Commissioners. The Lakeshore Protection Committee is the only one of its kind in Montana.

Generally, lakeshore protection standards regulate the amount and type of construction activity that can take place within the “lakeshore”, or “lakeshore protection zone” (LPZ); defined by the Montana law as 20 feet landward of mean high water. Recently, the City of Whitefish has adopted an ordinance that establishes a 10-foot setback from the LPZ boundary for “vertical elements” such as structures of any kind and retaining walls. Other than that ordinance, there is only a requirement for a drainage plan when a development exceeds 5,000 square feet of impervious surface. No other codified protections for steep slopes, wetlands, or riparian vegetation and habitat currently exist.

While lakes are at least afforded the protection of lakeshore regulations, there are no such standards for the Whitefish River, local streams and creeks, and wetlands, at least not in the zoning code. Through an “interim measure” passed by the City Council in 2006, setbacks for these environmental features was established until a more comprehensive and permanent critical areas ordinance can be formulated and adopted.

In addition to the lack of protection through the zoning code, most of the Whitefish Lake shoreline as well as the entire shorelines of Lost Coon and Blanchard lakes lay outside of the Whitefish corporate limits. Significant reaches of local streams such as Haskill Creek, Walker Creek, Viking Creek, and the Whitefish River are also located in unincorporated areas. This means that no building code is being administered and, therefore, no site plan review is taking place (except for a voluntary zoning compliance permit). Without plan review of some kind, even the simplest of environmental standards would be difficult and time consuming to enforce. Finally, most all waterfront development that takes place in the unincorporated areas employs individual sewage disposal systems, which can pollute both ground water and surface water bodies.

Growth

ISSUE: Where and by how much is Whitefish to grow?

Participants at the public visioning sessions generally expressed a desire to not set numerical or geographic limits on Whitefish’s future growth. Most participants preferred to protect what the community values (open spaces, scenic vistas, wildlife habitat, clean air and water, community character and scale, small town feel, etc.), and formulate a good growth policy around those things. **Therefore, no population threshold or ultimate urban growth boundary will be set by this Growth Policy.**

At the same time, however, residents wanted the rural lands that surround the city to remain open and free of intense development. In addressing these two seemingly conflicting objectives, it is helpful to examine Whitefish’s growth potential in real time. In other words, what would be Whitefish’s population sometime in the future if all existing approved developments are built out, and some reasonable build-out assumption is made for key vacant and/or underdeveloped parcels in and around the urbanized area?

The mid-2006 U.S. Census estimate of population for the City of Whitefish is just over 7,000 residents. The current (2005) population estimate for the entire jurisdictional area is around 11,500. All existing approved development projects, primarily including plats, planned unit developments (PUDs), and conditional use permits (CUPs) account for just over 1,200 total units. Some of these projects are partially built out, but others have not yet begun construction. Assuming the Whitefish area adds 200 new units per year (a conservative estimate that includes the city, where building permits are required, and the unincorporated areas where they are not), these entitlements account for about six years of construction activity if not a single additional lot or project is approved. (See Entitlement Map.)

In addition to entitlements, there is also the potential for another 1,200 units on vacant and/or underdeveloped land. This too is a conservative estimate, and includes lands already zoned and/or designated for future development in the 1996 City-County Master Plan. It does not assume wholesale changes in planned land use designation and does not generally include agricultural and forest lands where extensive infrastructure improvements would be needed to make development possible. (See Development Potential Map.) This means that there are 2,400 additional units already entitled, or with a potential to be developed under existing zoning and the 1996 Master Plan, and they account for approximately 12 years of construction activity at the current rate of development and land absorption. Therefore, in 12 years time the population of the planning jurisdictional area could reach 17,500 permanent and part-time residents combined.

As to where the city should grow, no clear consensus emerged from the visioning sessions regarding any particular geographic area where growth should be directed by public policy. Therefore, this Growth Policy will not make a recommendation to direct new growth to one part of the jurisdictional area over another. However, there was a moderate consensus for infill development that makes more efficient use of existing infrastructure while not expanding the urban boundaries of the community. At the same time, residents expressed a strong dislike for higher density housing that would overburden existing services and facilities and/or would not be compatible with existing neighborhoods.

ISSUE: Where shall additional commercial development take place, and what form should it take?

Here too, the citizens of Whitefish were quite clear in their preferences. Downtown should remain the commercial and cultural center of the community. In 2004 and 2005, the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan was formulated and adopted. This Master Plan is based upon an extensive community involvement program that included hundreds of participants in public meetings, workshops, and visioning exercises. In order to ground the Master Plan in reality, a market analysis was used as the starting point. Out of this effort came land use alternatives that meet realistic goals within a 20-year period, and a strategy for attainable investment and growth. The plan also includes

land use and transportation assessments, an opportunities and constraints analysis, and a framework for improvements to transportation, parking, civic/cultural, open space, housing, and retail components.

The Master Plan contains an extensive implementation program that includes a capacity diagram depicting a possible 140,000 square feet on new retail floor space and over 330 housing units. Finally, detailed recommendations and concepts for “catalyst projects” for key downtown locations are presented. Other specific recommendations call for zoning district changes, a recommendation to write upper floor residential uses into the WB-3 zoning district, and five new architectural review standards.

While the commercial strip along Hwy 93 South from Hwy 40 north to about 13th St. was generally accepted as a given, most visioning session participants wished to see the current quality of commercial development maintained. This included the meandering bicycle-pedestrian way, and distinctive landscaping maintained by each business establishment. There was very little interest in extending commercial development down Hwy 93 south of Hwy 40, or extending it along Hwy 40 toward Columbia Falls. Some commercial establishments now exist in both of those corridors as legal non-conforming uses. There was, however, great interest on the part of visioning session participants to work with Flathead County on cooperative planning beyond the Whitefish jurisdictional boundaries, and on preserving the visual qualities of community gateways, especially along the Hwy 93 and 40 corridors.



Attractive landscaping and a functional pedestrian way are important components of the existing Hwy 93/ Spokane Ave. commercial corridor.

There has been virtually no support in the Whitefish community for “big box” and “category killer” retail. Those types of retail establishments are readily available 15 miles away in Kalispell, and are generally viewed as being out of scale with Whitefish and detrimental to its small town feel and character. Code revisions to limit big box stores both in the downtown area and in the Hwy 93 commercial corridor are already being enacted.

The 1996 Master Plan concluded that, “Commercial land is vastly oversupplied and underused in the Planning Jurisdiction”, and judging from the amount of commercial land that is still undeveloped, especially in the Hwy 93 South corridor, that remains true today. Other than the recommendations set forth in the Downtown Master Plan, this growth policy will recommend no additional land for commercial development.

ISSUE: Whitefish has several highway corridors that are characterized by a variety of land uses, transportation functions, and design and development issues.

Land use planning along major transportation corridors is always a complex matter, with many varied and often conflicting issues to resolve. As pointed out at the beginning of the Transportation Element, there exists a reciprocal relationship between transportation and land use. Vehicle trips attract commercial land uses, which generate more vehicle trips, which attract more commercial development. Besides that, planning in transportation corridors usually involves multiple agencies and jurisdictions. A city may be in control of zoning and site plan reviews, but the county or state may have responsibility for maintenance and access permitting. Also, highways and arterial streets tend to be major routes for large water mains, sewer interceptors, and other utilities, and well as pedestrian and bike routes.

The two major community gateways are Montana Hwy 40 (from the east) and US Hwy 93 (from the south), and they are both very different in terms of appearance, character, and land use. Hwy 40 has a collection of business service type uses near the intersection of Dillon Road/Conn Road, but then is mostly agricultural land and large-lot residential to the intersection with Hwy 93. Average daily traffic (ADT) for the year 2005 was around 8,700, and the speed limit was recently lowered to 60 mph. Corridor planning emphasis here should be on keeping a rural character, while controlling screening, signage, and access standards for those few businesses that exist.

By contrast, Hwy 93 South is characterized by a number of commercial establishments of various kinds. Many are legal non-conforming uses, but most are legal permitted and conditional uses under the SAG-5 Flathead County zoning district (administered by the City of Whitefish within the jurisdictional area). Most of this corridor is heavily timbered, and many of the commercial buildings are of high quality. These two factors make the corridor far less visually distracting than many commercial strips in unincorporated Flathead County. Still, the corridor suffers from a lack of screening and landscaping, and from multiple uncontrolled highway approaches. Widening of the highway and growth in traffic have made the residential environment increasingly hostile. Because of this factor, there has been disinvestment in residential property resulting in some of those properties taking on a rundown appearance. ADT is approximately 15,000.

While the issues facing the Hwy 93 South corridor are complex and will be difficult to solve, the Whitefish community has long history of discouraging this area from becoming a “commercial strip”. Policy 6.3 of the 1996 Master Plan states, *Avoid the spread of strip commercial activity south of the Highways 93 and 40 intersection.* In 2004 when the North Valley Hospital Neighborhood Plan was adopted, it included the following goal:

[The North Valley Hospital Neighborhood Plan] *In no way promotes or encourages commercial development south of the Highway 40 intersection.* As concluded earlier in this element of the Growth Policy, visioning session participants expressed very little support for extending additional commercial development in either the Hwy 93 South or Hwy 40 corridors. Finally, it is important to remember that the existing zoning in the corridor was put in place in 1993 by the Blanchard Lake Area Zoning District, and one of the reasons for the SAG-5 zoning along the highway itself was that additional commercial development was not supported by the master plan in effect at that time. Therefore, any corridor plan for Hwy 93 South **must successfully address** at least the following issues:

- ❖ Commercial growth- Commercial growth will continue to be discouraged by the City of Whitefish.
- ❖ Scale- The existing modest scale of commercial and residential structures should be maintained. No “big box” retail or office buildings should be proposed.
- ❖ Architectural standards- Any successful plan must include high standards of architectural design that is compatible with the wooded environs of the corridor.
- ❖ Landscaping/screening- The corridor plan must include standards for replacement of existing forest stands, on-site landscaping, and screening of parking and service areas.
- ❖ Utilities- Water and sewer service must be provided, or, the corridor plan should support no more development than can be served by well and septic systems **without** adversely affecting water quality or wells on neighboring properties.
- ❖ Trip generation- With growing traffic volumes on Hwy 93 already, additional non-residential uses should not be of a nature that attracts large numbers of additional vehicle trips. The corridor plan must include a traffic impact and access analysis.
- ❖ Traffic safety, circulation, and access- Traffic safety will be a major concern with any new growth in this corridor. The proliferation of access points can cause both safety and traffic access problems. An access and circulation component must be a product of the over-all corridor plan.
- ❖ Bike/pedestrian facilities- Bicycle and pedestrian ways must be provided within the corridor itself, and should link to the existing commercial areas north of Hwy 40.

The Wisconsin Ave. corridor on the north side of Whitefish has its own unique set of issues. This corridor has **multiple** land uses, heavy seasonal traffic, is an active pedestrian area, and will soon have a major bike route as well. Land uses include commercial, offices, restaurants, lodging, a major resort facility (The Lodge at Whitefish Lake), multi-family residential, public, and semi-public uses. Zoning is a mixture of WB-1 (Neighborhood Commercial), and high-density residential (WR-3 and WR-4). Average daily traffic for 2005 was around 9,000 vehicles just north of Edgewood Drive. In this corridor the plan must address the mix of uses and the transition to residential both east and west of the roadway. It must also address connections to the adjacent residential neighborhoods, orientation and connections to the new bike route, scale issues, landscaping/screening, and circulation/access. Most of the existing commercial is located

in the WB-1 (Limited Business) zoning district, and that scale and intensity of commercial activity should be preserved.

When US Hwy 93 North leaves downtown Whitefish and crosses the Whitefish River, it is actually proceeding west. This segment of the corridor, locally referred to as West 2nd Street, is characterized by single-family and multi-family residences, offices, and limited commercial land uses. The existing WR-3 zoning would tend to allow residential densities to increase over time. Most uses take direct access to 2nd Street, and there are multiple driveways along this route. Even though it is frequently used by pedestrians, there are no sidewalks anywhere in the 93 North corridor. ADT for 2005 is around 8,200 just east of Karrow Ave., 7,200 approaching State Park Road. Beyond State Park Road, ADT drops off to less than 5,000, and the corridor becomes decidedly more rural. Any plan for this corridor must mesh with plans to reconstruct Hwy 93 North, which should include new bike and pedestrian facilities. It too must deal successfully with scale issues, as well as the current and projected mix of residential, office, and commercial uses. Another critical issue for this corridor is the visual quality of the streetscape as an entryway both to the downtown area and the Whitefish community in general.

Whitefish has never undertaken a “corridor plan”; a plan that takes into account the different transportation modes, land uses, and community functions. Corridor plans can be developed as neighborhood plans, which are provided for under Montana law. While corridor plans can be initiated by the City, they can also be conducted by the property owners, residents, and business persons in the corridor. Regardless of who conducts the corridor plans, they should have an extensive stakeholder involvement program, and should take a comprehensive approach to the critical issues such as transportation modes, land use, screening, noise, access, and aesthetics.



The Wisconsin Ave. corridor is characterized by multiple land uses and driveway approaches, seasonally heavy traffic, and (at the present time) no pedestrian or bikeway facilities.

ISSUE: As a man-made environmental factor, noise can have a significant impact on the type and distribution of land uses in the community.

The current Whitefish City Code regulates noise in two areas. Sec. 5-2-5 regulates disturbance of the peace, and prohibits construction noise between the hours of 10:00 PM and 7:00 AM. Sec. 6-1-8 regulates the noise that can be produced by vehicles. However, the code does not regulate other types of noise that can interfere with the use and enjoyment of property. The City adopted a new Community Decay ordinance in 2006, but did not include noise standards.

Noise made by industrial processing can have a profound impact on adjacent and nearby land uses, as can noise from machinery. Noise near railroad crossings is a frequent complaint in Whitefish, and the State Park Road crossing is actually being studied for a “silent crossing” so that whistles will not be required as trains approach. Noise from commercial heating and air conditioning equipment can also be a nuisance when not properly located and baffled.

Noise is also an issue along arterial streets and in highway corridors as discussed in the previous section. The Montana Department of Transportation has a fairly new highway noise mitigation program, but it primarily places the burden for noise reduction on the adjacent private property owner. However, the speed limit along MT Hwy 40 was recently lowered by MDT from 70 to 60 mph.

ISSUE: Wherever and however Whitefish grows, facilities and services should be upgraded to take the additional impact into account as the community grows.

“Concurrency” was a topic at several visioning sessions. Concurrency simply means that any upgrades to facilities or services necessitated by development, such as streets, parks, schools, emergency services, pedestrian/bikeways, etc., should be in place **before** the impact of the new development. Communities that require concurrency tend to be more livable and more sustainable because facilities and services keep pace with population growth.

Under concurrency policies, one of two things happen. Either a development is delayed, curtailed, phased, or denied until such time as all necessary facilities and services are provided, or, the developer pays for upgrades “up front” so the development can proceed, and is then reimbursed by subsequent developers who are also making use of the same infrastructure. The City of Whitefish has “latecomers agreements” in place for developers who extend water and sewer lines and build or improve streets, but the City does not have a concurrency policy at this time.

Preservation of Open/Rural Lands

ISSUE: Preserving open rural lands that surround Whitefish.

Many visioning session participants specifically listed the open lands that surround Whitefish as things they value and would like to see preserved as the community grows. However, the vast majority of these lands are in private ownership, and some are in areas that have been proposed for additional urban or suburban development.

Most of the surrounding rural lands are designated “Important Farmlands” or “Timberlands” in the 1996 Master Plan, and are zoned WA (Whitefish Agricultural) with a 15-acre minimum lot size. Some are designated “Limited Rural Residential”, which also allow very low densities. Some of these areas also have environmental constraints such as steep slopes, high ground water, and/or hydric soils. Many of these properties are already divided into 5 to 20-acre lots.



Property immediately east of Monegan Road shown during spring wet season. This property has been proposed for residential development, but is subject to both high ground water and hydric soils.

Most of this rural land east of Monegan Road was designated “Important Farmlands” in 1996. It is zoned WA (Whitefish Agricultural), SAG-10, and AG-20. Some of this zoning was put in place by the East Whitefish Zoning District approved by Flathead County. Most of the land is either wooded or is pasture land for horses or cattle. It is also important for the production of high quality hay that is very much in demand both in and out of the Whitefish area. Another challenge to development east of Monegan Road is the proximity to the City of Whitefish wastewater treatment plant. Should the plant and/or lagoon system need to be expanded, or if the plant is converted to a mechanical treatment, a marked increase in odors would result.

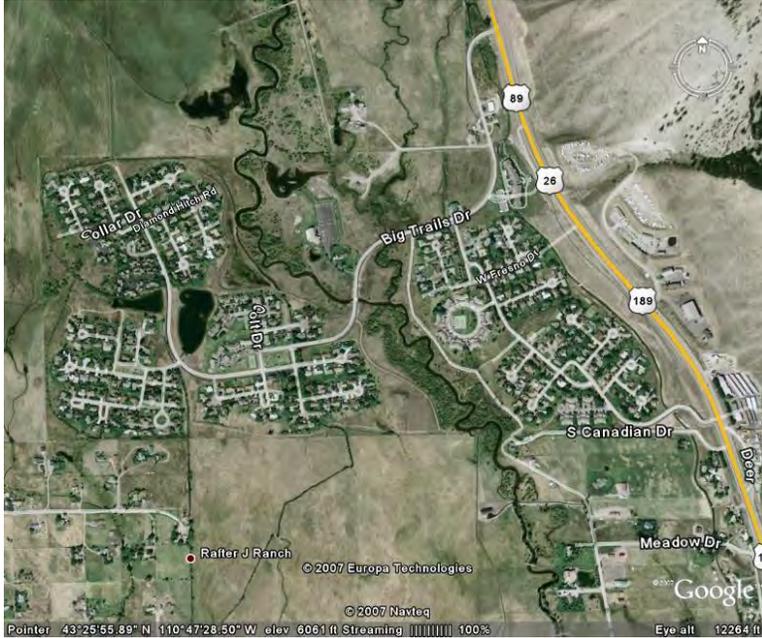
The Karrow Ave. area south of 7th Street is designated “Urban Residential”, “Suburban Residential”, and farther south, “Suburban Rural Residential” on the 1996 Master Plan. Zoning is WLR (One-Family Limited Residential District), WA, and some WCR

(Whitefish Country Residential) which has a 2 ½-acre minimum lot size. Generally, the Karrow area is more wooded than the lands east of Monegan Road, but the Karrow area does not have the severe constraints of high groundwater and hydric soils. There is also some active farming and grazing in the Karrow area.

Preserving these lands in a rural and open state in perpetuity will take more than simple regulatory action pursuant to a Growth Policy. Somehow, the development potential must be taken off these properties through a transfer or purchase of some kind. Transfer of development rights, or the outright purchase of development rights through open space bonds or other means, in order to establish a conservation easement are both possibilities. In fact, several properties in and around Whitefish are subject to conservation easements of various types. (See Conservation Easements Map.) But another possibility is conservation development. This would allow for development, even development of various residential product types at high densities, provided that some significant portion of the land is kept in open space or agriculture. One such conservation subdivision located in another state is depicted below.

At the present time (August, 2006), there are approximately 1,200 residential units, of all product types and densities, for which “entitlements” have been granted. This simply means that these dwelling units have some level of approval through development review process. Subdivisions, Planned Unit Developments, and Conditional Use Permits are the most common forms of entitlements in Whitefish. All entitlements used in this calculation are shown on the accompanying Entitlements Map.

In addition to the entitlements, there is a potential for another estimated 1,200 units within the general urban service for which entitlements can reasonably be granted and which already have urban services or they can reasonably be provided as part of a development project. Therefore, the existing development entitlements and additional development potential total approximately 2,400 units. In addition to that, the Downtown Business District Master Plan projects another 300 units possible in the downtown area. Recent rates of residential construction indicate that units are being built at a rate of



This residential development south of Jackson, WY is mostly single-family detached, but has a mix of product types. SF lots are ¼ acre in size, but the gross density is about 2 du/ac. Flat Creek flows through the project, hay is cut in the open spaces, and fishing ponds were created in common areas.

approximately 200 units per year. Therefore, this Growth Policy will promote **infill** development as a first alternative for future growth, and will not designate significant amounts of additional undeveloped land for land urban and suburban development at this time. (Note: An explanation of entitlements is found in the Special Appendix at the end of this element.)

Development Density

ISSUE: How and at what densities should new developments be planned for Whitefish?

As new neighborhoods emerge through future development, Whitefish residents have expressed a desire that they be consistent in character and quality with existing neighborhoods. A strong desire was expressed for continuing the traditional grid street pattern when and where possible. There was also a preference for continuity of streets, pedestrian/bikeways, and open space corridors such as streams and wildlife use areas.

There is a general expectation that densities of new neighborhoods will be mixed as appropriate, but a preference was expressed for developments that incorporate open space and exhibit a high degree of connectivity with the street. Streets should be lively, attractive, and walkable, and streetscapes should not be dominated by garage doors, blank walls, or other “dead” structural features. Porches and entryways should be open to the front yard and street. Extreme “garage forward” designs, in which entryways are hidden away behind double and triple garage doors, should be avoided in any development.



Although this small house in a traditional neighborhood has a modest entryway, the well-kept low fence, arbor, and appropriate plant materials all combine to provide an attractive connection to the street. Opaque fencing and excessively high fences should be avoided in front yards.

Visioning session participants were most clear in expressing a dislike for relatively high density housing that they felt “is not Whitefish”. The Monterra project in the southeast corner of the city was most often cited as inappropriate, but those familiar with The Views condominium project (currently under construction) felt that was too dense as well. When participants were asked if there is a place in Whitefish for higher densities, they generally responded in the affirmative, but that it should represent a mix of product types (not just high-density multi-family), and **must** respect the character and scale of existing neighborhoods and cannot over-tax facilities and services. The inclusion of small retail nodes interspersed in higher density residential areas would tend to contribute to the “mix of product types” and the walkable community concept.

Environmental Conflicts

ISSUE: Residential development in forested areas poses the risk of wildfire hazards.

In Montana, “fire season” usually begins in late July or early August with a combination of low rainfall, higher temperatures, low humidity, and summer thunderstorms. However, major wildfires can occur at any time of year. When residential and recreational development takes place in forested or “wildland” areas, the result is that structures are mixed with wildland vegetation creating what fire protection professionals call the Wildland Urban Interface. In an Interface situation, fire can spread from vegetation to structures, and vice versa. So often when a wildfire breaks out, first response fire fighters are sent to protect structures instead of fighting the actual blaze.

Interface situations already exist in the Whitefish area in developments such as Northwoods, Lion Mountain, and in subdivisions scattered along the Big Mountain Road. Both the Montana DNRC and State Fire Marshal recommend that “firewise” guidelines be adopted at the local level, and observed by fire protection agencies, homeowners, and developers. Common problems associated with Interfaces can be corrected through advance planning that includes subdivision and structural design, fuels management, and public education. Some firewise practices include:

- ❖ Reduction or removal of vegetation around each structure according to slope. Ornamental trees and shrubs should not touch any building.
- ❖ For ornamental landscaping, hardy indigenous perennials should be used.
- ❖ Evergreen shrubs are easily ignited and should be limited or thinned with lower limbs removed.
- ❖ Deciduous trees may be clumped, scattered, or planted in greenbelts or windbreaks. Conifers tend to ignite easily and should be widely spaced with ladder fuels removed.
- ❖ Keep highly flammable vegetation away from access roads so that they can remain passable during a wildfire event.
- ❖ Emergency access points should be well marked and maintained in a year-round passable condition with ample turn arounds.

Flathead County has a fuels reduction program and is in the process of researching and developing firewise standards. This is an area where the City and County could cooperate in order to reduce wild fire hazards and increase public safety.

ISSUE: Gravel extraction within the planning jurisdictional area could cause severe land use and environmental conflicts.

While there is currently very little active gravel extraction in the Whitefish area, the potential exists for more. With a continued high level of construction activity already, and with major projects such as Hwy 93 reconstruction looming on the horizon, the pressure to provide nearby sources of sand and gravel will only intensify.

Sand, gravel, and crushed stone production can have a variety of adverse impacts on the environment and surrounding neighborhoods, including:

- ❖ Increased dust, noise, and vibrations.
- ❖ Increased truck traffic near aggregate operations, and the damage to rural roads that were not designed to support loaded aggregate trucks.
- ❖ Visually and physically disturbed landscapes and wildlife habitat.
- ❖ Affects on surface and groundwater supplies and quality

Within the jurisdictional area, extractive industries are not permitted by right in any zoning district, but are allowed as conditional uses in WA, SAG-5, SAG-10, and AG-20. Lands within those four zoning districts comprise the vast majority of rural areas within the jurisdiction. Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) are only granted after public hearings before the Planning Board and City Council, and permitting decisions are made based upon criteria that are set forth in the zoning ordinance. Also, reasonable conditions to avoid and/or mitigate adverse impacts may be imposed as conditions of the CUP. These conditions are usually related to dust control, noise abatement through limiting hours of operation, providing screening or landscaping to mitigate visual impacts, tire washing or tracking pads to reduce material tracked onto streets, etc.

Perhaps the most significant impacts associated with gravel extraction on the rural areas surrounding Whitefish are impacts on wildlife habitat and the quality and quantity of

surface and groundwater. As a general policy, gravel extraction should not be allowed in critical wildlife habitat. Even with restoration, there is no guarantee that habitat values can be regained once the land is disturbed by open pit extraction. Also, given the high environmental values of the Whitefish area and the fact that so many of this area's rivers and streams are already impaired to some degree (see discussion in Natural Resource Element), in-stream extraction of any kind should be disallowed.

Gravel extraction can have severe impacts on groundwater quality and quantity. Dewatering of groundwater in open pits can lower the water level on nearby properties, and affect the production of existing wells. Equally as serious however, is that any opening in the earth can act as a conduit for the entry of contaminants into groundwater supplies. In gravel extraction, fuels from equipment, accidental spills of solvents and lubricants, and surface drainage into the pit can all introduce pollutants into local aquifers that will never go away, only dissipate with time and distance from the source.

Jurisdictional Boundaries

ISSUE: How will planning for lands beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of Whitefish be administered by other local governments?

The type, scale, and character of development just outside of the Whitefish planning and zoning jurisdictional area has been a concern of the Steering Committee, City staff, and many visioning session participants. The City of Whitefish has encouraged Flathead County to engage in cooperative planning for Hwy 93 South, MT Hwy 40, and rural lands beyond jurisdictional boundaries. Very little is accomplished if Whitefish carefully plans land use, establishes setbacks, landscaping, access, and signage in the highway corridors approaching the city, and Flathead County does not. The results of unplanned highway commercial development can be seen first hand on U.S. Hwy 2 north of the airport, and along other arterials and highways near Columbia Falls and Kalispell. The Whitefish community has expressed no desire for that type of development to occur locally.

Future Land Use

The Future Land Use Map is a graphic and general representation of the type, density, and spatial extent of future growth in the Whitefish area. Because the map is a general representation, more than one zoning district may apply and serve to implement each land use designation on the map.

Commercial Core: This designation describes the downtown area of Whitefish as well as surrounding transitional and mixed use areas. The major uses are retail commercial, professional and government offices, financial institutions, restaurants and taverns, hotels, and art galleries and studios. The Commercial Core is also characterized by mixed and multi-use developments such as residential above retail, mixed residential and office, and “artist lofts” which may have residential, studio, and gallery components.

Urban forms in the Core are dense and usually multi-level. Street connectivity is high, with minimal or zero setbacks, and accessible, human scale storefronts. Character is decidedly pedestrian. On-street parking is provided for ease of accessibility, but parking serving employees and residents is generally located in parking structures or in small lot accessed from alleys. Streets in the Core are active, and streetscapes are attractive with street trees, planters, and street furniture. Architecture is of very high quality and contributes to the established local theme. Zoning is mostly WB-3, but the Commercial Core can also be implemented through WR-4.

General/Highway Commercial: Generally applied to the Hwy 93 corridor north of the Highway 40 intersection, this designation is defined by auto-oriented commercial and service uses. Specific land uses include retail, restaurants of all types and quality ranges (including those with drive-up facilities), professional offices, auto sales and services, hotels/motels, supermarkets, shopping centers or clusters, and convenience shopping, including the dispensing of motor fuels. Primary access is by automobile with ample parking provided on site. Development sites are properly landscaped to screen parking and drive areas and to provide a high-quality visual image. Zoning is generally WB-2, but higher density residential with WR-3 zoning, and mixed use development may also be appropriate in this area.

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

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 districts would be WB-4 and a re-written WI.

Planned Industrial: Vital industries need to be provided for in areas where they will not compete against commercial development for land, but also where they will not impact residential neighborhoods with intense industrial activities and truck and rail traffic. Industrial uses tend to centers of employment, generate far less traffic than commercial, and do not generally depend on drive by traffic for clientele. WB-4 and WI are the applicable zoning districts.

Hospital/Medical/Office: This designation is primarily for the new North Valley Hospital and related medical offices and services, but it can be applied to any location in

the community where medical/professional office development is a desired use. The North Valley Hospital area is subject to a master plan amendment and a planned unit development, which regulate uses and site planning parameters. A new Office/Professional zoning district must be written and adopted to implement this land use designation.

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

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

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

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

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

Rural Residential: The rural residential designation is intended primarily for areas that are already divided into lots of 2 ½ to 10 acres in size. Its intent is to preserve rural character while allowing existing large-lot residential areas to continue without becoming non-conforming as to minimum lot size. Applicable zoning districts include WCR and WA-10. Rural residential is not seen as a desirable future development option, and this

Growth Policy does not advocate designating additional areas for rural residential beyond what is already depicted on the Future Land Use Map.

Planned Resort: This designation is for a master planned, dense, mixed and multi-use destination resort complex. The Planned Resort center is highly walkable and is pedestrian and bicycle oriented. Architecture and streetscapes are of very high quality. Parking is generally in on-site structures or lots that do not interfere with trails, paths, and walkways. Land uses include accommodations of all kinds, resort retail, eating and drinking establishments, and spas and fitness centers. Residential uses are generally medium to high density and are clustered around open space and other resort amenities. Zoning is generally WPR (Whitefish Planned Resort).

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

Rural: Open lands with decidedly rural character, including farmlands, pasture lands, timber harvesting and management areas, and forest lands generally fall under this designation. Agricultural and timber management are generally allowed, but residential densities are extremely low. This designation includes “important farmlands” as defined by National Resources Conservation Service criteria. Zoning is mainly WA-10 and WA-20.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA Overlay): Lands subject to this overlay are deemed environmentally sensitive due to a number of factors. ESA lands may have high groundwater, hydric soils, steep and/or potentially unstable slopes, or other development constraints. ESAs also include riparian lands and flood plains adjacent to the Whitefish River, local creeks and streams, wetlands, and critical wildlife habitat. Areas subject to the EAS may not be developable to full allowable densities under applicable zoning due to specific environmental characteristics. Sensitive areas mapping from the 1996 Master Plan will be adopted and utilized until such time as new mapping can be developed pursuant to a critical areas ordinance and/or a comprehensive hillside development ordinance.

Future Land Use Goals:

1. Preserve and enhance the character, qualities, and small town feel and ambience of the Whitefish community through an innovative and comprehensive growth management system.
2. Preserve, enhance, and manage environmentally sensitive areas such as river and stream banks, steep slopes, wetlands, forested areas, and critical wildlife habitat.
3. Strengthen the role of Downtown Whitefish as the commercial, financial, and administrative center of the community.

4. Preserve and protect scenic vistas and view sheds. **(Note: No work has been done to date to specifically identify important or “image setting” view sheds.)**
5. Protect and preserve the special character, scale, and qualities of existing neighborhoods while supporting and encouraging attractive, well-designed, neighborhood compatible infill development.
6. Preserve important rural lands and agricultural land uses that surround the community.3G. Plan for healthy, efficient, and visually attractive corridors along major transportation routes through the community.
7. Preserve and protect important historic buildings, neighborhoods, and landmarks in downtown Whitefish.

Future Land Use Policies:

1. All land development regulations shall be consistent with and based upon the Growth Policy in accordance with Montana state law.
2. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to require concurrency of all urban services, including but not limited to:
 - Water and sewer
 - Drainage
 - Streets
 - Public safety and emergency services
 - Pedestrian, bikeway, and trail facilities
 - Parks
 - Schools
3. The City of Whitefish shall continue to implement and update the Downtown Whitefish Business District Plan.
4. For new development, redevelopment, and infill projects in downtown Whitefish, building height and massing shall be consistent with the scale of existing structures.
5. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to encourage and support sustainability in land use planning so that the needs of the present are met while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities.
6. The City of Whitefish shall give priority to infill development over Growth Policy amendments that would redesignate land to Urban or Suburban.
7. Waterfront development, including roads, utilities, and trails, shall not be allowed to degrade water quality, illegally or otherwise improperly alter natural stream

- backs and lakeshores, destroy riparian vegetation, degrade riparian wildlife habitat.
8. As a matter of policy, development shall be required to „pay its way’ in terms of costs for services and facilities needed to serve it.
 9. Land designated Rural or Rural Residential on the Future Land Use Map shall not be redesignated by the City of Whitefish through a Growth Policy amendment, neighborhood plan, or subarea plan, except as set forth in the Implementation/Intergovernmental Element, until at least 50% of the previously entitled dwelling units, as depicted on the Approved Entitlements Map dated September 20, 2007, is actually constructed. Should the Whitefish City Council fail to conduct a review of this Growth Policy, with or without a written report from the City-County Planning Board as set forth in the Implementation/Intergovernmental Element, within 26 months following adoption of this Growth Policy, enforcement of this policy 3H shall be automatically suspended. Upon completion of the Growth Policy review, the City Council may reinstate policy 3H by simple majority.
 10. The City of Whitefish shall facilitate the formulation of corridor plans for all major transportation corridors in the community. When corridor plans are prepared by the property owners, residents and business persons in the area, the planning process, study area boundary, and involvement program are subject to review and approval by the City.
 11. Mineral, gravel, and sand extraction is generally considered to be incompatible with the character, qualities, and environment of the Whitefish area, and is to be discouraged.
 12. Encourage land owners to consult with professional foresters on the proper silvicultural and forest management techniques for hillsides and environmentally sensitive areas.
 13. All waterfront structures shall be appropriately set back from the waterfront to preserve views, minimize adverse environmental impacts, preserve the aesthetic qualities of the lake or river front, meet sanitation requirements, and protect water quality.
 14. All road construction associated with waterfront development and/or occurring in waterfront areas shall be monitored. Excessive clearing, hillside cutting, and the creation of spoil banks, which adversely affect views, destabilize hillsides, cause erosion, or increase surface runoff, shall be avoided or effectively mitigated.
 15. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support and vigorously enforce lakeshore protection regulations.

Future Land Use Recommended Actions:

1. In order to protect and preserve the character, scale, and qualities of existing neighborhoods, the City of Whitefish shall revise the Zoning Jurisdiction Regulations and adopt “character based” standards and “neighborhood conservation” districts for new development, redevelopment, and infill. For newly developed areas, regulations shall provide for cluster and “conservation” subdivisions in order to preserve rural character and environmentally sensitive areas.
2. In order to preserve and protect historic Whitefish buildings and neighborhood character, the City of Whitefish shall initiate a Historic Properties Survey of downtown and the Railway District, and explore options with regard to historic preservation, including historic overlay zones, preservation incentives, and public education.
3. The City shall formulate and adopt a comprehensive critical areas ordinance (CAO) to protect and manage designated environmentally sensitive lands.
4. All zoning district designations may be reviewed for conformance with this Growth Policy. The City or neighborhoods may initiate rezonings in order to bring zoning into compliance.
5. The City shall actively and aggressively pursue an agreement with Flathead County for cooperative planning outside the Whitefish planning jurisdictional area.
6. The City shall actively pursue conservation easements, transfer of development rights (TDR), and other mechanisms to protect and preserve rural lands surrounding the Whitefish urbanized area.
7. The City shall develop special regulations for “big box” commercial structures to ensure that the scale and character of the community are maintained.
8. The City shall explore a zoning text amendment to allow offices, galleries, and similar uses as conditional uses in the WR-2 zone along Baker Ave. from 10th Street to the Whitefish River.
9. The City shall formulate, or shall facilitate the development of, corridor plans for all major transportation corridors to address land use, transportation function and modes, noise, screening, landscaping, and all aspects of urban design. Corridor plans shall address the issues and concerns set forth in this element of the Growth Policy. The Hwy 93 South corridor shall be the first priority, and the remaining corridors shall include:
 - US 93 North
 - Montana Hwy 40
 - Wisconsin Avenue

- US 93/Spokane Avenue
10. The City shall explore adding noise standards to its Community Decay ordinance.
 11. Work with Flathead County to adopt firewise practices for development and construction in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).
 12. Revise jurisdictional zoning regulations to include special standards for gravel extraction, including but not necessarily limited to:
 - Screening and landscaping
 - Noise and dust abatement, including the tracking of material onto public streets
 - Surface and ground water quality monitoring
 - Preventive and mitigative measures to protect water quality
 - Access plans to avoid adverse impacts on existing neighborhoods
 - Street reconstruction plans (as necessary)
 - Sequential reclamation plans
 13. The City shall adopt standards for widths of waterfront lots in order to control waterfront congestion.

Special Appendix to the Land Use Element

Explanation of Methodology for Determining Entitlements

Entitlements: As used in this Growth Policy, the term “entitlement” refers to a legal status whereby the right to develop something, in this case a dwelling unit, has been established through some development review, approval, or permitting process. In very simple terms, an entitlement is an approval of some kind, but that approval has not yet been exercised-----like a legally platted lot that is vacant.

For purposes of this Growth Policy, entitlements were tabulated as a way to assess the infill development potential in Whitefish. All known approved development projects located generally within the urban service area of the city were inventoried, and the most accurate tabulation possible was made of the units left to be built within each. The units were then added up to arrive at a total number of 1,578 entitlement units as of September 20, 2007.

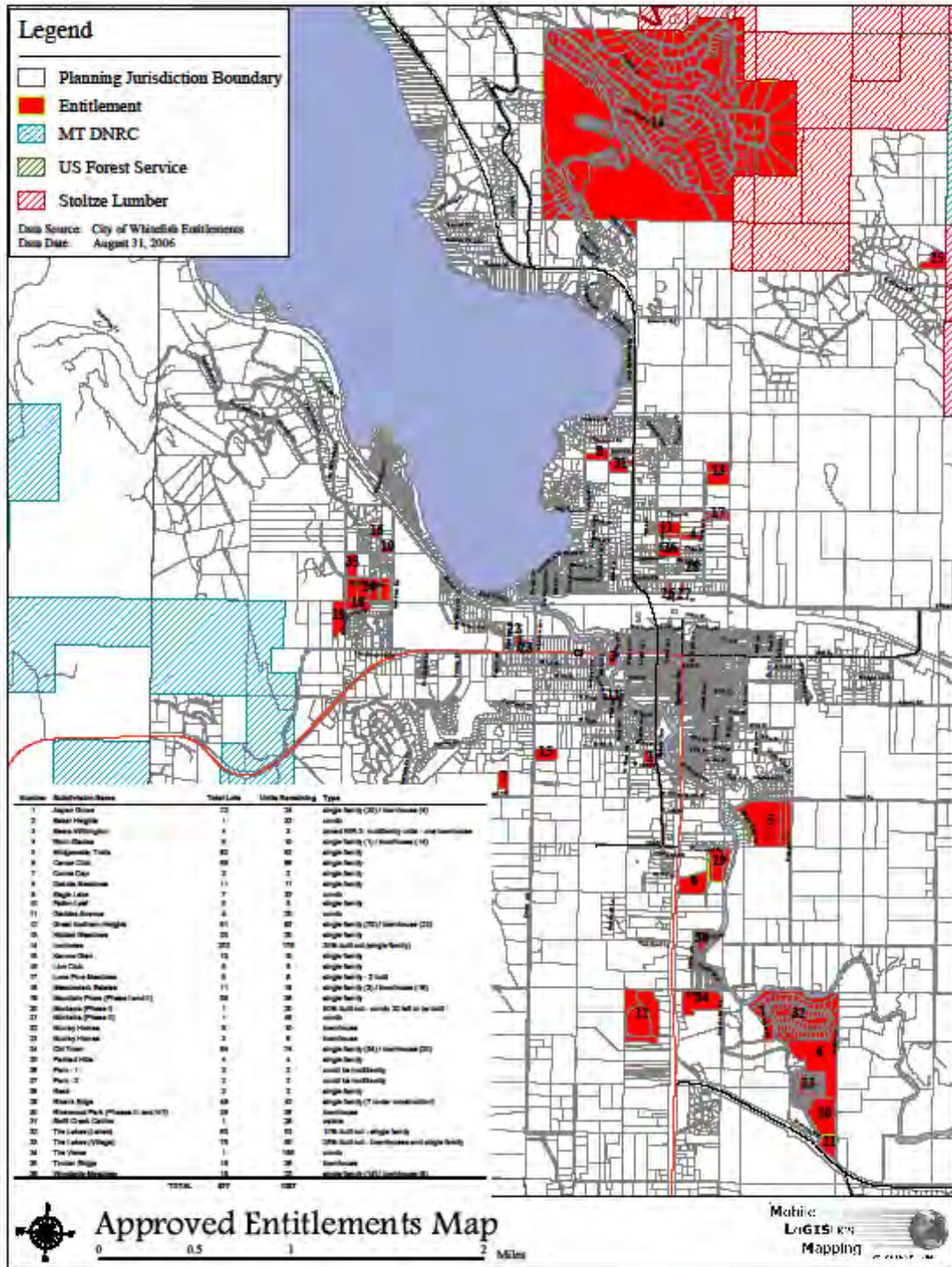
It is important to note that in identifying development projects to be included in the calculation, only the most recently approved developments were considered. While there are scattered vacant lots all over Whitefish, they were not added up individually to arrive at the entitlement figure. Also, as stated previously, only projects generally within the urban service areas of Whitefish were considered. Subdivisions in rural areas not served

by city water and/or sewer are not considered to be a component of infill. The different types and levels of approval for these projects are:

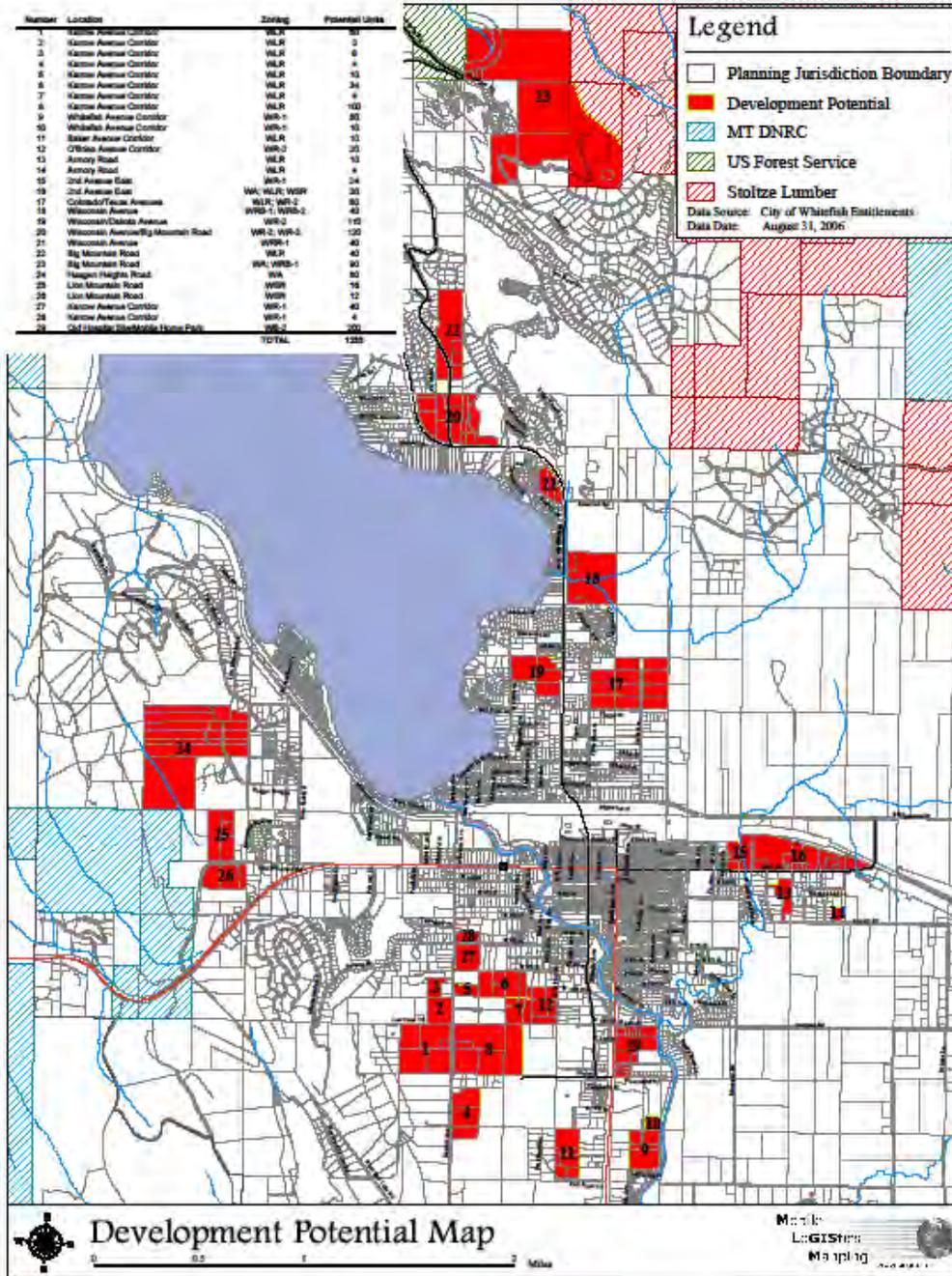
- ❖ Final plat- These are vacant lots and/or as yet unbuilt units within an area that has received final plat approval. Examples are Ironhorse, Great Northern Heights, and The Lakes Subdivision.
- ❖ Preliminary plat- These projects have an approved preliminary plat, but no final plat had been approved as of August, 2006. Examples are Hidden Meadow Preserve and Karrow Glen.
- ❖ Planned Unit Developments (PUD)- Approved PUDs include Bridgewater Trails, Old Towne, and The Views Condos. (Note: Some projects have both approved PUDs and preliminary plats.)

All projects used in the tabulation of entitlement units are depicted on the Approved Entitlements Map included in the Land Use Element.

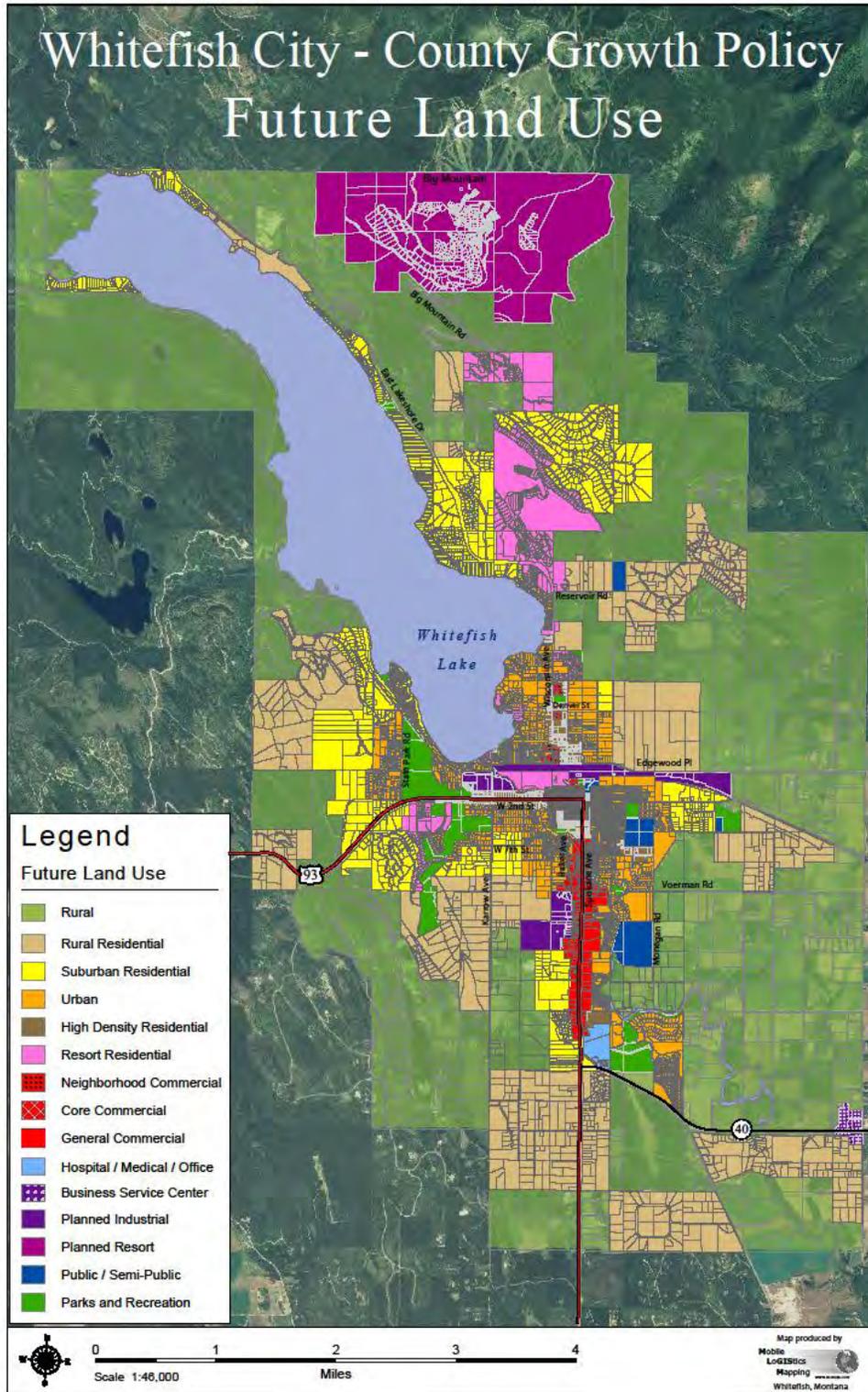
Approved Entitlements Map



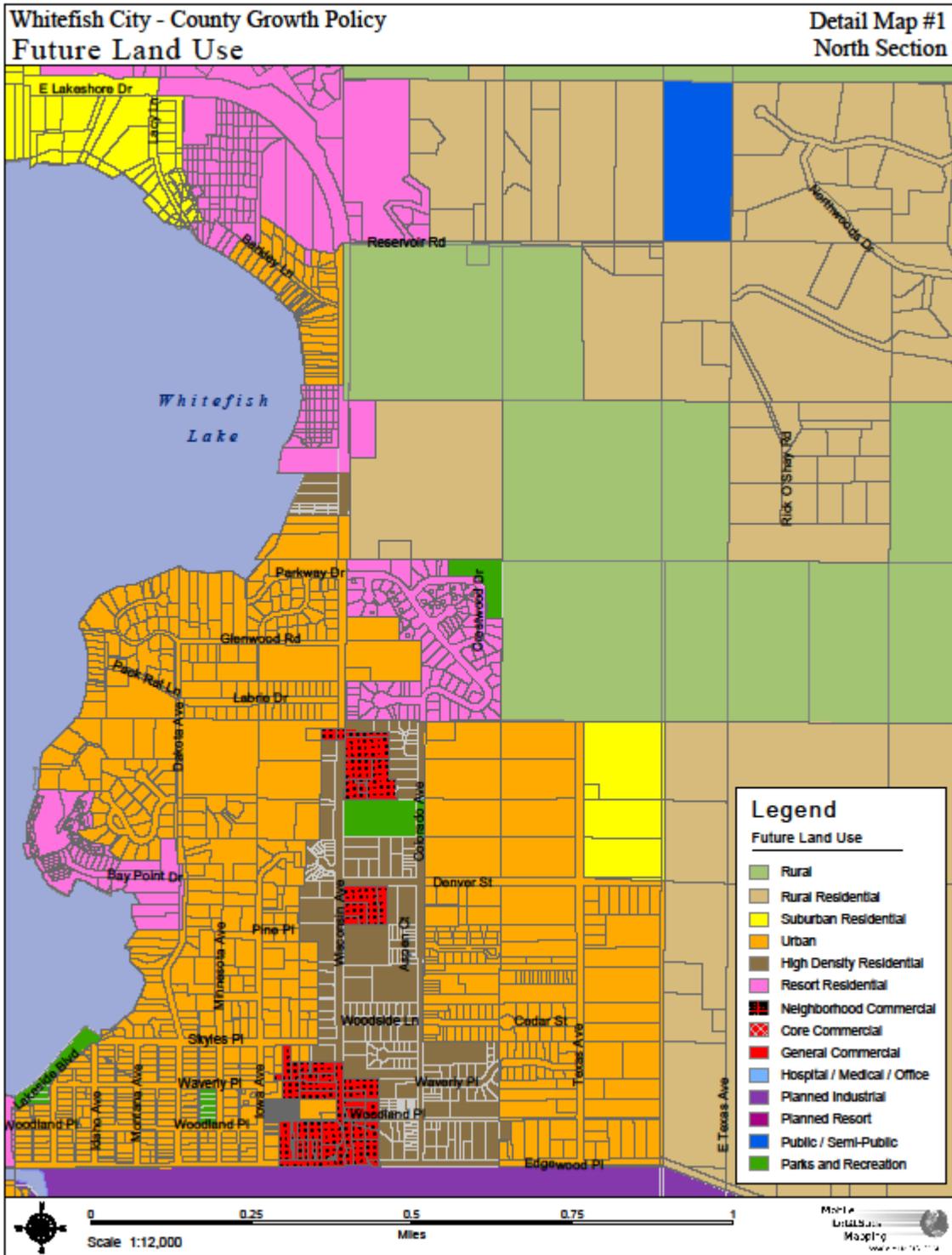
Development Potential Map



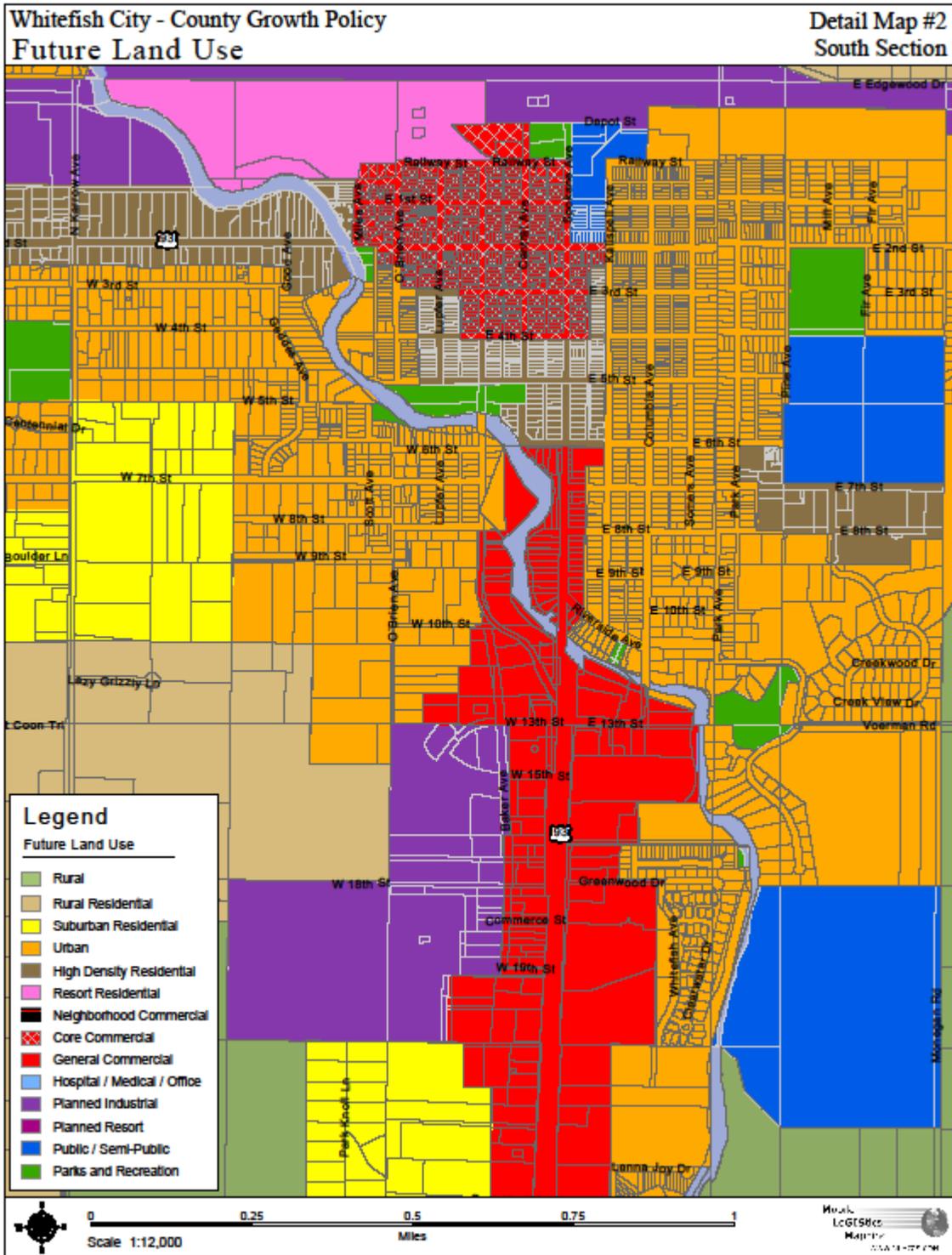
Future Land Use Map: Full View



Future Land Use Map: North Detail



Future Land Use Map: South Detail



CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY FACILITIES ELEMENT

The Community Facilities Element focuses on the facilities and services provided by the City of Whitefish, the Whitefish School District and other public, private and non-profit agencies in the Planning Jurisdiction. This includes general government services, police, fire and emergency services, schools, libraries, cultural services, parks, recreational programs, water, sanitary sewer, wastewater treatment, storm sewer, solid waste disposal and other facilities.

The purpose of this Element is to maintain and improve the facilities and services required to fulfill the current and future needs of the area's residents and businesses. Out of the visioning sessions two concerns regarding infrastructure were voiced: issues surrounding concurrency, that is having the infrastructure in place at the time of development, and ensuring development takes place where utilities are located or easily extended. Inherent in this stated purpose is the concept of **sustainability**; the idea that the needs of the present are met while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities. Through this Growth Policy and through the efforts of a caring and involved community, Whitefish can become a model of sustainability for all of Montana.

This Element will describe the various public services and facilities, then will identify issues surrounding community facilities. This analysis will be followed by goals, policies and recommendations.

Municipal Water Service

For any community, even a small one like Whitefish, providing municipal water service to a growing population is a multi-million dollar business. The City's water distribution system consists of 54 miles of mains ranging in size from 4 to 24 inches. There are over 2,960 individual connections from 5/8" to 4", three storage tanks, three booster stations, and two separate sources for raw water. Annual receipts for delivery of treated water are \$1.6 million.

In 2005, the City began development of water, sewer and stormwater master plans. All three facility plans were reviewed and adopted by the Whitefish City Council in 2006. The purpose of developing master facility plans is to evaluate the existing systems, determine future needs, and identify priority projects. In addition, urban service areas were established for each utility. The stormwater service area is the entire City-County Planning Jurisdictional Area, but the water and wastewater service areas are confined mainly to the urbanized areas and developable areas adjacent to them. Service area maps are included at the end of this element.

Water Utility Plan. Municipal water usage is fairly stable in Whitefish, but it does tend to increase somewhat during the summer months due to seasonal visitation and irrigation for landscaping. Average daily use from 2001 through 2004 has been 1.164 million gallons

daily (mgd), with the highest single-day peak use of almost 3 million gallons in July, 2003. Actual plant capacity is over 4 mgd. Municipal water is provided by two surface sources: Haskill Creek and Whitefish Lake, with the majority coming from Haskill Creek. Water from Whitefish Lake is only used as a back-up during spring runoff (when the organic content in Haskill Creek is high due to natural sources) and to satisfy peak demands. Raw water from both sources is treated at the City's water treatment plant on Reservoir Road before entering the system.

The Water Utility Plan identifies a series of capital improvements to the water infrastructure. Several improvements are proposed to improve or maintain fire flows in particular areas of the city. Other improvements are for system production, treatment, storage, and distribution. Another concern brought out by the plan is the threat to the quality of surface water from septic tanks or other sources.



An aerial view of the Whitefish water treatment facility off of Reservoir Road.

ISSUE: Even though peak water usage occurs in the summer months, and a significant portion of treated water is used for irrigation, there is no active water conservation program in the City of Whitefish.

In order to protect precious clean water sources and to control the costs of producing treated water at peak periods, many communities have instituted volunteer (and even mandatory) water conservation programs. Some communities in California and other arid states mandate the use of low-flow fixtures in new and remodeled homes. Irrigation with gray water and other low impact development techniques such as “California driveways” and permeable pavement, can also be effective in conserving water.

But most conservation programs rely on consumer education, demonstration, and outreach to reduce peak system demands. For several years, the City of Whitefish has had printed water conservation material at City Hall for customers to pick up. Some communities like Las Vegas and Walla Walla, Washington for example, have demonstration gardens to show homeowners and business people how to use native,

drought tolerant plants for residential and commercial landscaping. Watering at certain times of the day and use of native and/or drought tolerant plant materials for landscaping can substantially reduce peak demands during the driest month of summer. Irrigation of city parklands consumes significant amounts of water during the summer months, and according to City officials, many park irrigations systems could be improved.

ISSUE: Creeks in Haskill Basin are susceptible to pollution, sedimentation, and erosion.

As stated previously, the Haskill Creek system (First, Second, and Third Creeks) is the primary water source for the City of Whitefish. The Water System Utility Plan points out that for the most part, the Haskill system produces generally clear water that is low in hardness and dissolved organics. As a water source for a municipal facility, the water from the Haskill system is very clean and safe. However, during snow melt and rain events, the water can become highly turbid from sediment washing into the streams. The City samples the water from Second and Third Creeks an average of twice weekly.

The intake for First Creek has not been used in several years due to concerns of coliform bacteria contamination from upstream development, and the need to maintain adequate flows for downstream aquatic life. According to City of Whitefish officials, First Creek probably would not be used anyway as its flows are the lowest when water demand is at its peak. First Creek originates at Whitefish Mountain Resort, where it is now subject to pollutants urban stormwater discharge, and sedimentation from unpaved parking areas and construction activity. However, in conjunction with the Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan approved by the City of Whitefish in 2006, Big Mountain is preparing a stream management master plan to restore portions of First Creek and to address other water quality issues.

Haskill Creek is listed (actually petitioned) by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality as a water body that is “impaired” for certain functions. This means that DEQ will conduct water quality studies to determine the total maximum daily loading, or TMDL, that the system can withstand and still be of sufficient quality to support its most vital functions (domestic water supply, cold water fishery, etc.) Once the TMDL is established, measures must be taken to ensure that pollution reduction targets are met. As stated above, the Haskill system provides a very clean and stable water source for the City of Whitefish. However, the TMDL could, depending upon pollution reduction targets set, affect the City’s use of the Whitefish River for discharge of treated effluent from the wastewater treatment plant.

ISSUE: Whitefish Lake is susceptible to pollution and sedimentation from a variety of sources.

While Whitefish Lake is a secondary source of potable water for the City of Whitefish, it is a direct source of drinking water for many residents around the lake. Whitefish Lake is facing water quality issues from aging septic systems, urban drainage, lakefront development, land clearing, golf courses, logging, and even two-stroke internal

combustion engines in water craft. Current lakeshore protection regulations do little to address water quality, and their application is limited to 20 feet landward of mean high water. While lakeshore regulations have generally done a good job of regulating the amount and type of development within the lakeshore protection zone, they may have reinforced the false impression that any development or land clearing above the protection zone is “O.K.” A recent zoning code amendment requires that most structures rising above grade (buildings, decks, retaining walls, etc.) be set back an additional ten (10) feet from the lakeshore protection zone boundary. Still, these issues should be addressed through a comprehensive critical areas ordinance.

The Whitefish Lake Institute is in the process of establishing baseline water quality data for the lake. Once baseline data is established, individual pollutants can be monitored over time so that regulatory, cleanup, and mitigation efforts can be better targeted to meet or exceed water quality standards set by TMDL.

ISSUE: Many rural residents within the Whitefish Planning Jurisdictional Area rely on wells for potable water.

This makes protecting the quality of the area’s groundwater every bit as important as protecting surface water quality. Development in areas of high ground water must be engineered very carefully to prevent stormwater from interacting with ground water. Drainage systems should be designed based upon thorough ground water studies, including wet season monitoring as set forth in the City’s proposed critical areas ordinance.

Test wells in the Whitefish area have indicated that some shallow aquifers interconnect with deeper aquifers. This causes a greater concern for the quality of deep aquifers as the shallow aquifers are more easily contaminated through chemical land treatments, improper drainage practices, excavations of any kind, seepage from surface water bodies, and activities such as gravel extraction.

Municipal Water Service Goals:

1. To provide a clean, safe, healthy, and sustainable water supply for all residents, free from the threat of degradation or depletion.

Municipal Water Service Policies:

1. Maintain adequate fire flows in all new developments, and require off-site improvements when necessary to achieve required fire flows.
2. Require that all new water main extensions be made in accordance with the City of Whitefish Water Utility Plan, including routing and sizing to serve future developments.
3. The City of Whitefish shall promote the maintenance and improvement of the area’s water supply in all programs and regulations.

Municipal Water Service Recommended Actions:

1. Continue communication and cooperation with the Whitefish Lake Institute, the Whitefish Water & Sewer District and other agencies to monitor and protect the quality of Whitefish Lake and Haskill Creek (as direct sources of drinking water), and all other local lakes and streams so that point and non-point source pollution can be effectively targeted in regulations and programs.
2. Continue to study and investigate pollution from septic systems and implement regulatory and/or programmatic measures to curtail eutrophication of Whitefish Lake.
3. The City of Whitefish shall institute a comprehensive water conservation program that includes public education/information and promotes the principals of sustainability and low impact development.
4. The City shall explore improving the efficiency of its irrigations systems for parklands and other irrigated open spaces.
5. The City of Whitefish shall institute a public education program on the use of lawn and garden fertilizers and pesticides, and how nutrients from lawn chemicals impact the area's lakes and streams.
6. For subdivisions and other developments within the Whitefish Planning Jurisdictional Area that propose individual and/or private water systems, require contingency plans to connect to the municipal system at some future time.
7. Formulate comprehensive hillside development and critical areas ordinances to directly address the causes and sources of water pollution and sedimentation, integrating and balancing economic, environmental, and social goals.
8. Developments in the 2nd Creek watershed shall be closely evaluated and conditioned to protect the City's domestic water supply source.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment

The collection, treatment, and disposal of municipal wastewater is one of the most important and complex services that any city can provide. Protecting public health is the primary goal. Failing septic systems, or placing septic systems in areas unsuitable for their proper operation, can result in a public health risk through contamination of surface and groundwater. The Flathead County Health Department is responsible for issuing permits for septic systems. Permits are issued based on tests to determine suitable soils, appropriate lot size, and development density. Generally, a minimum lot size of one acre is required for a septic system. Contamination of Whitefish Lake from numerous older septic systems is a concern to the City of Whitefish and many area residents. This risk of contamination will only grow as more long vacant lots around the lake are built upon.

On average, wastewater flows to the City of Whitefish system are .75 million gallons daily (mgd), with higher flow events in the spring due to infiltration of snowmelt into the system. The general trend since 1996 has been that wastewater flows are declining even as the population grows. This too is primarily due to better system maintenance and improvements that have reduced clear water flows to the system.

The Whitefish wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) uses three partially mixed aeration lagoons for biological treatment. Following aeration in each of the three lagoons successively, effluent is discharged to a flocculating clarifier where alum and polymers are added to precipitate phosphorus. The system discharges treated effluent to the Whitefish River under a permit from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and the system has consistently met the requirements of the permit.

When a proposed new development is reviewed, or when people think about the future of Whitefish, a question that often arises is, “What is the capacity of the sewer plant, and what happens if we exceed it?” The capacity of the existing plant is 1.25 mgd based on average daily flow. As pointed out above, current average daily flows are running .75 mgd, and the trend is declining due to better maintenance that is successfully reducing infiltration/inflow. Even if total maximum daily loading (TMDL) standards, once they are set for the Whitefish River, require the City to improve the quality of plant discharge, there is still significant treatment capacity for future growth.

Wastewater Utility Plan. While actual flows into the system may be on the decline, there are still multiple maintenance and improvement projects that are needed for the long range system viability and for the protection of the public’s already large investment.

Within the Whitefish Planning Jurisdiction is also the Big Mountain Sewer District (BMSD). The BMSD, under an agreement with the City of Whitefish, discharges its untreated effluent into the City’s system for eventual treatment at the WWTP.



Whitefish wastewater treatment plant located off Monegan Road. The Whitefish River is at left.

Image courtesy of Google Earth

ISSUE: The Whitefish WWTP will have to meet new TMDL standards within the next few years.

The Wastewater Utility Plan identifies a series of capital improvements to the wastewater infrastructure. These include improvements to the treatment plant, transmission lines, and lift stations. Another concern brought out in the plan that could effect the list of capital improvements is a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) being prepared for the Whitefish River with the intent of establishing pollutant load limits. The goal of the TMDL is restoring water quality to support “beneficial uses” such as swimming, salmonid fisheries, and water supply. It is anticipated that this will result in more stringent discharge standards for both ammonia and fecal coliforms, and if that is indeed the case, significant modifications to the WWTP may be needed to meet new ammonia standards.

ISSUE: The City maintains 20 raw wastewater lift stations which must constantly be monitored for accidental discharge and maintained as needed.

Since 1995, there have been nine documented incidents of unpermitted wastewater discharges to state waters, five of which have resulted from failures at key lift stations. None of these discharges occurred at the WWTP itself. The Wastewater Utility Plan recommends millions of dollars for system upgrades to the collection system as well as to the WWTP, and a multi-year financing plan is provided to ensure that all needed improvements can be adequately funded.

ISSUE: Existing lots around Whitefish Lake, some of which were platted decades ago, are now being built upon. Many of these lots must rely upon individual sewage disposal systems in close proximity to the lake.

There are many platted subdivisions surrounding Whitefish Lake. Some of these subdivisions were first platted in the early to mid 20th century when little attention was paid to proper wastewater treatment or the consequences of intense residential development in close proximity to the lake. Plats such as Whitefish Lake Summer Homes, Paullin, Britells Point of Pines, and others were laid out either with extremely small lots or very narrow lots so that each development produced more “lakefront lots”. Many of these lots do not conform to today’s zoning requirements for minimum lot size, minimum lot width, or both. However, once a legal lot of record is created, the owner or any subsequent purchaser has the right to expect a “reasonable use” of the property. At present, municipal sewer lines extend only as far as Rest Haven.

Compounding this problem are a great many older septic systems that are likely failing, or at best, employ obsolete technologies. The result can be nitrates, phosphorus, and other nutrients entering the lake system. However, the Wastewater Utility Plan does not address providing sanitary sewer beyond the Rest Haven neighborhood.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment Goals:

1. Continue to provide cost-effective and efficient wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal that protects the public health and does not compromise the environment.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment Policies:

1. Through the Land Use Element of this Growth Policy and land development regulations, direct growth to areas of the community already served by municipal sewers.
2. New sewer main extensions to serve new development shall be made in compliance with the City's Wastewater Utility Plan, including both location and routing of new mains and main line capacities to account for future development.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment Recommended Actions:

1. New developments within the Jurisdictional Area which propose on-site sewage disposal shall submit contingency plans for eventual connection to the municipal wastewater system.
2. Continue to work with the Whitefish County Water and Sewer District and the Big Mountain Sewer District to develop and implement long range wastewater management plans for the urbanizing areas of the Planning Jurisdictional Area, including those areas around Whitefish Lake where much of the new construction continues to rely on individual sewage disposal systems.
3. Work with the Flathead County Health Department to prepare a public education program on the proper operation, life expectancy, and potential pollution problems associated with individual on site disposal systems.
4. Work with the Flathead County Health Department and the Whitefish Lake Institute to monitor existing on-site sewage disposal systems around Whitefish Lake to detect failed systems, and devise a plan for corrective action.
5. Study the feasibility of extending sewer mains to serve lakefront properties.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater generated from impervious surfaces and other non-point sources in the city and surrounding area is handled either through the city stormwater system, state systems associated with state and federal highways, or privately maintained systems within developed subdivisions. Most stormwater is then discharged to Whitefish Lake, Whitefish River, or Cow Creek. Untreated stormwater can have serious impacts on the quality of receiving water bodies, including fertilizers, pesticides, sediment, and automotive fluids from parking areas and streets. Increased stormwater flows and

volumes can degrade natural streams by reducing riparian vegetation, eroding stream banks, and widening channels.

Generally, Montana law provides that natural stormwater flow (drainage) must be accepted by a downstream property. However, any flows over and above natural flow are the responsibility of the owner upon whose property the excess runoff occurs. In Whitefish, the accepted drainage criterion is that excessive runoff (or developed flow) for the 10-year storm event of 6-hour duration must be retained on site. This is usually accomplished through a system of conveyance pipes, gradients of paved areas, curbing, or conveyance swales, with storage in retention ponds and/or dry wells.

In 2005, certain Drainage Study Areas were identified by the City as areas where due to special soil and/or subsurface conditions, subdivision drainage plans would have to be studied in greater detail. Within these special areas, wet season ground water monitoring and detailed ground water studies form the basis for stormwater management plans. As indicated on the accompanying map, the Drainage Study Areas are State Park Road, Monegan-Voerman, Karrow Avenue, the Armory area, and Northeast Whitefish, which includes most of the Northwoods area. (See Drainage Study Areas Map.)

Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP): Much like the other master facility plans, the WSSUP contains evaluations of the current system and practices, and makes recommendations for improvements. The WSSUP recommends the formation of a drainage utility (upon which the City has already acted) to help fund millions in capital improvements. In addition, the WSSUP recognizes that contemporary drainage plans are more about the quality and sustainability of receiving water bodies than before. Untreated urban drainage has the potential to do significant damage to an aquatic system, as discussed above. In response to this issue, the WSSUP recommends setbacks from the Whitefish River, local creeks, and wetlands, and further recommends that development be restricted on slopes in excess of 30%.

ISSUE: Much of the land that surrounds the presently developed areas of Whitefish, those areas that have been proposed by property owners and developers for further urbanization, are characterized by high ground water and/or hydric soils.

Stormwater management systems must be designed in such a way that interaction between surface and groundwater is avoided, otherwise, groundwater would become contaminated with the constituents of urban runoff. When groundwater is very close to the surface, designing effective stormwater systems can be very difficult and complex. Engineering solutions exist, but they are sometimes prone to failure or at best, may fail over time.

Filling a development site may be a partial solution, but that can have its own set of impacts by affecting drainage on neighboring properties. Filling for individual building sites and roadbeds can exacerbate surface drainage problems, and make a development look like it is disconnected from the land.

ISSUE: Stormwater facility plans cannot be solely concerned with managing quantities of water. They must also address the quality of urban runoff and how receiving water bodies may be impacted.

While the WSSUP does not study receiving water body quality in great detail (nor necessarily should it), it does make the critical connection between urban drainage and the water quality of the Whitefish River and local streams. The WSSUP recommends that setbacks be established from the river and local streams, and that development be restricted on slopes greater than 30%.

The relationship between slope and water quality is quite clear and has been thoroughly documented. When rain falls (or snow melts) on flat ground, it tends to stay there. It either sinks into the ground, or it ponds until it finally does sink in and/or evaporate. When rain falls or snow melts on slopes, the water might percolate into the ground under dry conditions, but it will tend to run downhill. Naturally, when water runs down a steep slope, its velocity increases and it can pick up loose soil particles eventually causing erosion, and sedimentation of whatever body of water this runoff finds its way into. When natural terrain is disturbed, for development or other reasons, erosion and sedimentation can be accelerated dramatically.

Through this same process, nutrients and other pollutants can find their way into an aquatic system. When rain or irrigation water falls on a flat lawn, it percolates into the soil, or ponds until it percolates eventually. When a lawn is maintained on a steep slope, a certain amount of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals are carried down slope with the runoff. Fertilizers add “nutrients” to the receiving water body and its aquatic system, causing algae and other vegetation to grow at accelerated rates. In a lake, this accelerates the natural process of “eutrophication”, causing algae blooms and the buildup of detritus on the lake bottom. Whitefish Lake is approximately 11,000 years old, and through natural eutrophication, could be around for another 11,000 years or more. But when nutrients are artificially introduced through fertilizers, effluent from septic systems, and other sources, the “death” of the lake will arrive much sooner.

Any terrain disturbance, even on level ground, has the potential to increase runoff, sedimentation, and therefore, stream or lake turbidity. Therefore, since 1997, the City of Whitefish has required drainage and erosion control plans for all developments which create over 5,000 square feet of impervious surfaces. Since 2005, the City has imposed construction mitigation plans as a condition of record for all new developments. These plans must address drainage during construction, erosion control, dust, and the tracking of material onto public streets, which can be a source of both air and water pollution. At the building permit stage, the City requires tracking pads in order to minimize the deposition of mud and dirt onto public streets.

Stormwater Management Goals:

1. To develop and manage an urban drainage system that is effective, cost-efficient, and that preserves the quality of local lakes and streams.

Stormwater Management Policies:

2. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to ensure that the highest standards of environmental protection are met in public construction projects such as streets, utilities, structures, parks, and trails.
3. Stormwater management systems to accommodate new development shall be constructed and maintained in accordance with the Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP) and the City of Whitefish Standards for Design and Construction.

Stormwater Management Recommended Actions:

1. Formulate and adopt comprehensive hillside development and critical area regulations aimed at eliminating sedimentation and nutrient loading to receiving water bodies from urban runoff and site drainage in order to achieve established water quality standards for receiving water bodies.
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce water quality impacts associated with the City's urban drainage system to achieve established water quality standards for receiving water bodies over the long term, and to establish Whitefish as a regional leader in environmentally responsible stormwater management.
3. The City shall explore an incentive-based program that provides for "green roofs" and the reuse of stormwater for irrigation.

Financing and Improvement Mechanisms

At present, most extensions of water and sewer mains and public streets are made by developers. When a land development is proposed, the developer is required to extend main lines to serve the development, or in some cases, upgrade an existing line (and/or street) to meet City standards. Engineering design is also paid for by the developer and is subject to review and approval by the City. Construction is at the developer's expense, and is conducted with City oversight to ensure that all design standards and practices are followed.

Plant Investment Fees (PIFs): PIFs are charged for water and sewer hookups at the time a building permit is drawn. The City's current PIFs are based on capital investments after the facilities have been built. By paying the PIFs, new development essentially "buys into" that investment by paying a proportionate share of the infrastructure. The PIF **does not include** planned investments listed in each utility's capital improvement program. Those are added to the PIF (again on a proportionate basis) only after the improvement is completed. Presently, total PIFs for water and sewer are approximately \$3,800 for a 3-br 2-bath home. Fees can and do go much higher for larger homes with multiple plumbing fixtures.

Latecomers agreements: Any developer that extends infrastructure to serve a proposed development has the ability to enter into a “latecomer’s agreement” with the City. This is a mechanism through which the City can collect fees from subsequent developers who make use of the new infrastructure, and reimburse the developer who installed it. This ensures that the costs of providing infrastructure are distributed equitably among all developers who benefit from it.

Over-sizing: When infrastructure is extended into a new area (whether or not a latecomers agreement is entered into), the City may opt to pay for “over-sizing” of water and/or sewer lines. This is a common practice when lines extended by a developer will eventually serve a much larger area than the developer’s specific project. For example, a developer may need to extend an 8” sewer main to serve a proposed subdivision. However, if that main will subsequently be extended to serve an even larger area in the future (and is projected as such in the Wastewater Utility Plan), the City may pay the cost difference between engineering and installing 12” pipe over the 8” pipe necessitated by the development. This too is common practice for most cities and utility districts.

Capital improvements: Capital improvements are made to the City’s utility and street system most every fiscal year. Capital dollars are budgeted from each utility fund for priority projects. Most capital improvements are for system maintenance or an over-all system improvement. Main extensions are seldom financed by the utility as these are normally paid for by developers. An example of a system improvement financed by the water utility is the new 18” water main to be installed during the summer of 2007. It will run from the reservoir, along Texas Ave., and under the railroad tracks to Columbia Ave. It will provide an additional main between the reservoir and the south side of the city. This is a system-wide need that is being financed by revenues from the water utility, and budgeted as a capital expenditure.

Impact Fees: This is a mechanism that allows communities to capture the incremental system costs that are solely attributable to new growth. In 2005, the Montana legislature passed an impact fee statute (Sec. 7-6-1601 through 1604, MCA) that provides requirements, standards, and a general framework for establishing local impact fee programs. Impact fees may be established for water, wastewater, stormwater, streets and transportation in general, emergency services, and just about any other public facility or service. The City of Whitefish recently adopted impact fees for trails, the park maintenance facility, the emergency services building, city hall, water and sewer facilities, and stormwater.

It is important to remember that impact fees can only be used to build facilities to serve new growth. Existing deficiencies to a street or utility system cannot be financed with impact fee revenues. Also, capital improvement programs must be in place, and levels of service must be established to ensure that impact fees are used to maintain those levels of service in the face of growth, and not to improve existing service levels. This means that when impact fees are initiated, local governments often have to raise additional funds to build facilities that were needed anyway. Also, impact fees are not a “growth management tool” as such. In other words, impact fees will not stop or even slow

development. Impact fees may, however, tend to push development out of a jurisdiction that has impact fees into adjacent and nearby areas that do not.

Concurrency: Concurrency is not technically a funding mechanism, but a policy through which facilities and services are required to be in place at the time the actual impacts of development occur. Under a concurrency policy, a developer has the option of delaying a proposed development until all applicable facilities are in place, or providing for those facilities (often with reimbursement from future developers and/or the City). Concurrency can also work hand in hand with impact fees in that a developer can install a needed improvement instead of paying the fees up front.

Obviously, concurrency is already a requirement for water, wastewater, and drainage. Subdivisions are not approved unless those essential facilities are extended to the subject property. By the same token, developments are not approved without adequate access. But when it comes to facilities such as parks, schools, sidewalks, and bike/ped trails, the issues are not quite so clear. At the visioning sessions held during the summer and early fall of 2006, many of those in attendance expressed a strong desire to have all facilities in place as the impacts arrive.

Tax Increment Financing: TIF is an important community and economic development tool that has been available to Montana cities and towns for 30 years. In Whitefish, an urban renewal plan and tax increment district was first established in 1987. Since that time, the TIF district has raised over \$12 million, and another \$9.9 million has been raised through urban renewal bonds in 2000, 2001, and 2004.

Projects financed by the increment directly and through urban renewal bonds have included:

- ❖ Reconstruction of City Beach
- ❖ Purchase/remodel of City Hall
- ❖ Downtown parking lots
- ❖ The resurfacing of 14 street sections
- ❖ Construction of Riverside footbridge
- ❖ Reconstruction of Baker Ave., First Street, Second Street, Fourth Street, Dakota Ave., Edgewood Pl. Greenwood Dr., and a portion of Columbia Ave.

TIF has also partially funded:

- ❖ Kay Beller Park
- ❖ The indoor ice pavilion
- ❖ The Wave
- ❖ Reconstructed boat ramp at City Beach
- ❖ Dave Olseth Memorial Skate Park.

Once all bond obligations are paid, the tax increment district is expected to sunset in 2020.

Resort Tax: Montana law provided that communities that substantially depend on visitation for their economic base may enact local option sales taxes on certain goods and services. Whitefish voters first approved the resort tax in 1995, and then in 2004, they extended the tax through 2025 by an overwhelming margin. The city’s Resort Tax Ordinance (Ord. 95-15) sets the tax rate at 2%. It also provides that 25% of the revenues derived from the previous year go for property tax relief for Whitefish taxpayers. In fiscal year 2006-07, this amounts to over \$390,000. The ordinance also provides that 65% of revenues be used for repair and improvement of existing streets and infrastructure, 5% for bike paths and park improvements, and 5% is withheld by local merchants to defray the cost of collection. Collections come from retail (48%), lodging (18%), and restaurants and bars (34%). Total collections in FY2004-05 were almost \$1.5 million, and collections have seen 6.9% average annual growth since their inception.

Actual facilities constructed are similar to those improvements made with tax increment funds. In fact, on many projects, both TIF and resort tax funds are used. Projects include street resurfacing and reconstruction, bike and pedestrian paths, and park and recreation improvements.

Financing and Improvement Mechanisms Goals:

1. Ensure that community services and facilities keep pace with growth so that desired levels of service are maintained, and in a way that sustains the community and environment over the long term, integrating and balancing economic, environmental, and social goals.

Financing and Improvement Mechanisms Policies:

2. It is the policy of the City of Whitefish to work with prospective developers to provide high quality, efficient, and sustainable infrastructure for existing and future residents alike.
3. New development shall „pay its way’, and will not be subsidized by existing ratepayers.

Financing and Improvement Mechanisms Recommended Actions:

1. Continue to explore impact fees as a mechanism for funding future public facility needs resulting from new development.
2. Formulate and adopt a concurrency policy for sidewalks, parks, bike and pedestrian ways, and other related facilities that integrates with an overall master plan for such facilities.

Solid Waste

The City of Whitefish no longer operates a solid waste collection and disposal system. However, garbage pick up is conducted by Waste Management, Inc. under a franchise agreement with the City. Garbage pick up in the unincorporated areas is handled by

Waste Management under individual subscriber service. All garbage and refuse is disposed of at the Flathead County Landfill located just west off of Hwy 93 between Whitefish and Kalispell.

ISSUE: Source reduction would help extend the life of the County’s land fill, but there is no organized public program to encourage reuse, recycling, and composting.

While there is one private curb side recycling service and a few recycling convenience bins are located around the city, there is no area-wide program nor is there a central recycling center. Other western communities of comparable size to Whitefish have public supported recycling centers that crush cans, collect and sort bottles, and bale paper and magazines for efficient transport to markets.

ISSUE: There are no regulations that require residents of unincorporated areas of Flathead County to collect and dispose of household garbage properly.

While there are regulations in the Cities of Kalispell, Whitefish, and Columbia Falls that prohibit the accumulation of garbage and trash, there are no such regulations in the unincorporated areas. This can lead to locally unsightly and unhealthy conditions, and could be an attractive nuisance to wildlife.

ISSUE: There is no organized hazardous waste or household chemical education or collection program in Whitefish.

As part of an overall waste reduction program, many communities have hazardous waste education and collection programs that provide consumer information and opportunities to recycle or properly dispose of potentially hazardous materials. While Flathead County provides a collection site at the landfill for disposal of household chemicals, there is no such facility in Whitefish. There have been one-time computer recycling collections in Whitefish, and most computer suppliers accept old computers free or for a very nominal charge. However, there is no consistently available way to properly dispose of or recycle a used computer and monitor, or other consumer electronics such as TVs and stereos, in the Whitefish area. Household batteries contain hazardous metals such as cadmium, mercury, copper, zinc, lead, and manganese, as well as corrosive acids, that can leach into water supplies when deposited uncontained in land fills. Paint and regular household chemicals can be hazardous when deposited in the wastewater treatment or the stormwater collection system. There are no special events or public campaigns to make citizens aware of the potential for environmental degradation that could result from the improper disposal of these substances.

Solid Waste Goals:

1. Conduct source reduction and solid waste collection and disposal in an efficient, environmentally responsible, and sustainable manner with the objective of achieving 25% waste reduction throughout the Whitefish planning jurisdictional area over the next five years.

Solid Waste Policy:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to practice and promote reuse and recycling in all of its programs and activities.

Solid Waste Recommended Actions:

1. The City of Whitefish shall explore options for a community-wide recycling program, including public education a community recycling center.
2. Develop construction management guidelines and incentives for reduction of construction waste through reuse, recycling, and composting.
3. The City of Whitefish shall support and promote recycling through the placement of recycling containers in all city facilities.
4. The City shall formulate and adopt regulations that require refuse disposal for the unincorporated portions of the Whitefish Planning Jurisdictional Area.
5. Institute a public education program for the proper use and disposal of household chemicals.
6. Coordinate community recycling for used electronics.
7. Promote special events and promotions to emphasize the importance of recycling and sustainability to the community.

Emergency Services

Emergency services provided by the City of Whitefish include police, fire, ambulance and emergency medical service, hazardous material response, and rescue operations on Whitefish Lake. The City also provides associated services such as fire prevention and a school resource officer program.

ISSUE: The Whitefish Police Department needs to maintain acceptable levels of service and good response times as the community grows.

In order to adequately plan for future emergency service needs, the City of Whitefish formulated and adopted the Emergency Services Plan; FY2006/2007 – FY2010/2011 in April of 2006. According to the Plan, requests for services (police calls) increased from 7,941 in 2003 to 11,793 in 2005. This represents an increase in service requests of over 48% in only two years. During those same two years, the number of sworn officers increased from 13 to 15.

Staffing standards established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation advise that the officer-to-population ratio of any jurisdiction should be 1.7 to 2.5 officers per 1,000 population. Urban communities with high volumes of visitors tend to try and maintain

ratios near the middle and upper end of this range. Since FY2001/02, Whitefish has kept its officer to population ratio at 1.98 to 2.24 per 1,000, and the Emergency Services Plan recommends that a ratio of 2.1 to 2.3 be adopted as a level of service standard. Given the population projections provided in the Plan, the City would have to add one officer per year through 2009, then add two officers in 2010.

ISSUE: The resources of the Whitefish Fire Department are also strained by growth, including the challenge of transitioning to a 24/7 operation.

Over the 5-year period from 2001 through 2005, service calls for fire and ambulance increased from 1,291 to 1,911, or 48%. Over the same period of time the number of professional firefighters/paramedics (professional firefighters are also certified Emergency Medical Technicians) increased from 6 to 10. Full staffing is provided only between the hours of 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM daily. The remaining hours are covered by volunteers and regular full-time personnel dispatched from non-department locations on an emergency basis.

Once the city's population reaches 10,000, Montana law will require full-time professional 24-hour service. However, comments received through the annual "Quality of Service" survey indicate that the public would prefer 24/7 coverage now. Therefore, the Emergency Services Plan recommends 24/7 service as soon as practicable, and full-time service is projected to begin in the FY2007-08 fiscal year. The Personnel Phasing Plan calls for one additional firefighter/EMT per year through FY2010-11.



The Police Dept., Fire Dept., City Court, and City Council Chambers are all located in this portion of the Whitefish City Hall. Administrative offices are located in the building to the right. A new Emergency Response/Justice Center and new City Hall are now being planned.

ISSUE: The community has limited access across the BNSF rail facilities.

The urbanized area of Whitefish is bisected by the BNSF railroad tracks that run east-west. The only grade-separated crossing is over the Wisconsin Ave. viaduct, with an at-grade crossing that connects E. 2nd St. to Edgewood Ave. There are also at-grade crossings at Birch Point and on State Park Road. At the Birch Point crossing, trains are frequently backed up from the BNSF rail yard, and sometimes sit idle for long periods.

This access constraint has always been a challenge for emergency services (as well as utilities) in Whitefish, but the issue is being made more critical with increased growth along the north and east sides of Whitefish Lake, multi-family growth in the Colorado-Texas corridor, continuing buildout of Ironhorse, and additional development at Big Mountain Village and along the Big Mountain Road. One possible solution that should be explored is an emergency only at-grade crossing.

ISSUE: Flathead County is in the process of transitioning to Enhanced 911 (E-911) to provide improved dispatching of emergency services, and better information about the emergency destination.

E-911 has already begun to revolutionize emergency service delivery in some Montana counties. E-911 is a completely coordinated system that features consistent and systematic addressing, up to date mapping, and “on the ground” information about emergency destinations. This type of information can save valuable time, and therefore, lives, in an emergency. Information may include driveway locations, exact locations of all structures on the property, fuel storage tanks, ditches or ponds, and other similar information that can improve the efficiency and safety of an emergency call. E-911 increases in its importance as a community grows, and as emergency dispatchers and responders have more developed properties on which to collect and maintain data.

ISSUE: Rural fire suppression services and site planning standards.

In addition to the city limits of Whitefish, the WFD provides services to a Rural Whitefish Service Area under contract. However, the City of Whitefish does not, and cannot under Montana state law, administer a building code beyond the corporate limits. This means that there is currently no permit mechanism to check zoning and fire code compliance. Often, the city is unaware of structures being built within the unincorporated jurisdictional planning area until the structure is completed and occupied.

Emergency Services Goals:

1. Continue to provide the most modern and efficient emergency services to the visitors and citizens of the Whitefish area.

Emergency Services Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to maintain excellent levels of emergency services through the implementation of the 2006 *Emergency Services Plan*.
2. The City of Whitefish shall manage the cost of emergency services through prudent land use practices that encourage infill development and limit sprawl.

Emergency Services Recommended Actions:

1. The City of Whitefish shall explore community policing, community resource officers, and other means to provide efficient and localized police services as the community grows.
2. The City's fire prevention program should be expanded to the unincorporated portions of the planning jurisdictional area. It should be integrated with the City's new Zoning Compliance Permit for the unincorporated areas.
3. The City must continue to work with Flathead County and the cities of Kalispell and Columbia Falls, and continue to be a leader in the implementation of E-911.
4. The City shall explore one or more emergency at-grade crossings of the BNSF rail lines in order to enhance emergency access.

Major Municipal Facilities

The City of Whitefish currently has plans for three major new municipal facilities:

- ❖ A new Park and Recreation maintenance facility to be located west off of Monegan Road immediately north of the WWTP.
- ❖ A new Emergency Response/Justice Center to be located west of Baker Ave. south of The Wave fitness facility.
- ❖ A new City Hall to be located immediately north of the public library.

Two of these projects, the emergency response center and the new City Hall, are actually identified in the Downtown Master Plan catalyst projects for downtown development. Once existing city administration functions, emergency services, and the city court are relocated, the prime NE corner of 2nd Street and Baker Ave. can be redeveloped. Planning for all three of these projects is well underway, and therefore, no major issues are identified in this Growth Policy.

The Pennington Public Library was built in 1997-98. It contains 9,677 square feet of floor space, and has a meeting room capacity of 46 persons. The library is an important downtown destination, and its strategic location next to Central School make it easily accessible to school children and adults alike. There are no plans to expand or upgrade the library at this time.



The Whitefish Public Library is located in the northeast corner of the Downtown area across from Great Northern Square. The proposed new City Hall will be located immediately to the north of the library.

Human Infrastructure

Social Services: Communities do not consist solely of streets, buildings, sidewalks, and water and sewer lines. Any community's most important resource is its people---and people have basic needs. The vast majority of social programs and resources that support the Whitefish community are physically located in Kalispell. Services that are located in Whitefish include:

- ❖ Pregnancy counseling
- ❖ A free medical clinic
- ❖ AARP Driver Safety Program
- ❖ School-to-Work Program
- ❖ Various mental health counseling
- ❖ Head Start
- ❖ Senior Citizens Center
- ❖ Big Brothers/ Big Sisters (Lunch Pail Pals in-school mentoring)
- ❖ CARE Programs (drug/alcohol prevention and awareness)
- ❖ Housing assistance/Home ownership (See Housing Element)

Day Care/Child Care: The general perception is that child care and day care services in the Whitefish area are lacking. It is not unusual for resort communities to lack sufficient day care for working and active young families. The telephone directory lists six day care providers in Whitefish. National standards (day care capacity per 1,000 population) could not be readily found, but in a community of approximately 11,500 people, the presence of only six providers could be considered problematic. (Note: The Nurturing Center is supposed to be providing us with an inventory of day care providers and slots in WF.)

In many communities, day care needs are met by in-home providers, and in the Flathead Valley there is a marked preference for home-based day care as opposed to larger commercial day care centers. Home-based day care operators modify their homes according to standards promulgated by the state, then are licensed by the state usually in one of two categories: (1) up to six children, and (2) six to twelve children. Many

communities require that day care facilities obtain conditional use permits in residential zones, and in some cases, this can be a deterrent to opening new home-based day care operations. In Whitefish, however, day care facilities serving up to 12 children are permitted uses in all residential zones.

Human Infrastructure Goals:

1. Support and maintain a comprehensive and viable system of social services to meet the needs of a growing Whitefish community.

Human Infrastructure Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to promote and welcome needed social and community services, and to safeguard against unnecessary regulatory and/or administrative barriers to their operation.

Human Infrastructure Recommended Actions:

1. The City should form an ad hoc committee to review existing community services, determine any additional community service needs, and report its findings and recommendations to the City Council.

Parks and Recreation

ISSUE: Whitefish has no park and recreation master plan with which to evaluate the existing system and to project future needs.

At present, the City of Whitefish has no park and recreation master plan to set standards for open space and recreational facilities, set forth a strategic plan to get those facilities built, and to set priorities for implementation. Parks and recreation facilities and open space are vital components of the community's attractive environment and the quality of life of its residents. Such facilities are an important public investment that provides recreation and leisure opportunities for both residents and visitors. They can also protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas and important fish and wildlife habitat, as well as views and community aesthetics. While all levels of government meet some portion of recreational demands, local government is recognized as having the responsibility to provide nearby and accessible neighborhood and community-type open space and park facilities. The purpose of a Park and Recreation Master Plan is to provide the city with a comprehensive guide that will direct the acquisition and development of park and recreation facilities and open space to satisfy the demands of both residents and visitors. It will also enable the city to compete for matching grant funds under federal and state recreation financial assistance programs. Parks and Recreation planning should focus on expanding the quality and diversity of available facilities.

One of the objectives of this Community Facilities Element is to, at the very least, produce enough guidance for parkland acquisition and improvements that the Parks Board and City Council can respond effectively to development proposals and make good, informed decisions about taking land or fees for park dedications.

Montana law prescribes the amount of parkland dedication required when subdivisions are developed. Requirements range from 11% of the land area for lots of one-half acre or smaller, to 2.5% for lots of 3 to 5 acres in size. Previously, no dedication was required for minor subdivisions, but amendments to the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act enacted in 2005 now allow for parkland exactions from subdivisions with five lots or fewer. Still, for subdivisions into lots greater than 5 acres, no parkland dedication requirement may be imposed. However, state law does allow local governing bodies to establish their own requirements based upon a growth policy or park plan, provided those requirements do not exceed .03 acres per unit. At 2.3 persons per household, this equates to a parkland standard of 13 acres per 1,000 population.

Current Montana law is problematic for two reasons. First, the selection of parkland within a development is heavily weighted to the subdivider. This can and has resulted in the City of Whitefish and other Montana cities and counties taking parkland which is unsuitable for development, and therefore, equally unsuitable for improved parks. Second, fees (or what the MCA refers to as “cash donations”) are based upon “the fair market value of unsubdivided, unimproved land”. What is often accepted as a “fair market value” is a land value that does not exist in the community. When cities go into the market place for parkland, they normally face per acre land prices far in excess of what they collect in fees.

Most communities have adopted standards of 7 to 10 acres per 1,000 population. Whitefish does not have an adopted standard at this time. According to the Whitefish Parks & Recreation CIP inventory, the City has 122.83 acres of parklands of all types; from the 51-acre Smith Sports Complex to a river access of less than half an acre. Using a city-wide population of 7,000 results in 17.5 acres per 1,000 population---a very high standard indeed. Even using the area-wide population estimate of 11,500 results in almost 10.7 acres per 1,000 population, and that is still on the high end for a community surrounded by so much public land. In addition, it should be noted that the citizens of Whitefish enjoy a modern, state-of-the-art aquatic and fitness facility that is open to the general public, and even offers membership assistance for low-income families and individuals. Despite a seeming abundance of park lands and recreation opportunities in the Whitefish area compared to national standards, there are still some neighborhoods without sufficient public parks and tot lots. Several existing facilities such as City Beach experience seasonal overcrowding and parking issues.

Recent trends in park and recreation land and facility planning have moved away from national and regional standards toward a *systems approach*. This planning approach is detailed in *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines* published in 1995 by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). The resulting guidelines themselves are not intended to be rigid regulations, but they should provide a framework in which the community can assess what recreation areas and facilities exist, what the current level of service is, and what areas and facilities will be needed as the community grows.

As stated above, the quantity of parkland available to the community is only part of the picture. Another part is the locations of parkland relative to established and planned residential areas. Park plans usually set standards for spacing and park service areas. For example, a park master plan may establish a standard of neighborhood parks within ½ mile of all residential areas to promote walking and cycling as opposed to auto trips to visit neighborhood parks. As the Whitefish City Parkland Map shows, very few areas that are developed to urban densities are more than ½ mile from a park of some kind. Ideally, parks are linked with bicycle and pedestrian routes.

Recreational facilities and programs round out the park and recreation picture. Here too, the practice is move away from national standards and toward a customized, community specific systems approach. A park and recreation master plan, with a public involvement process and user surveys, will target recreational programs and the proper facilities with which to conduct them.

Parks and Recreation Goals:

1. Expand the diversity of parks, open spaces, and high-quality recreational opportunities for the growing Whitefish area.

Parks and Recreation Policies:

1. The City of Whitefish shall only accept viable park land as dedications in subdivisions when said land will be further developed for active or passive recreation.
2. The City will continue to encourage private open spaces in order to broaden the range of open spaces available to the Whitefish community.
3. The City will continue to coordinate park planning and development with the ad hoc Open Space Committee in order to address a wider range of park and open space needs and priorities.

Parks and Recreation Recommended Actions:

1. The City of Whitefish shall formulate and adopt a comprehensive park and recreation master plan to assess current parkland and recreational programs and facilities, and to identify and anticipate future needs, and explore funding options for new and/or upgraded facilities.

Open Spaces

At visioning sessions conducted through the summer and early fall of 2006 for this Growth Policy, preservation of Whitefish's opens spaces was the topic that generated the most discussion. As a planning concept, open space includes many different types of spaces for many different functions. A wilderness area is open space, but so is a vest pocket park downtown. City parks and trails are open space, as is the Whitefish Mountain ski area. Rural lands on the edge of the city are privately owned, but are open space from a visual and community character standpoint. Also, much of the open space for active

recreation such as hiking, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing takes place on private land owned by the F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company. The company manages the land for timber production, but has historically allowed access and recreational use.

In 2005, the Whitefish City Council established an ad hoc Open Space Committee to study the entire range of open space needs, explore funding options, and to make recommendations back to the Council. The Committee identified a number of different types of open spaces that are important to the community, including:

- ❖ Additional park lands
- ❖ Additional access to Whitefish Lake
- ❖ Community entryways
- ❖ Portals to public open spaces and to private spaces with a history of public use such as the Stoltze lands
- ❖ Environmentally sensitive areas
- ❖ Scenic areas

In 2004, the City and County adopted the *Whitefish Area Schools Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan*. This is essentially a land use plan for over 13,000 acres of State School Trust Lands surrounding Whitefish. The objective was to identify uses of those lands that would fulfill the statutory mandate of generating funds for the state school system while still preserving the historic public recreational uses. Implementation of this plan is proceeding with the City and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) negotiating a license for maintaining improved recreational use trails in the Beaver Lake and Spencer Mountain areas. This Land Use License (LUL) actually implements the *Trail Runs Through It* master plan as well. That plan was prepared and adopted in 2006, and would establish a recreational trail system that links all of the State Trust lands identified in the neighborhood plan. Implementation of these two master plans in cooperation with the State of Montana would result in an extraordinary recreational opportunity for the Whitefish area.

Open Spaces Goals:

1. Expand the range and quality of open spaces available to Whitefish citizens and visitors.

Open Spaces Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support the designation of public and private open spaces through a variety of means, including partnering, dedications, donations, easements, and purchase.
2. The City of Whitefish shall recognize the wide range, variety, and functions of critical open spaces and shall continue to include all types of open spaces in its designation and acquisition efforts.

3. It is the policy of the City of Whitefish to be proactive in working with land owners and citizens to retain historic trail access and access to public lands across private property.

Open Spaces Recommended Actions:

1. In addition to a Park and Recreation Master Plan, the City should consider an Open Space Designation and Acquisition Strategic Plan that would identify, prioritize, and set forth realistic recommendations for open spaces of all types.
2. The City should be proactive in determining new urban forms and neighborhood types as the urbanized area grows so that important open spaces can be retained.
3. The City shall investigate mechanism to designate open spaces including transfer of development rights, purchase of development rights, scenic easements, conservation easements, and life estates.
4. The City shall investigate the formation of an Open Space Board to coordinate and investigate all aspects of open space designation, priorities, and funding.
5. The City shall seek ways to increase public access to Whitefish Lake, as well as to the Whitefish River and local streams and creeks.
6. As new development occurs, the City shall work cooperatively with land owners and developers to identify and maintain access to publicly and privately owned roads, trails, and lands.

Public Schools

The Whitefish Public School District operates four educational facilities in the Whitefish area:

- ❖ Whitefish High School
- ❖ Whitefish Independent School
- ❖ Central Middle School
- ❖ Muldown Elementary
- ❖ Whitefish Alternative High School

A major renovation project at Central School is nearing completion, and in 2008, the District intends to turn its sights on Whitefish High. While total enrollment has actually decreased over the past ten years, Whitefish High is still operating well above capacity. Upgrades are needed to replace obsolete facilities and to account for changing trends and demands in public education. Addition and remodel plans for Whitefish High include:

- ❖ Cafeteria (WFHS does not have a cafeteria at present)
- ❖ New classrooms for science, physics, and chemistry
- ❖ New performance laboratory space
- ❖ Expanded hallways

Also, new sports facilities may be built on campus.

The cafeteria is an important improvement not only for the school, but for surrounding neighborhoods as well. The WFHS/Muldown complex is located within the eastside residential neighborhood. Traffic to and from both schools flows through these neighborhoods, and has been a source of complaints from local residents. With no cafeteria on campus, many WFHS students and faculty make four trips per day to and from school. This issue is discussed more thoroughly in the Transportation Element of this Growth Policy. While no specific goals, policies, or recommendations relative to public schools are set forth in this document, the Growth Policy generally recommends support and cooperation with the Whitefish School District in its capital programs.

Declining school enrollment, even the slight declines that are being experienced in Whitefish, are a clear indication that the demographics of the community are changing. New people moving to Whitefish tend to be older, and many are retirees. Yet, social and economic diversity is one of the characteristics of the community most valued by its residents. When school enrollment declines and the number of families involved in school activities decreases, many communities find it difficult to raise funds for needed improvements. Therefore, it is incumbent on the members of the Whitefish community to continue to support the public schools system so that it maintains its high standards of educational performance, and so that Whitefish remains an attractive place to live and raise families. County wide, enrollment numbers are actually increasing. Therefore, it may not be long before enrollment in Whitefish reflects this trend and begins climbing once again.

Sustainability

As explained in the Introduction to this Growth Policy, this entire community planning effort revolves around the concept of sustainability. There are many and varied descriptions for sustainability and sustainable communities, but generally sustainability is all about meeting current needs without precluding options for the next generation; to leave the world and the community in as good or better shape than it is now. It can also be defined as meeting the needs of today while still leaving natural resources available for tomorrow and in hundreds of other ways.

Sustainability is a huge and vastly complex concept; so broad that it has geo-political implications in terms of energy use, finite resources, and global climate change. Fortunately, a sustainable community is a much narrower subset of the sustainability concept. Any definition of a sustainable community would contain many of the ideas and indicators that for decades have been used to describe “livable communities”. These include factors like a variety of affordable housing, living wage jobs, quality public education, open spaces, a healthy urban environment, abundant recreational opportunities, low crime rates, transportation alternatives, high level of participation in civic affairs, etc. These and other factors can be measured, and are used as sustainability indicators by state and local sustainability programs and organizations throughout the nation and the world.

For purposes of this Growth Policy, the following definition of a sustainable community is offered: Sustainable communities are places where people **want** to be; to live, work, recreate, raise families, and pursue careers now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents. They are interesting and fulfilling places to visit as well as to live. They are sensitive to their environment, and they protect and enhance those natural and man-made resources that contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive. They are nurturing. They are well planned, well constructed, and well managed. They offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

So, what does all this mean for the Whitefish City-County Growth Policy, and for the Community Facilities Element in particular? This element already recommends a community-based program to promote reuse and recycling, and a community recycling center where recyclables can be centrally collected, processed, and stored to await shipping to a large-scale processor. Also recommended is an efficient, compact growth area that will promote efficiencies in utility services and transportation. But those are common themes in any long range plan. Here are some others:

- ❖ Sustainable urban infrastructure- This is infrastructure that facilitates progress toward sustainable living; wise infrastructure planning and implementation that does not promote non-sustainable development (like sprawl and strip commercial) and the depletion of natural resources (clean air and water).
- ❖ Sustainable transportation system- One that offers transportation choices and does not rely solely on the private auto for daily trips.
- ❖ Sustainable urban environment- Incorporates urban green spaces to mitigate heat islands, store, cleanse, and soak up stormwater, and provides plants that take in CO2 and release O2. It (may) use natural streams as fingers of open space instead of running them into a pipe. A sustainable urban environment is also just a fun place to be; to walk, to work, to gather, to dine, and to shop.

Seattle was one of the first cities in the nation to use the concepts of sustainability in a long range community planning process. The program sponsor, Sustainable Seattle, has developed a series of sustainability indicators, many of which relate directly to community planning:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| ❖ Solid waste generated and recycled | ❖ Library and Community Center use |
| ❖ Local farm production | ❖ Open space |
| ❖ Vehicle miles traveled/Fuel consumed | ❖ Air quality |
| ❖ Renewable v. Non-renewable energy use | ❖ Water consumption |
| ❖ Wildlife impacts (wild salmon in their case) | ❖ Pollution |
| ❖ Housing affordability | ❖ Energy use per dollar of income |
| ❖ Soil erosion (closely related to salmon recovery) | ❖ Public participation in the arts/cultural events |
| | ❖ Gardening |
| | ❖ Impervious surfaces |
| | ❖ Ecological health |
| | ❖ Bike/Pedestrian friendly streets |

- ❖ Community reinvestment
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Employment opportunities

- ❖ Neighborliness
- ❖ Perception on quality of life

Any community can develop its own list of indicators; things that are important to them and their city or town. Neighborhood indicators can also be developed, the there are handbooks available to provide start-up and project guidance. These indicators can be monitored over time to determine where progress is being made and where additional resources need to be committed.

Carbon Footprint: One of the many ways that communities, and even individuals, can address sustainability is through calculating, then reducing, their carbon footprint. A carbon footprint is a measure of the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted through the combustion of fossil fuels as part of the everyday operation of a business, organization, community, or even and individual. It is usually expressed as tons of CO₂ emitted per year, and there are many different methodologies available for calculating the carbon footprint. Carbon dioxide is a so called “greenhouse gas” that according to many climatological studies is contributing to global warming.

According to the various calculators, the activities that most affect the carbon footprint are:

- ❖ Automobile travel- The variables are distance driven, fuel efficiency, and number of passengers per vehicle. A single driver car creates a larger footprint for the individual that one with passengers.
- ❖ Air travel- Depends on distance and number of flights. Take-offs and landings use large amounts of fuel, so non-stops produce less carbon over the same distance.
- ❖ Boat travel- Depending on distance and size of boat, can produce many times more carbon than a plane traveling the same distance.
- ❖ Other motorized transport- Usually train or bus.
- ❖ Electricity use- If generated by non-renewable sources.
- ❖ Home heating- Depends on fuel source and amount used.
- ❖ Food miles- Affected most by the food purchased from non-local sources.
- ❖ Diet - Carnivore, vegetarian, or vegan, and conventionally farmed foods v. organic.

Sustainability Goals:

1. To make Whitefish a model sustainable community through thoughtful planning, education, and community involvement.

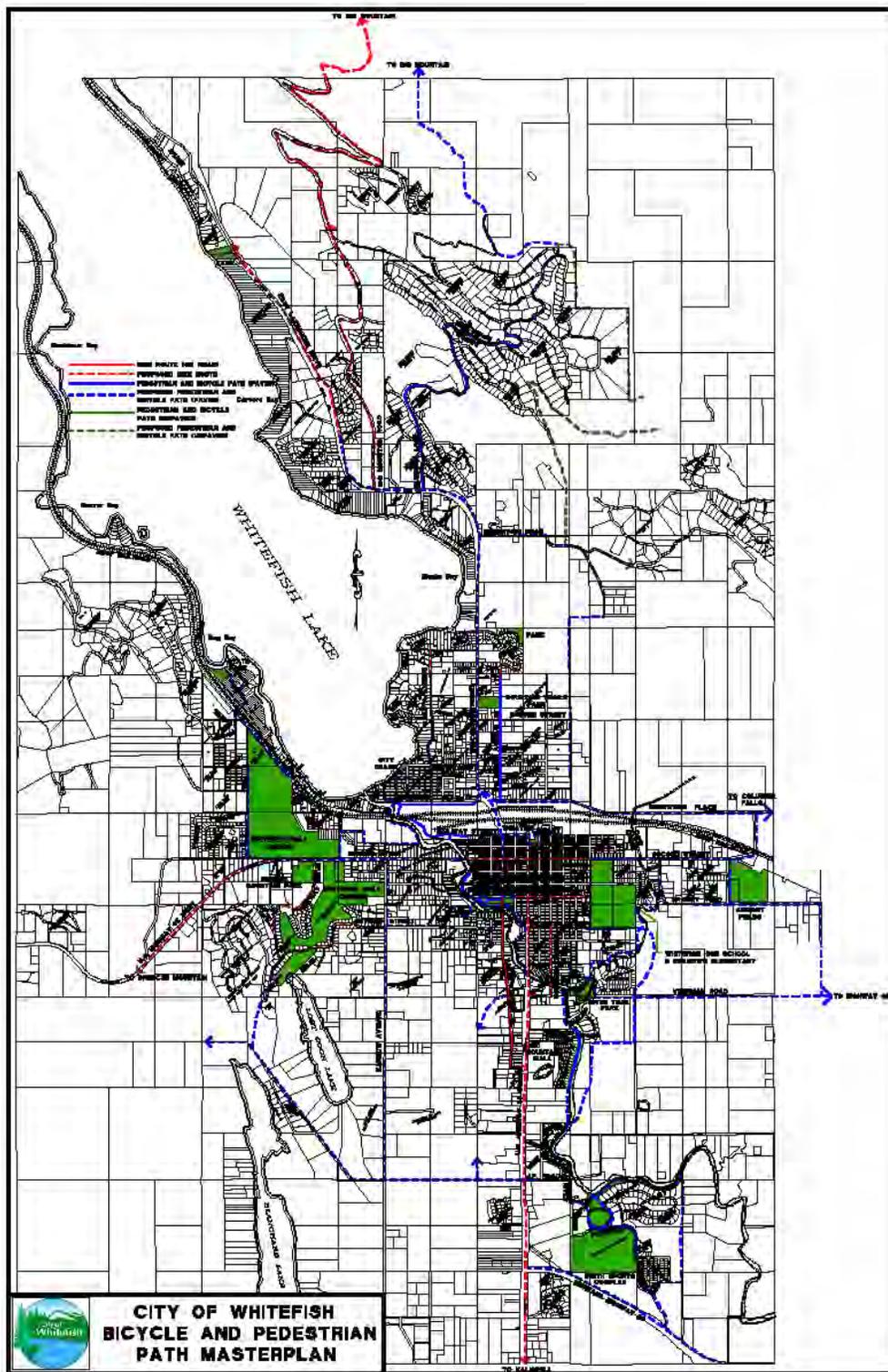
Sustainability Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to incorporate green technologies to the extent feasible in all new and remodeled buildings.
2. The City shall engage in sustainable infrastructure through careful cooperative planning, the use of reusable and recycled materials, and green technologies for water use and stormwater management.

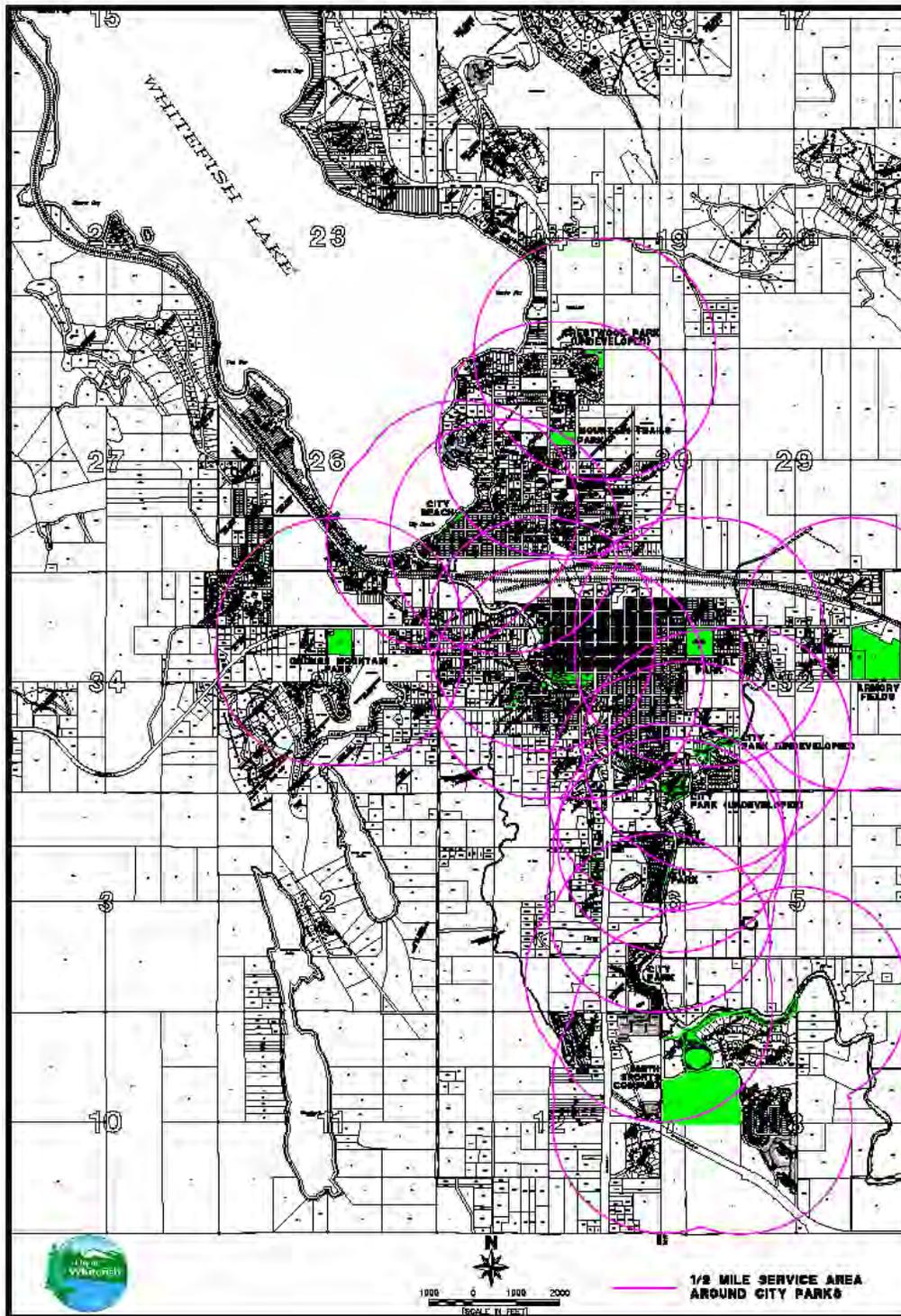
Sustainability Recommended Actions:

1. The City shall appoint a Sustainability Task Force to research and recommend educational community and neighborhood programs with the objective of making Whitefish a sustainable community.
2. The City shall calculate its municipal carbon footprint for daily operations and identify ways to reduce it. The City shall issue challenges to the North Valley Hospital, Whitefish Mountain Resort, and the local school district to do the same.
3. The City shall explore the incorporation of sustainability concepts, principles, and incentives into its land development regulations.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Master Plan Map



Parks Service Area Map



CHAPTER 5: HOUSING ELEMENT

While shelter is one of the most basic of human needs, the high cost of housing in the Whitefish area makes it out of reach for many working families. From 2000 to 2003, the median home price in Whitefish increased from \$148,000 to \$190,000; an increase of over 28% in only three years. Also, average time for a home on the market decreased from 256 days to 126 over the same period. These numbers are clearly indicative of a “seller’s” housing market. By 2004, the median price had jumped to \$265,000, and had become even more out of reach for Whitefish working families.

According to the latest information available from the Northwest Montana Association of Realtors, for the 12-month period ending February 13, 2007, the median home selling price for the Whitefish area was **\$319,000**. For the same time period, the mean (average) selling price was \$533,025. This compares to a Kalispell median price of \$200,000. To afford a median priced home in Whitefish, a household income of approximately \$83,700 per year would be needed. Current household income data for Whitefish is not available from the U.S. Census, but the 2005 median income for Flathead County was \$40,000. This leaves little doubt that home prices are escalating faster than wages and salaries.

Shortages of housing that was affordable for low and moderate income residents began to occur in Whitefish in the early 1990’s, and many of the factors that affected the market then are still prevalent today. Housing demand continues strong from new residents to the area and from recreational (second, third, etc.) home buyers. Escalating land prices attracts investment capital, which drives land costs up even more.

The term “affordable housing” is often misused and misunderstood. It is often taken to mean “low-income housing”, and can carry connotations of poorly constructed and badly maintained multi-family housing. Affordable housing actually means housing that is affordable (meaning that no more than 30% of the gross household income goes for housing) to households earning less than 125% of the area median. When new market rate construction is targeted to the demands of out-of-state buyers and the median home price is \$319,000 as it currently is, even households earning well over the area median income can be cost burdened for housing.

Many people tend to think of affordable housing only as multi-family housing in tall, dense, characterless buildings. In reality, affordable housing includes all different types of product meeting the needs of different residents. Household size, employment, and income are the main variables. Therefore, affordable housing can be an apartment, an accessory apartment, a townhome, or a single-family detached home. Just as the community needs affordable housing for its service and retail workers, it also needs housing for its teachers, police officers, firefighters, and nurses.

Another widely held view of affordable housing programs is that they are charitable programs to aid or assist the less fortunate. In reality, affordable housing strengthens the economic and social fabric of the community. These programs bring dollars into the community through grants and low-interest loans. They also add value to the tax base.

People who live as well as work in Whitefish tend to shop in local stores for groceries, fuel, and durable goods, which they are not likely to do if they live in Columbia Falls or Kalispell. Also, people tend to “give back” to the community they live in, not necessarily the one they work in. A store manager who is also a Scoutmaster is far more likely to head up a Scout Troop in his home community, not the one in which he merely works. Retailers and hotel operators always prefer that their businesses be represented by people who are part of the community as opposed to those who just drive in to work a shift.

Finally, there are recommendations in the Economic Development Element for diversifying the base economy through identifying clean businesses and industries that would be compatible with the community character and qualities on which Whitefish’s visitation economy is based. One of the keys to attracting these industries is an adequate supply of workforce housing.

ISSUE: The latest housing needs assessment was published in December, 2003, and has not been updated since.

The *Whitefish Housing Authority Housing Needs Assessment* was a comprehensive analysis of housing trends, conditions, needs, tenure, affordability, and important local housing factors and indicators. The report contains a population projection that puts the population of Whitefish at 6,502 in 2010. In 2006, the U.S. Census estimated that the city’s population had already reached **7,000** (although this is believed to be somewhat high, and may be based upon a dwelling unit count that includes seasonal homes).

From this population projection, the Needs Assessment calculates a “need” for 783 new housing units between the years 2000 and 2010. However, from 2003 through 2006 alone, the Whitefish corporate limits added 725 new units, 271 of which were single-family detached. These statistics alone point out the necessity of updating the needs assessment as soon as possible. Additional information about the local housing market such as housing conditions, cost-burdened households, and seasonal occupancy also needs to be updated.

ISSUE: Whitefish now relies heavily on a voluntary inclusionary zoning provision for its affordable housing stock.

At present, there is no code requirement to provide affordable housing units in conjunction with market rate units. However, there is a voluntary inclusionary program that is part of the planned unit development (PUD) zoning regulations. “Inclusionary” means that some percentage of affordable units is provided in a development project or subdivision. The units are made available to the Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) at a pre-determined below market level. **Units are not given to the Housing Authority for free, although this is a commonly held misconception.** A developer must provide 10% affordable units if the density bonus in the PUD is used, and/or, if the required open space is reduced from 30% to no lower than 20%. An alternative to providing affordable units, or the equivalent in gifted developed lots, is to pay a fee-in-lieu to the City of Whitefish of \$6,000 per market rate unit to be used for affordable housing. The per unit

fee-in-lieu payment amount is set by resolution of the Whitefish City Council, and may be reviewed and updated annually.

One of the major benefits to the voluntary system is that the community can select the affordable housing target without the need for expensive, complex studies to establish a “nexus” that ties the market rate units to the need for affordable ones. As stated above, that target is currently set by code at 10%. The primary downside to the voluntary program is that density bonuses are often difficult to take advantage of. For example, if a developer tried to increase the gross density in a WR-1 or WR-2 project by up to 50%, the resulting PUD would be sufficiently dense that it may be detrimental to the character or the surrounding neighborhood, and therefore, not meet PUD criteria. It should be noted, however, that some developers have opted to provide affordable units even though they were not required to do so.



These affordable units in the RiverPark residential complex look no different from the market rate units in the neighborhood.

ISSUE: Whitefish has been considering a mandatory inclusionary housing program to address affordable housing needs.

Whitefish has been considering the merits of a mandatory inclusionary program vs. a voluntary one for the past several years. In fact, a recommendation to consider a mandatory inclusionary program as part of an overall affordable housing strategy was contained in the 1996 City-County Master Plan. In the *Workforce Housing* report prepared in 2003 by the Whitefish City-County Planning Board at the direction of the City Council, a strong case is made for a mandatory program as opposed to a voluntary one.

As stated above, the affordable housing target for the current voluntary program is 10%. However, in order to shift to a mandatory program, a comprehensive study of the causes and effects of the affordable housing shortage would have to be conducted. Out of this study, a “nexus”, or connection between the development of market rate homes and the need for affordable homes would be quantified. Then, the City could propose regulations that would require affordable housing according to some formula based on the study. Variables usually involve the value of the market rate home, and the demand for services

(both public and private) that would be generated by that home. Once a mandatory program is in place, the affordable housing requirement can usually be met by providing units (or lots) within a given development at an “affordable” rate, providing affordable units off-site, or paying a fee-in-lieu.

ISSUE: While the current voluntary program offers density bonuses and open space reduction, there may be additional incentives that could make the voluntary program more attractive to developers, and therefore, more effective at putting affordable housing on the ground.

Any successful voluntary affordable housing program must have sufficient incentives for developers to participate. While density bonuses and open space reduction incentives have enticed some developers to participate in the current volunteer program, it is very possible that the program’s effectiveness could benefit from additional incentives.

Many communities throughout the country have voluntary incentive-based affordable housing programs. Typical incentives are:

- ❖ Density/floor area bonuses
- ❖ Expedited permit processing
- ❖ Entitlement facilitation
- ❖ Reduced setbacks (this was removed from the Whitefish code in 2006)
- ❖ Increased building height
- ❖ Increased lot coverage (generally not permitted on environmentally sensitive sites)
- ❖ Reduced parking requirements
- ❖ Impact fee waivers
- ❖ Plan review/inspection fee reductions or waivers
- ❖ City assistance with off-site improvements (water, sewer, streets, etc.)
- ❖ City assistance with other improvements such as street trees and street lights

Some of the incentives used in other communities may or may not be effective in Whitefish. However, any and all possible incentives could be studied in order to make the voluntary program more effective.

ISSUE: While Whitefish at least has a voluntary inclusionary program, it has not yet considered a “linkage” program for employee housing.

Inclusionary programs are tied to residential development; linkage programs are tied to commercial development that directly generates the need for employees. Resort community businesses need retail clerks, waiters, cooks, maids, lift operators, and many people to fill jobs that do not usually pay a “living wage” in the community. A linkage program also requires a study to determine for every type of resort-related job:

- ❖ how many employees are generated (per square foot, per restaurant seat, etc.),
- ❖ what the prevailing wages are
- ❖ what types of housing the employees are in the market for
- ❖ what percent of their housing needs are not being met by the market

- ❖ and therefore, to what extent the employees that are so vital to the community are cost-burdened for housing.

As a goal, the Whitefish Housing Authority recommends that at least 60% of the Whitefish workforce reside in Whitefish. However, Whitefish is not isolated from more affordable communities like many Rocky Mountain resort towns such as Aspen, Steamboat Springs, and Jackson, WY. Historically, many Whitefish workers have commuted the relatively short distances from Kalispell or Columbia Falls. However, these communities are now having workforce housing affordability issues of their own. Given all of these uncertainties, it is unclear to what extent a linkage employee housing program is need or desired in Whitefish.

ISSUE: Affordable housing should be located in suitable areas throughout the community.

In a community with an affordable housing shortage, any affordable unit is a good affordable unit. Generally, however, care must be taken to assure that affordable housing is close to employment, parks, schools, and commercial services. Low and moderate income families need more than just a roof over their head, they also need to be able to live sustainably within the community, and live where they have a variety of options to meet their transportation needs. Therefore, affordable housing is best located within the urban environs of Whitefish within walking and cycling distance of most services and facilities. Also, affordable housing should be spread throughout the community, and should not be concentrated in one area or neighborhood.



Affordable homes by the Whitefish Housing Authority under construction at Armory Road and 2nd St.

ISSUE: Whitefish has not adopted a housing code.

In fact, very few Montana communities have housing codes. Generally, housing codes set forth standards for sanitation, fire prevention, occupancy, life safety, exiting and other related factors. Building codes by contrast, set forth minimum structural requirements and procedures to ensure that buildings are properly constructed. Housing codes are intended to keep housing in healthy, sanitary, and livable condition. Extreme examples of

housing code violations might be a hole in a floor through which mice can enter a home, or a broken furnace that has not been repaired by a landlord or property manager.

In many large communities that have substantial inventories of older homes and multi-family structures and tight rental markets, housing codes are imperative to protect the health and safety of tenants who cannot afford better, safer, or cleaner housing. It is not known to what extent sanitation and life safety factors are an issue in Whitefish, but it was noted even in the 1996 City-County Master Plan that neither the City nor the County have housing codes. A new housing study and needs assessment would also contain a housing conditions component which will be useful in determining the need for a housing code.

ISSUE: Some developers and concerned citizens alike contend that high housing costs are at least partly a function of a constrained land supply, and if more land were made available for residential development, housing prices would drop (or at least stabilize) due to increased supply.

During at least two community visioning sessions, the issue was raised that the City should designate significantly more land for residential development. If that were to happen, developers would respond with enough additional units to put downward pressure on housing prices through increased supply.

Supply and demand has long been upheld as the guiding principle for commodity pricing. Increased supplies and/or decreased demand leads to lower prices, and the reverse is also true. But others point out that if demand for housing is so high in Whitefish, why are there still almost 1,200 entitlement units (units that have an approved preliminary plat, PUD, etc.) left to be built? And why are there still potentially another 1,200 units (Planning & Building Department August 2006 estimate) which could be entitled consistent with the 1996 Master Plan?

Unfortunately, with no **guarantee** of affordability, truly affordable housing cannot be assumed through simply increasing the land supply. Anecdotally, most housing units under construction today are designed for and marketed to out of state buyers. The profit margin for these units is higher than for more modest units intended for the working people of Whitefish.

Consider the case of Kalispell some 15 miles to the south. Kalispell has averaged 400 new dwelling units per year over the past three years (2004-06). The city has final platted 524 residential lots (mostly single-family and duplex) in 2006, and another **983 residential lots** have preliminary plat approval but have not yet gone final. Kalispell has annexed almost 1,000 acres of land since 2004. Yet the median home price in Kalispell is \$200,000, for which a family would have to earn at least \$52,520 per year to afford (without being cost-burdened). As pointed out at the beginning of this Housing Element, the median household income in Flathead County was only \$40,000 in 2005. Kalispell too, in spite of its high level of development activity, is feeling an affordable housing shortfall (Daily Interlake, February 22, 2007). The WHA points out that while

neighboring communities are producing generally lower priced housing than Whitefish, target groups are still unable to purchase that housing without assistance.

ISSUE: Affordable homes in Whitefish that are being lost through redevelopment are not being replaced

The 62 mobile homes that were lost when the Greenwood Mobile Home Park closed are gone forever, and not because the city forced closure or because mobile home parks are not allowed within the City of Whitefish. Mobile home parks and subdivisions are allowed by City codes, but with escalating land costs, development of a new mobile home community is extremely unlikely. The land that the former Greenwood MHP occupied was zoned commercial (WB-2), and simply became too valuable for other uses. As a result, many former residents of the park have been displaced from the community. The land on which the mobile home park on the north side of Whitefish is located has a land development approved for it, and affordable units at the SW corner of Kalispell and Second Street will soon be lost when that block is redeveloped. “Tear-downs” within the older traditional Whitefish neighborhoods are not problematic yet, but they will become more prevalent if the community continues to be attractive to out-of-area investors.

Another pressure point on the traditional neighborhoods is that more and more homes are being purchased as second homes, meaning that they sit dark and unoccupied for up to 50 weeks out of the year. This can be very disruptive to an established neighborhood. With greater financial resources, the WHA could secure some of these homes for permanently affordable housing stock as they come on the market. This would have the dual benefit of providing greater affordable housing opportunities, and helping to stabilize the traditional neighborhoods by keeping homes occupied year round.

Change is constant, and redevelopment is one way in which the community rejuvenates itself. However, some communities require that when affordable units are lost through development, they be replaced somewhere in the community. Aspen, Colorado has had such a program for over 20 years, and affordable units are often replaced as accessory units on the very site where the old units were located. In order to keep affordable housing affordable in perpetuity, the WHA is investigating implementing a community land trust model so that rising land costs are taken out of the pricing-affordability equation.

ISSUE: Rental Housing

In Whitefish, rental housing of all types tends to be available to local working families. Anecdotally, residential rents have not increased appreciably in the past two years. According to local property managers, many people from out of the area purchase homes in Whitefish with the intent of relocating here in the future, perhaps upon retirement. In the meantime, they place the unit in the rental market. While the sales prices of residential property keeps rising because of out-of-area buyers in the marketplace, rents have kept comparatively stable. The reason is that renters tend to be Whitefish residents

in the work force, and their ability to pay rent is directly related to their wage earning ability.

The Whitefish Housing Authority web site lists seven apartment complexes in Whitefish, including housing for seniors and the disabled. However, many other rental apartments can be found in homes and in accessory apartments in various residential neighborhoods throughout the city.

The Housing Authority participates in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 rental voucher program. The vouchers provide rental assistance to households earning 50% or less of the area median income by making up the difference between fair market rents and what the qualifying family can afford to pay, defined as no more than 30% of the family's gross income. Families earning 30% of median income or less have a higher priority for vouchers and rental units.

Fair market rents are set by the federal government for each participating community. The WHA has an allotment of 16 vouchers, and has a waiting list. Northwest Human Resources also has a voucher program and their vouchers too may be used in Whitefish. However, their waiting list is 3 to 4 years. While rental stock is available in both Whitefish and Kalispell, there is a shortage of rental opportunities for the very low end of the income scale. Fair market monthly rents for the Whitefish area as of October, 2006 are:

Studio.....	\$388
One Bedroom.....	\$477
Two Bedroom.....	\$599
Three Bedroom.....	\$847
Four Bedroom.....	\$1039

However, information from the WHA indicates that market rents have recently increased more than fair market rents. In addition, there are fewer rentals on the market, and what rentals there are spend less time on the market. In 2004, the WHA found that Whitefish had the highest percentage of renters in the Flathead Valley. This fact coupled with fewer rental opportunities will tend to push market rate rents higher.

ISSUE: Seniors, Disabled, and Assisted Living

The WHA also owns the Mountain View Manor, which is a residential facility for seniors and disabled adults that are capable of living independently. The Manor has 48 one-bedroom units and two two-bedroom units. Rents are based on income, which are modest and fixed for many residents, and average \$215 per month including utilities. There is a waiting list for units in this facility, and the U.S. Census predicts a 50% increase in the number of seniors living in the Rocky Mountain states by 2010. Other living quarters for senior and the disabled include Whitefish Manor, Stone Creek Apartments, and the Mountain Senior apartments. There are also private assisted living facilities in Whitefish,

and although occupancy rates are high, there do not appear to be significant waiting lists for these facilities at this time.



Mountain View Manor is operated by the Whitefish Housing Authority for seniors and disabled adults. It is located in a traditional residential neighborhood near downtown. The Manor backs up to the Whitefish River and accesses a riverside pathway.

ISSUE: Housing Rehabilitation

The WHA also manages a housing rehab program that assists eligible homeowners to finance repairs to their homes such as eliminating safety hazards and energy conservation improvements. This program was originally funded by federal, state, and local grants, but is now a revolving loan program with funds returning to finance new improvements as older loans are repaid. Homeowners pay for needed repairs either through a loan, or through a lien that is repaid upon the sale of the property.

Housing Element Goals:

1. Ensure an adequate supply and variety of housing product types and densities, at affordable prices, to meet the needs of Whitefish's existing and future workforce, and for senior citizens.
2. Maintain a social and economic diversity of Whitefish through affordable housing programs that keep citizens and members of the workforce from being displaced.

Housing Element Policies:

1. The City of Whitefish shall continue to support the activities and programs of the Whitefish Housing Authority, including grant-writing, code review and development, and cooperative planning, to ensure that affordable housing remains available.
2. The City of Whitefish shall always have a policy of supporting the development of affordable housing, and shall seek to partner with and support any reputable affordable housing developer in the public sector or private.

3. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to consider the possible impacts on housing affordability in all city programs, regulations, fee structures, and capital improvements.

Housing Element Recommended Actions:

1. The City of Whitefish shall partner with the Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) to update the 2003 Housing Needs Assessment in order to provide the information and analysis necessary to:
 - Reexamine the existing voluntary program
 - Determine other needs that should be addressed through additional programs
 - Assess the feasibility and potential effectiveness of a mandatory inclusionary affordable housing program
 - Assess the linkage between high-end market rate housing and the need for affordable housing.
2. The City shall, with the cooperation and participation of the WHA, fully investigate mandatory housing programs for both workforce housing, and a linkage program for seasonal and full-time employees in businesses related to the visitation industry.
3. The City shall review its codes and ordinances for additional opportunities to support and provide for affordable housing.
4. The City and the WHA shall proactively identify the prime locations for affordable housing in the community, and designate those areas on the Future Land Use Map that is contained in this Growth Policy.
5. The City shall investigate the community benefits to adopting and administering a housing code.
6. The City and WHA shall investigate the feasibility of an Affordable Whitefish Housing Foundation in order to bring additional financial resources to the affordable housing problem.
7. The City and WHA shall jointly explore a program to encourage the privately funded construction of accessory residential units and to ensure their continued affordability.
8. The City of Whitefish shall investigate and adopt special standards for residential construction in areas with high groundwater.

CHAPTER 6: TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

Of all the impacts that growth can have on a community, the one that is most often cited is traffic. Increases in traffic volumes, traffic congestion, speed, noise, and air pollution are the issues that most people raise when talking about growth in their communities. Almost every adult operates a motor vehicle at one time or another, but everyone experiences motor vehicle traffic. Even children walking or cycling to school or to parks encounter traffic, and traffic growth that overtakes neighborhood streets and intersections can make the best of communities seem hostile and unlivable at times.

Like most American communities, Whitefish has had its share of transportation planning programs and projects. Two the most recent efforts are the *South Whitefish Transportation Planning Project*, October, 1999 prepared by WGM Group, and the *Southeast Whitefish Transportation Plan*, December, 2001 by Robert Peccia & Associates. The most recent program was an attempt to formulate a Hwy 93 corridor study to improve the capacity of this U.S. highway through the most urbanized areas of Whitefish, including downtown.

Even more recently (February, 2007), the City of Whitefish and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) are jointly undertaking a comprehensive community-wide transportation planning program. A component of that program will be to once again look at the Hwy. 93 corridor through the downtown area, focusing on both regional and local transportation needs. This study is being coordinated with this Growth Policy, and is scheduled for completion in November, 2007. It will look at transportation needs and make recommendations for transportation infrastructure that affect the efficiency and operational parameters of the existing system through the year 2030.

With a comprehensive transportation plan already underway, this Transportation Element can focus on broader community issues. **As stated previously, sustainability is a major theme of this Growth Policy, and nowhere is sustainability and community livability more apparent than in the local transportation system.** Livable communities are walkable and bikeable communities. They provide residents and visitors with viable transportation choices---not just reliance on the private automobile. For the most part, this element will focus on expanding those transportation choices in Whitefish.

A Reciprocal Relationship

A local transportation system should serve the community and its component neighborhoods in the locations, and with the character and qualities, that the local citizens desire. In other words, the desired land use plan drives---or should drive---the transportation plan, and not the other way around. There is, however, a reciprocal relationship between land use and transportation that should be recognized, and is of vital importance throughout the community planning process.

In a commercial area, trips are generated by the commercial activity (in addition of course to the through trips that are using the arterial street to get from one part of the community to the other). Daily trips on the adjacent street is a prime factor in the value of commercial real estate, and so trips generated by the commercial activity make the land more valuable for even more commercial activity. That increased commercial activity generates even more trips, which generates even more commercial activity. This phenomenon can be seen along commercial strips throughout the country. Arterial streets are most often “widened” for increased capacity not so much for the growth in through traffic, but to accommodate the traffic increases generated by the commercial activity along the arterial itself.

In residential areas, the reciprocal relationship operates in reverse. The more trips that take place on a residential street, generally, the less desirable it is to live there. When through traffic is allowed to “infiltrate” a residential neighborhood---usually due to poor transportation planning, poor land use practices, or both---the result is often disinvestment and the ultimate decline of a once viable neighborhood. As the neighborhood declines and residents retreat to interior living spaces and backyards, surrendering their street and front yards to the traffic and noise, the street can become even more desirable for through traffic as speeds increase and side friction is reduced. Further disinvestment in the neighborhood usually follows.

Functional Street Classification

Like most communities, Whitefish has a functional street classification system that designates city streets as arterials, collectors, or local streets. Generally, local streets primarily provide direct access to a land use; a single-family home for example. A local street might also be called a “neighborhood street”. Residential access is taken directly from it, and through traffic is (or should be) discouraged. As its name implies, a collector street “collects” traffic from the local streets and conveys them to the arterial system for trips across the community. Some land uses, like neighborhood commercial and multi-family residential, will take direct access from collectors. Arterials are the major traffic movers across a city or town, and that is their primary purpose. Usually, only the most intense of land uses take direct access from an arterial street. These would include major shopping centers, office/business parks or complexes, and large-scale multi-family residential. Often, direct access to “strip” commercial development adds friction to the traffic flow and makes the arterial inefficient for its primary purpose, moving traffic.

There are many reasons for establishing a functional classification system, including community planning. A carefully thought out and adopted classification system ensures that streets will not be over built or under built for their intended purpose. When the functional classification of streets is a known quantity, informed land use decisions that do not overburden existing streets can be made---to the benefit of the entire community. The existing classification system for the City of Whitefish is shown in Map Z, and a new functional street classification map will be produced by the community-wide transportation study. (See Functional Street Classification Map.)

summer of 2008, the City and MDT will construct a combination separated and connected (to the street) bicycle and pedestrian path along Wisconsin. In addition to local funds, Montana Air Quality Initiative (MAQI) funds are being used for this long-awaited project.

Streets in rural areas are also important for biking and walking, yet very few of them have sidewalks, pathways, or bike lanes of any kind. During the community visioning sessions, many respondents reported that walking and cycling in the rural areas is a big part of their outdoor recreation and fitness regimen. Roads such as Monegan, Voerman, Karrow, and Edgewood could be retrofitted with wider shoulders for pathways and bikeways at relatively low cost.

ISSUE: Off-street routes called for in the Pedestrian and Bikeway Master Plan are often located along the Whitefish River, cross local streams, or traverse environmentally sensitive areas.

Protection, management, and enhancement of environmentally sensitive areas are high community priorities. However, it is very common for bicycle and pedestrian pathways to be routed along rivers and streams to make the pathways more pleasant and scenic. This practice also makes good use of land that is often unusable for other development activity due to flooding, plus providing the general public benefits of recreation and non-motorized transportation.

Because of the close proximity to environmentally critical areas, recreational trails **must** be just as sensitive to the protection of natural resources as private development---if not more so. Out of necessity to meet requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), pathway surfaces must generally be hard. This usually means they are constructed of asphalt or concrete, which are impervious, and therefore can create water quality issues if not properly located and constructed. The ADA also has strict standards for grades, and that often result in more cutting and filling than might otherwise be necessary. Still, public recreational trails in Whitefish are---and should be---subjected to the highest standards of environmentally sensitive construction and best management practices. To that end, the City should continue to explore more environmentally friendly pathway surfaces for use in sensitive areas.

Parallel Collector Streets

ISSUE: Parallel collectors along both sides of Hwy. 93 South are not yet complete. This adds to congestion on Hwy. 93 South (Spokane Ave.) during peak hours.

The South and Southeast Whitefish transportation plans call for parallel collectors to provide local access to businesses in the Hwy. 93 South corridor and to move local traffic off of Hwy. 93. These collectors are Baker Ave. on the west and Columbia/Whitefish Avenue on the east. However, completion of these streets is for the most part, developer driven. That means that the City will not generally fund uncompleted segments of these streets as capital projects, but will instead require them to be constructed by developers as

projects are planned and built that will rely on these streets for access. For example, the River's Edge development behind the Mountain Mall recently built a segment of Whitefish Ave. Eventually, Columbia/Whitefish Avenue will have continuity from 2nd Street near downtown to JP Road. On the west side of Hwy 93, Baker Ave. will run from downtown to approximately 19th Street, but an additional segment can continue south if the community-wide transportation plan determines a need.

East – West Street Access Limitations

ISSUE: Mainly because of the Whitefish River, east-west street access is limited.

The Whitefish River originates in Whitefish Lake and flows generally south through the city. It skirts downtown on the west, but turns southeast and flows under Baker Ave. between 5th and 6th Streets. It continues southeasterly flowing under Hwy. 93 (Spokane Ave., then flows beneath Columbia Ave. just north of 13th Street. From Columbia Ave. to JP Road, it effectively forms a barrier to transportation. Because of this barrier, traffic from the developing areas of southeast Whitefish infiltrate the Creekwood neighborhood to reach the schools along 7th St., or use Park Lane to reach the downtown area. Park Lane is relatively narrow with no bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and has difficult horizontal and vertical alignment where it crosses Cow Creek.

In 2001, the *Southeast Whitefish Transportation Plan* examined a number of alternative improvements to the transportation system in this area of the community. Two of the alternatives that were recommended as part of the future Major Street Network (Fig. 5.1 of the transportation plan) were extending Monegan Road north of Voerman and connecting it to 7th Street, and extending Voerman to the west across the river and connecting it to existing 13th Street. However, any northward extension of Monegan Road would cross undeveloped pasture land, and therefore, most likely be developer driven; it would only happen if the agricultural land known as the “Barnes property” were to develop. The extension of Voerman west to 13th Street involves a very costly and environmentally difficult crossing of city parkland, a portion of Cow Creek, and the Whitefish River. Farther to the southeast, River Lakes Parkway and JP Road provide good access to and from Hwy. 93 South. JP Road was recently reconstructed through a local improvement district. **However, consistent with the concurrency policy recommended in the Land Use and Community Facility elements, this Growth Policy will not recommend that any additional lands in the Monegan corridor be designated for residential development until at least one additional connection is made.**



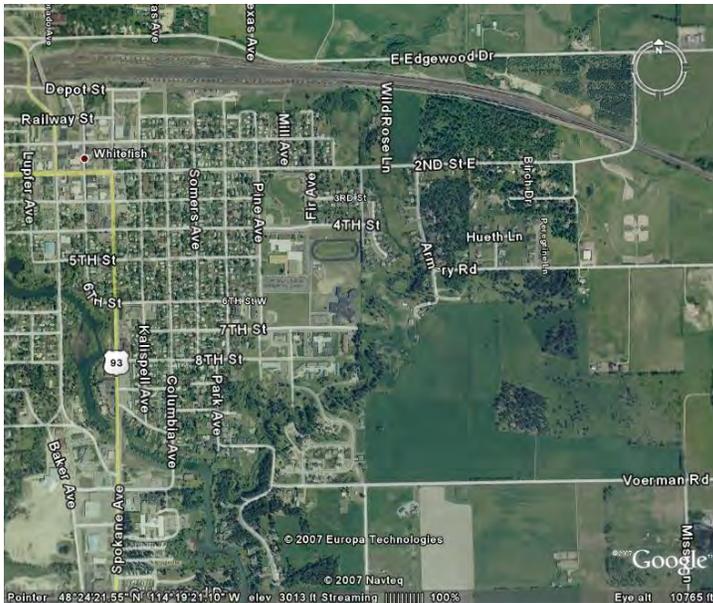
A northerly extension of Monegan Rd. to connect with 7th St. and Armory Road would have to go along this approximate alignment east of the Creekwood neighborhood. Voerman Road is in the foreground.

School Traffic

ISSUE: Whitefish High School and Muldown Elementary are located within the eastside residential neighborhood. Therefore, daily traffic generated by the two schools infiltrates surrounding neighborhoods, and is a source of frequent complaints.

The WFHS/Muldown complex is located east of Pine Ave. between 4th and 7th streets. Access to the main high school parking lot is from Pine Ave. between 5th and 6th streets. Muldown Elementary is accessed from 7th St. Whitefish High has no school cafeteria, and as a result, the campus is open and relatively heavy traffic is generated four time per school day as students arrive in the morning, drive to and from lunch, and depart in the afternoon.

While the entire eastside neighborhood is impacted to some degree, the Creekwood area is impacted most of all. The vast majority of high school traffic generated from the Voerman Road area and farther south, and east of the Whitefish River, travels through Creekwood----often well over the legal speed limit. Once Monegan Road is extended north as described above, a connection to 7th Street can be made that will alleviate the infiltration situation in Creekwood.



This aerial view shows WFHS and Muldown Elementary situated in a residential neighborhood.

Image courtesy of Google Earth.

Big Mountain Road

ISSUE: Big Mountain Road provides the only general access for the Whitefish Mountain Resort as well as the many residential subdivisions on Big Mountain.

From its intersection at E. Lakeshore Drive, Big Mountain Road winds its way five miles up to the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Along the way, it provides subdivisions such as Elk Highlands, Ptarmigan Village, The Cedars, and Hidden Hills with their only general vehicular access. In summer, there is emergency access via a forest road from Haskill Basin.

Big Mountain Road is maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and a major reconstruction project was begun in the spring of 2007. The road will be widened in places and some hairpin curves eliminated. In 2006, the Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan was approved by the City of Whitefish. This plan calls for extensive additional resort development in the Whitefish Mountain Village area over the next 20 years. A traffic impact report has been prepared and accepted as part of the neighborhood plan, and an additional 2,500 to 3,000 vehicle trips per day are expected to be added to Big Mountain Road at buildout. This additional volume is not projected to negatively impact levels of service on Big Mountain Road, nor at the East Lakeshore Drive intersection. No additional general access can be provided to Whitefish Mountain Village due to topographical and ownership constraints.

Grade Separated Railroad Crossings

ISSUE: The Wisconsin Ave. viaduct is the only grade-separated crossing of the BNSF rail facilities connecting downtown Whitefish to the northern neighborhoods of the city, to Ironhorse, and to Big Mountain.

The Burlington Northern Santa Fe railway essentially divides Whitefish into south and north halves. The only grade-separated crossing in the area is the Wisconsin Ave. viaduct that was reconstructed and widened in 1994. The only other crossing in the area for general traffic is the at-grade crossing on 2nd Street near Armory Park. This crossing is over a mile from the Whitefish central business district, and traffic is interrupted by approximately 60 trains per day. There is an emergency only crossing in the Texas Ave. area. There is also an at-grade crossing serving the Birch Point neighborhood to the west of downtown.

While no specific proposals have been made for another grade-separated crossing, a possible crossing from Texas Ave. on the north to Columbia Ave. on the south has been discussed. The Texas and Colorado Ave. corridors continue to develop to urban densities allowed by existing zoning and by the 1996 Master Plan. As pointed out previously, Columbia Ave. will eventually have continuity through Whitefish as far as JP Road.



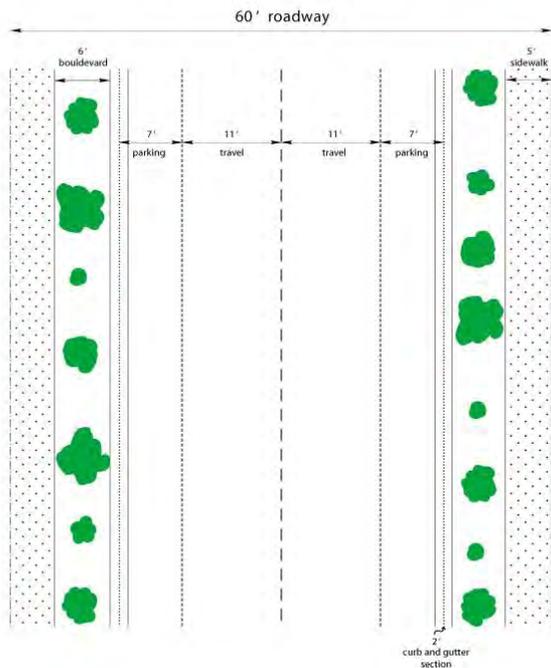
Cars and a cyclist wait for a freight train to pass at the East 2nd Street crossing of the BNSF railway. Some 60 trains per day move through Whitefish, eastbound and westbound combined.

Neighborhood Sensitive Street Standards

ISSUE: Street standards should be “neighborhood sensitive” in much the same manner as land development regulations. Also, flexibility is needed in infill projects and in environmentally sensitive areas.

Public street standards are set forth in both the Subdivision Regulations (Title 12, Whitefish City Code) and in the Standards for Design and Construction. Generally, streets require a right-of-way (R/W) width of 60’, a pavement width of at least 28’, and detached sidewalks not less than 5’ in width. Unless approved otherwise by the City Engineer, sidewalks are required on both sides of a street. When private streets are proposed, the City normally requires that they meet public standards. Curbs and gutter or swales are required to ensure proper drainage. The City’s standard local street is illustrated below.

City Standard Local Street



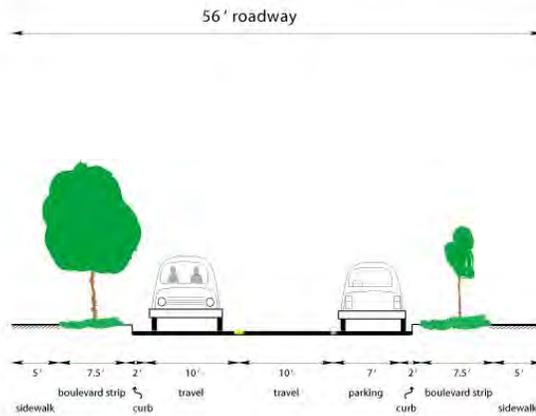
This city standard local street has a 60' R/W. Travel lanes are 11' in width with 7' on each side for parking. Total pavement width in this example is 34'. There is a 6' boulevard with street trees, and a 5' sidewalk on each side.

Street design standards may be deviated from through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process set forth in Chapter 2, Article S of the zoning regulations. The most frequently requested deviation is for R/W width, followed by pavement width. Developers have also requested that sidewalks only be placed on one side of the street in residential subdivisions. To better manage storm water and to support a rural character, bio-swales are often proposed instead of curbs, and as residential development occurs in more rural areas of the planning jurisdiction, more standards that do not utilize curbs should be examined. In most cases, developers are requesting deviations in an attempt to make the design of their streets fit the design of their projects, and not necessarily to lower up-front development costs.

Few factors can change the character and livability of a neighborhood more dramatically than streets that carry an excessive number of trips and/or allow excessive speeds. Wide residential streets designed to allow parking on both sides, and to allow two vehicles to pass safely, also can encourage excessive speed. Some alternative standards are presented below. If infill is to be the primary growth mechanism as recommended in the Land Use Element of this Growth Policy, alternative character sensitive street standards must be developed. However, safety and the ability of the street to carry the expected volume of traffic must remain the primary concerns. Projected volumes, connectivity, existing right-of-way, and any traffic impact analysis for a proposed development should all be taken into account in assessing the appropriateness of an alternative street standard.

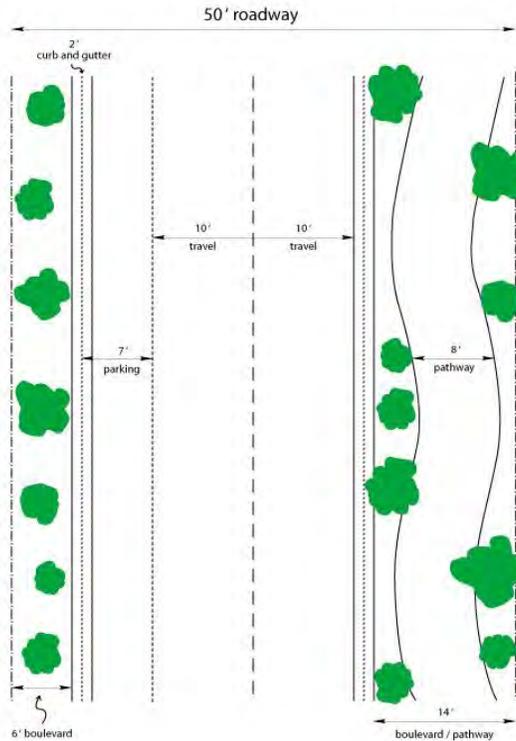
Along with the street itself, street lighting should also be neighborhood sensitive with variations from standards allowed to account for unique neighborhood qualities. In 2005, the City enacted a new lighting ordinance, often called the “dark skies ordinance”. That ordinance generally requires full cut-off fixtures, regulates fixture height, sets wattage levels, and specifies a standard decorative street light fixture that limits glare and directs light downward. Still, light levels allowed by the ordinance may be excessive for some situations. Due to low traffic volumes, many residential streets may only need lighting at intersections. Others may benefit from bollard lighting at key pedestrian crossings. Depending on public safety concerns, many individual fixtures could be switched off in the pre-dawn hours in order to save energy. While street lighting requirements should be flexible, visibility of the night sky and public safety should never be compromised.

Alternate Residential Street Section



This alternate residential section has sidewalks on both sides like the city standard, but parking has been eliminated on one side so that the boulevards can be widened to 7.5'. Travel lanes have been reduced to 10' in order to slow vehicle speeds. The total R/W has been reduced to 56'.

Alternative Residential Street Section



This alternative uses only 50' of R/W. On one side it provides parking and a standard boulevard, but on the other side is a wider (14') boulevard with a meandering 8' bike/pedestrian way.

ISSUE: Residential collectors should be designed to carry traffic efficiently, but also to control vehicle speeds through residential neighborhoods.

Colorado Ave. and Columbia Ave. are both collectors (according to the MDT Functional Classification Map) that have been recently reconstructed--to very different standards. Columbia was reconstructed to a width of 32' (back of curb to back of curb) with parking on both sides, and "bulb-outs" at the intersections. Bulb-outs help to slow traffic by narrowing down the travel lanes at the intersections, and they facilitate pedestrian movement by reducing the crossing distance at intersections. However, with parking on both sides, passing vehicles most often have to stop in a spot where no vehicle is parked to allow an oncoming vehicle to pass. In this respect, Columbia does not function like a true collector street.

Colorado Ave. was reconstructed at 29' (back of curb to back of curb), but does not provide any on-street parking, and has no bulb-outs. Therefore, traffic tends to move at higher speeds on Colorado. Bulb-outs were considered when the street was programmed and designed, but were left out due to concerns about bicycle safety. Dakota Ave. south of Skyles has been constructed to a 31-foot width with parking on one side only.

Most residential collectors in Whitefish are very straight---Colorado Ave. through Crestwood being the only notable exception. Very straight streets tend to instill a great

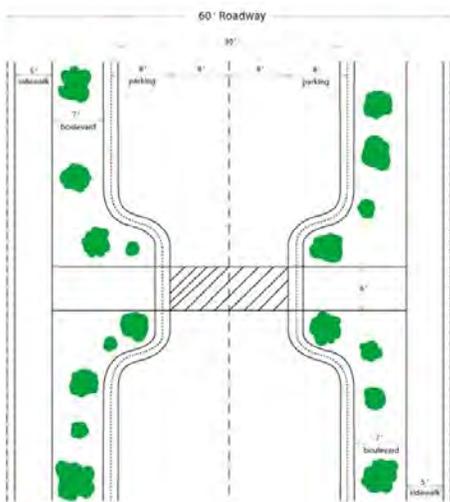
deal of driver confidence, and therefore, encourage excessive speed. While collectors should be direct routes out of necessity and efficiency, they need not be straight with no horizontal variation. Also, all collectors should be appropriately striped. Columbia Ave. has no striping at all, while residents of the Colorado Ave. area have complained that striping makes the street appear “too urban”.



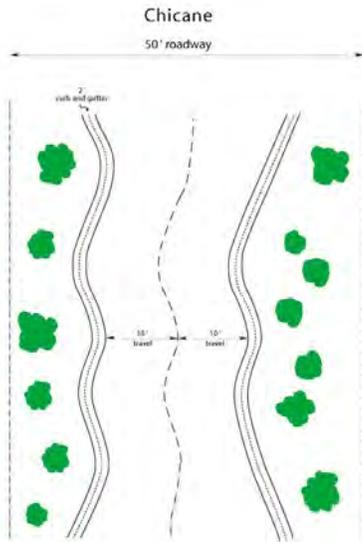
Bulb-outs on Columbia Ave. help to reduce vehicle speeds, add landscaped area to the streetscape, and shorten the distance pedestrians must traverse to cross the street.

On residential collector roadways that are generally straight, traffic calming should be considered in the design process. Research and experience in other communities has shown that some traffic calming measures are ineffective, and sometimes result in higher speeds due to driver behavior. For example, a driver will slow down considerably for a portable speed bump, but may then accelerate quickly out of frustration and/or resentment. Traffic calming devices should be carefully planned and thought out to be contributing components of the entire streetscape. Some examples are illustrated below.

Mid-Block Pedestrian Crossing / Traffic Calming



This concept would serve to both slow vehicle speeds and allow a relatively safe and visible place for pedestrians to cross the collector street.



Chicanes reduce vehicle speeds through changing the horizontal alignment of the street. Curvatures in the chicane should be supported by street trees to make them more visible to the driver.

Downtown Bypass

ISSUE: U.S. Hwy 93 runs through the middle of downtown, dividing it into a north half and south half at 2nd Street. A bypass of some kind has long been discussed in the community, but transportation planning thus far has shown it to be infeasible.

Heavy truck traffic and other through traffic in the downtown area is one of the most frequently voiced complaints among residents and visitors alike. According to 2005 counts, 4.1% of the vehicles using Hwy. 93 South (Spokane Ave.) are trucks, and some portion of those are through transfer trucks. This through traffic in the downtown area is listed as one of the biggest challenges in the Downtown Business District Master Plan. Still more trucks come into the downtown area because of new home construction north of the viaduct. The community-wide transportation and Hwy. 93 corridor study will assess the by-pass option, at least to some degree.

Two routes have been considered for a Whitefish by-pass. One route would use Karrow Ave. and probably connect to Hwy. 93 at 7th Street via a new bridge over the Whitefish River. This route is problematic for a number of reasons: the cost of the bridge over the widest part of the Whitefish River, and that the 7th St. route would take the by-pass through a residential neighborhood. Also, the location of the intersection of Karrow Ave. and Hwy. 93 North (2nd St.) would require north-bound trucks to almost immediately negotiate a substantial grade.

Another route that has been considered is Reserve St. in Kalispell to Farm to Market Road. But some roadway reconstruction would be necessary to for this route to be functional, and those improvements would be both costly and have environmental issues associated with them.

Public Transportation

ISSUE: Whitefish and Flathead County have limited public transportation systems.

Public transit systems enable people to commute to and from work, shopping, recreation, and other destinations inexpensively, with the additional benefits of saving gas, reducing traffic, and lowering air pollution. For a Valley-wide population of around 86,000, the existing intermittent inter-city public transportation is quite inadequate. Currently, Flathead County's Eagle Transit provides the only year-around public transportation services in Whitefish and between Kalispell and Whitefish. Unfortunately, their services are limited in Whitefish to a call-in-advance curb-side service or pickup at the Mall, primarily benefiting the elderly or disabled. There is no daily scheduled system in place to benefit commuters or students. If a Whitefish resident needs to visit Kalispell, Eagle Transit provides service only on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 2:00 PM. The rider would have to call ahead, and there is no return service. A bus comes to Whitefish from Kalispell on those days at 9:00 AM. There is currently no public transportation available between Columbia Falls and Whitefish. The existing system does not address the needs of most commuters who would benefit from a public transportation system that provides daily service in the mornings and evenings at a minimum.

The City of Whitefish has limited intra-city public transportation. The Snow Bus shuttle operates during the winter months, from late November through mid April, providing a free passenger service from the Mountain Mall to the Whitefish Mountain Village. While this is a valuable service for residents and visitors alike, paid for by local businesses, a similar shuttle service operating year-round is needed. Many residents and visitors would benefit from the ability to ride a shuttle to and from The Wave, grocery stores, or even Whitefish Mountain during the warmer months. The City of Whitefish should explore ways to improve public transportation, including support for improved city and inter-city transit.

Air Travel

Glacier Park International Airport is approximately nine miles from Whitefish on U.S. Hwy 2 north of Kalispell. It is currently served by four commercial carriers:

- ❖ Horizon
- ❖ Delta Connection
- ❖ Northwest
- ❖ US Airways

Total boardings have decreased recently from 190,964 in 2005 to 175,699 in 2006. This decrease was primarily attributable to some of the airports major carriers eliminating some direct flights. However, in 2007 Delta Airlines will add direct service to Atlanta and United will fly direct to Denver. Prospects for better air service mean more opportunities for visitation, and therefore, exposure of the Whitefish area to more people who will eventually wish to make Whitefish their home as visitation correlates highly to in-migration. While commercial boardings were down in 2006, indications were that

charters experienced a 30% increase over 2005. Most charters are in the 500-mile range to business destinations such as Seattle, Boise, and Billings.

Whitefish has a grass airstrip on the far east end of town adjacent to Armory Park. It is 2,560 feet in length at an altitude of 3,066'. There are no hangar facilities, but there is a small unpaved parking area near the runway. This airstrip is suitable for STOL (short take-off and landing) aircraft, and is controlled by the Flathead Municipal Airport. No improvements to this facility are planned at this time.

Rail Travel and Transport

Whitefish is served by Amtrak passenger service and Burlington Northern and Santa Fe freight carriers. Amtrak has two passenger trains per day: a west bound train that departs in the evening, and an east bound train in the early morning. The passenger station is located at the north end of downtown Whitefish, and major BNSF facilities are located immediately east of the Wisconsin Ave. viaduct.

Passenger boardings for the Whitefish station are not available on the Amtrak website. However, the *Empire Builder* remains the most popular overnight route carrying more than half a million passengers. Ridership increased 1.6% from 2006 to 2007. Amtrak ridership is increasing nationally, and total ticket sales increased 11% over the last fiscal year. However, federal subsidies that keep the passenger service in operation are never guaranteed, and have to be constantly advocated by the state and by local communities that depend on the service. Indications are that consideration is being given to reestablishing passenger service between Whitefish and Missoula.

BNSF has 32,000 route miles nation wide and employs approximately 40,000 people. The company operates approximately 60 trains per day through Whitefish, carrying mostly agricultural products (including Montana wheat for export to the Far East) and intermodal cargo (truck trailers).

Inter-City Bus Transportation

Whitefish is served by Rimrock Trail Lines with daily coach service to Missoula. From there, passengers can continue east to Butte or Bozeman on Rimrock, or transfer to Greyhound and use that system throughout the country. Ridership information for Rimrock is not available.

Transportation Element Goals:

1. Provide an efficient and effective transportation system to serve the present and future needs of the Whitefish area.
2. Integrate transportation and land use planning so that choices of transportation modes are optimized.

3. The City shall explore support of improved public transit, both in the city, and inter-city, through support of the expansion of existing systems and support for new enterprises, using capital improvement planning, grants, and other means.
4. The City shall be open and receptive to the use of alternative street standards that preserve and enhance the character and qualities of neighborhoods while still meeting general transportation and public safety needs.
5. The community shall encourage sustainability in all aspects of the transportation system so that the needs of the present are met, while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities.

Transportation Element Policies:

1. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support non-motorized transportation through community planning and capital improvement planning and programming.
2. The City shall seek ways to reduce the community's carbon footprint through efficiencies in the transportation system, reduction of vehicle miles traveled, and through promoting non-motorized transportation.
3. The City shall be open and receptive to the use of alternative street standards that preserve and enhance the character and qualities of neighborhoods while still meeting general transportation and public safety needs.
4. The community shall encourage sustainability in all aspects of the transportation system so that the needs of the present are met, while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities.

Transportation Element Recommended Actions:

1. Make construction of new sidewalks and pathways a priority in areas where they do not currently exist.
2. Plan for through, continuous streets to the extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are appropriate due to ownership, topography, or other constraints, ensure that a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.
3. It is highly recommended that no additional land in the Monegan Road area be designated for urban or suburban development until such time as additional connections are made available.
4. Through the community-wide transportation plan, explore possibilities for an additional grade separated crossing of the BNSF rail facilities.

5. The City shall make the provision of sidewalks, pathways, and other non-motorized transportation facilities part of a concurrency program and policy.
6. The City shall research and develop a set of alternative “neighborhood sensitive” designs for local residential streets.
7. The City shall develop a menu of traffic calming measures for use residential collector streets.
8. Through the community-wide transportation plan, the City shall assess the need and feasibility of a highway by-pass to alleviate through traffic in the downtown area.
9. Continue support for federal funding that will keep Amtrak passenger service operating in Montana.
10. Continue to support agreements with Eagle Transit and the Snow Bus, and encourage them or other enterprises to expand existing services to provide daily and year-round public transportation options in Whitefish.
11. Coordinate with the Montana State Department of Transportation in developing corridor studies for state highways within the planning jurisdiction.
12. Explore alternative vehicular routes to the Whitefish Mountain Village.

CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION/INTERGOVERNMENTAL ELEMENT

A Growth Policy is a broad body of public policy that addresses growth and development issues through specific topic areas, or elements. The elements contained in this Growth Policy are:

- ❖ Natural Resources
- ❖ Economic Development
- ❖ Land Use
- ❖ Community Facilities
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Transportation

The seventh and final element is Implementation/Intergovernmental Coordination, which describes how the policies and recommendations contained in the first six elements will be carried out. Therefore, as required by Montana law, this element of the Growth Policy will set forth the programs and strategies for its implementation. This element will describe the types of programs, capital improvement planning, financial strategies, and regulatory approaches that will all serve to implement the Growth Policy over time. It must be stressed from the very outset that **all** programs, plans, and strategies are on the table for implementation. Just as a Growth Policy does not consist of a single element, its implementation cannot consist of a single program or strategy.

Planning Documents Adopted by Reference

Much of the inventory, analysis, prioritization, and capital planning for specific facilities and services provided by the City have already been set forth in master facility plans and other similar documents. Many of these documents will be adopted by reference as part and parcel to this growth policy, and they include:

- ❖ Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP), 2006
- ❖ Whitefish Water Utility Plan, 2006
- ❖ Whitefish Wastewater Utility Plan, 2006
- ❖ South Whitefish Transportation Planning Project, 1999
- ❖ Southeast Whitefish Transportation Plan, 2001
- ❖ Bike and Pedestrian Pathways Master Plan, updated 2007
- ❖ A Trail Runs Through It Master Plan, 2006

When completed and adopted, the Whitefish Community Wide Transportation Plan will also be adopted by reference into the Growth Policy, as will the corridor plans and the Park & Recreation Master Plan. Of the adopted plans listed above, the utility master plans were just adopted in 2006 and need not be updated at this time. The South and Southeast Whitefish transportation plans will be superseded by the community-wide transportation plan, and therefore, need not be updated. A Trail Runs Through It Master Plan is also

very current, and need not be updated as a result of this Growth Policy. The Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan was updated in July, 2007, and is regularly updated by the Bike/Pedestrian Committee.

Also adopted by reference are certain area master plans and neighborhood plans, including:

- ❖ Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, 2005
- ❖ Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan, 2006
- ❖ South Whitefish Neighborhood Plan, 1998 and amended in 2000
- ❖ Riverside at Whitefish Neighborhood Plan, 1999
- ❖ Iron Horse Resort Neighborhood Plan, 1996
- ❖ Whitefish Area Schools Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan, 2004

None of these plans needs to be amended or updated as a result of this Growth Policy. It should be noted, however, that the Future Land Use Map does change the land use designation on some properties from those adopted through the Downtown Master Plan.

Many of the community trends and projections called for in Montana law are found not in this Growth Policy, but in companion documents. These need not be adopted by reference, but are valuable resources nonetheless. They include:

- ❖ Whitefish Resource Analysis, 2006
- ❖ Whitefish Housing Authority Needs Assessment; December, 2003
- ❖ Workforce Housing: A Report by the WF City-County Planning Board, 2003

Growth Policy Implementation

The Montana Code Annotated requires that the Growth Policy set forth “a timetable for implementing the growth policy”. The Whitefish City-County Growth Policy is generally based on a 20-year time horizon, but the Growth Policy is on-going and is dynamic---and it serves a dynamic community. Therefore, as discussed later in this element, this Growth Policy will be reviewed every two years and revised as necessary. Implementation will be on-going as is the community planning process.

Programs: Many of the recommendations in this Growth Policy will be implemented through new and/or expanded programs---either City programs, programs by other agencies, or partnerships involving the City and others. For example, the Natural Resources Element recommends a public information campaign to heighten awareness of how fertilizers and pesticides can impact water quality. Another recommendation supports baseline water quality monitoring for Whitefish Lake. This monitoring will actually be conducted by the Whitefish Lake Institute; a private non-profit supported by the City, but not a legal or functional part of the City organization. Other implementation programs focus on affordable housing, community sustainability, and economic development.

It is extremely important that programs recommended by the Growth Policy be prioritized for implementation and acted upon. Programs are initiated in a number of

ways. City sponsored programs often arise out of annual Council goal setting sessions and out of discussions and workshops to set budgeting priorities. Others come up from individual departments to the City Manager. The programs recommended by this Growth Policy should be reviewed at least every two years in conjunction with the overall Growth Policy review as described further in this element.

Policies: Every element in this Growth Policy contains statements of public policy; some general and some specific to a program or function. Through adherence to these policies, the Growth Policy is in part implemented. It is very important for the community to understand just what City policies are, how they are applied, and in what situations they may apply. It is therefore recommended that the City of Whitefish develop and publish a list of adopted policies in all areas from fiscal policies, to customer service, dissemination of public information, annexation, and growth and development. Adopted and recognized policies will lead to greater consistency and predictability in city government, and greater confidence on the part of the public.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Many Growth Policy recommendations and projects are accomplished through intergovernmental coordination. That topic will be discussed more thoroughly later in this element, but projects like the community-wide transportation plan and air quality monitoring are examples of intergovernmental efforts for the benefit of the Whitefish community.

Regulations: Like most Montana communities, Whitefish has adopted and administers zoning and subdivision regulations. Although the zoning code for the Whitefish Planning and Zoning Jurisdictional Area has been amended many times, the original structure of the code goes back to 1982. This Growth Policy contains several recommendations for revising the land development regulations, including:

- ❖ Review of codes for additional opportunities to provide and support affordable housing
- ❖ Adopt environmental standards in the form of a critical areas ordinance and a comprehensive hillside development ordinance
- ❖ Review of architectural, site design, and signage standards
- ❖ Establish design standards for the industrial zoning districts
- ❖ Low density and rural zoning districts to protect local farming
- ❖ Character based standards and neighborhood conservation districts
- ❖ Special regulations for “big box” commercial structures

The Whitefish Subdivision Regulations will also be revised following adoption of this Growth Policy. Sec. 76-1-601, MCA requires Growth Policies to contain statements as to how the governing body will “define the criteria” in Sec. 76-3-608(3)(a), MCA. These criteria are often referenced as the “primary review criteria” for subdivision approval, and are found in what is known as the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act. The criteria include assessing the impacts on:

- ❖ agriculture
- ❖ agricultural water user facilities
- ❖ local services
- ❖ the natural environment
- ❖ wildlife and wildlife habitat
- ❖ and public health and safety

The primary review criteria also include compliance with:

- ❖ survey requirements provided in Part 4 of Chapter 3, Local Regulation of Subdivisions, Title 76, MCA.
- ❖ local subdivision regulations
- ❖ the local subdivision review procedure
- ❖ the provision of easements for the location and installation of any planned utilities
- ❖ the provision of legal and physical access to each parcel within the proposed subdivision and the required notation of that access in the applicable plat and any instrument of transfer concerning the parcel.

Impact on agriculture: An impact on agriculture would be defined as an impact on an existing, on-going agricultural operation on an adjacent or neighboring property that may suffer some hindrance or other interference in the agricultural operation as a result of approval of a proposed subdivision.

Impact on agricultural water user facilities: This impact would be defined as the interference of conveyance of irrigation water and/or of ground water supplies relied upon by an existing, on-going agricultural operation on adjacent or neighboring property as a result of approval of a proposed subdivision.

Impact on local services: This is defined as an impact on the capacity and/or level of service of any local services such as utilities, streets, schools, parks, and bike and pedestrian facilities.

Impact on the natural environment: This shall be defined as impacts to air and water quality, including erosion, sedimentation, loss of native vegetation, and soil contamination.

Impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat: These impacts are defined as loss of documented critical habitat or disruption of daily or seasonal migration routes.

Impacts on public health and safety: This set of impacts can involve traffic generated by a proposed development, smoke, dust, noise, odors, and/or impacts on fire and police protection.

The standards for defining the remaining criteria will be set forth in revised subdivision regulations. Detailed analyses of the of the primary review criteria as they relate to specific proposed subdivisions will be set forth in the staff reports and finding of fact that

are reviewed by the Planning Board and governing body as part of each subdivision application.

Intergovernmental Coordination

As stated previously, intergovernmental coordination is key to implementing many of the programs recommended in this Growth Policy. Protecting the quality and integrity of community gateways was identified as a priority during the initial community visioning sessions. Another concern expressed was the planning and development activity that occurs outside of the planning jurisdictional area that could impact the character and quality of the Whitefish community. Addressing both of these issues will mean forging partnerships with Flathead County for joint long range planning and development review. This Growth Policy strongly recommends an addendum to the 2005 interlocal agreement between the City and County to set up these processes and procedures. It is further recommended that the Flathead County Long Range Planning Task Force (LRPTF) be the first point of communication for intergovernmental issues relative to planning, growth management, and development, and that the Task Force be used as the official communications platform for planning issues of county-wide significance. The Task Force is comprised of elected and appointed officials from the county and all three cities, as well as at-large members with specific areas of interest and expertise.



This commercial establishment represents the type of approach to gateway and corridor development that can be discouraged through cooperative planning among Flathead County and the three municipalities.

Coordination with state agencies is also critical. As previously discussed, the City of Whitefish and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) are cooperatively conducting the community-wide transportation plan and Hwy 93 corridor study. The City and Flathead County must also coordinate closely with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as the TMDL (total maximum daily loading) water quality standards are released. The City (primarily) and County are already cooperating with the state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) on the *Whitefish Area Schools Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan* and on the *Trail Runs Through It* project.

Growth Policy Amendments and Updates

Periodic Review: A Growth Policy is not a static, end state document. Communities are dynamic---they change over time---and a Growth Policy must be as dynamic and adaptable as the community it serves. Because of the intense growth pressures and the sweeping changes taking place in Whitefish and in the Flathead Valley generally, **it is strongly recommended that this Growth Policy be thoroughly reviewed every two years, and updated as needed.**

In two years from the time this Growth Policy is adopted, and every two years thereafter, the Whitefish City-County Planning Board shall conduct a review of the Growth Policy. This review shall consist of an analysis of the Policy's effectiveness in working toward community goals and in carrying out its vision. The review shall, at a minimum:

- ❖ Revisit trends and projections presented in the Resource Analysis, and update if new data becomes available.
- ❖ Note which Recommended Actions have been, or are being, carried out. If there is sufficient history, analyze the Recommended Action's effectiveness in addressing the issue(s) for which it was intended.

- ❖ Document any "unintended consequences" that may be occurring as a result of Policies and Recommended Actions.
- ❖ Note programs which have been completed or begun since adoption or the most recent review. Note priority programs (if any) that have not yet begun.
- ❖ Check for changes in community conditions, demographics, economics, and other factors that would require revisions to the Growth Policy.
- ❖ Note any new issues which may have arisen in the community since adoption or most recent review, and recommend the appropriate process through which to address those issues.

The Board shall submit a written report of its finding to the City Council. Should the Board find that revisions are warranted, the Board shall so recommend to the City Council, and shall prepare a scope of work and schedule for revisions to be made. All reviews, revisions, updates, and all procedures shall be in accordance with applicable Montana law.

Amendments: This Growth Policy and the Whitefish Zoning Jurisdiction regulations shall provide that any person may apply for an amendment to the text of the Growth Policy. Provisions shall also be made for owners of real property or their authorized agents to petition for amendments to the Future Land Use Map. All procedures and criteria for text and map amendments shall be set forth in the land development regulations, but generally those criteria shall include:

- ❖ A specific error was made in the Growth Policy that necessitates an amendment to the text or map in order to preserve a property right, or to preserve or achieve equal protection under the law. (Example: A property may have been treated

differently than a similarly situated property in the same general area under the same general conditions.)

- ❖ Community conditions have changed to the degree that amendments to the map and/or text will facilitate achieving community goals and the overall vision of the citizens of Whitefish. (Example: Increased infrastructure capacity may render a property or an entire area more advantageous for additional community growth.)
- ❖ There is a clear, extraordinary community benefit in terms of achieving goals, resolving problems or issues, or furthering the realization of the Whitefish community vision. (Example: A proposed amendment may produce desired community benefits such as affordable housing, bike and pedestrian trails, or a needed transportation corridor.)

Neighborhood Plans: As set forth in 76-1-601(4), a growth policy **may** contain one or more neighborhood plans. However, the law contains no specific description of a neighborhood nor of its contents. This Growth Policy and the local land development regulations shall provide for the formulation and application for consideration and approval of neighborhood plans. The neighborhood plan shall be an option for refining and/or amending the Growth Policy. It shall generally be used for areas that are already developed, and shall generally be available for neighborhood residents to formulate comprehensive plans for the preservation, enhancement, or transition of existing neighborhoods. Neighborhood plans may also be initiated by the City. All procedures, requirements, and criteria for neighborhood plans shall be set forth in the land development regulations, but generally those criteria shall include:

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

Subarea Plans: Subarea plans are a Growth Policy amendment mechanism through which a developer or group of developers may plan for the orderly development of primarily undeveloped land. Like neighborhood plans, the requirements and procedures for submittal and review of subarea plans will be set forth in the land development regulations. Generally however, in order to ensure compliance with this Growth Policy, subarea plans shall be subject to a strict community benefit test that includes:

- ❖ The subarea plan must substantially further the goals and vision of the Growth Policy.
- ❖ The plan must provide of substantial community benefits such as affordable housing, open space, protection of air and water quality, protection and/or enhancement of critical areas, provide for essential public facilities including parks, ped/bikeways, streets, and school sites as needed and as applicable to each individual subarea plan.

- ❖ All on and off site improvements must be provided for, including but not limited to streets, utilities, drainage, and bike/pedestrian facilities.
- ❖ Any and all environmental constraints and natural hazards on site shall be avoided or effectively mitigated.
- ❖ Any and all adverse impacts upon existing neighborhoods shall be avoided or effectively mitigated. These shall include but may not be limited to traffic, noise, and overburdening of public facilities and services.

Corridor Plans: The Land Use Element of this Growth Policy recommends that corridor plans be formulated and adopted for five specific transportation corridors within the Whitefish area. Upon adoption, these corridor plans will effectively amend this Growth Policy with goals, policies, and recommended actions specific to each corridor. Following that, any special regulations regarding land use, access, buffering, screening, and/or landscaping may be considered.

Implementation Priorities

As stated previously in this element, the Growth Policy recommends numerous programs and new and amended regulations to carry out the goals and vision of this growth policy. Initiating and carrying out these programs and regulations will take time and resources, and therefore, priorities must be carefully set. It is recommended that immediately upon adoption of this Growth Policy, the City Council and City Manager, in consultation with the Planning Board and Whitefish Planning & Building Director, establish a priority list of programs and regulations for the next two years. Upon the biennial review of the Growth Policy by the Planning Board (as set forth in this element under **Periodic Review**), implementation priorities shall again be set for the next two-year period.

Initially, it is recommended that implementation priorities include:

- ❖ Update of the subdivision regulations as required by amendments to Montana law enacted in 2005
- ❖ Critical Areas Ordinance
- ❖ Rewrite of the zoning code to adopt “character based” regulations and to address other issues set forth in this Growth Policy
- ❖ Evaluation of additional affordable housing programs and/or regulations
- ❖ Corridor plans

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF PLANNING TERMS

This Glossary of Planning Terms has been assembled in order to assist the reader to better understand the issues addressed and concepts set forth in the Growth Policy. Many terms used in planning are very standard, meaning that their definition is essentially the same from one jurisdiction to the next. Others are more general and must therefore be defined operationally each time they are used. The terms defined in this glossary represent some of each. When a general term was operationally defined, the definition reflects the way in which the term is used in the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy.

Every effort was made to use published sources for the definitions presented here. The primary source was *A Planners Dictionary* published in 2004 by the American Planning Association. Definitions from this source are noted (PD). Another source, used primarily for confirmation, was *The Latest Illustrated Book of Development Definitions* published by Rutgers University Press, also in 2004 (DD). Still other definitions were taken from Internet sources ranging from the U.S. Department of Justice web site to Wikipedia. The Growth Policy itself supplied some definitions, and several of the definitions for scientific terms were from material generated by the Whitefish Lake Institute. When no suitable definition from a published or Internet source was available, definitions were provided by project consultant Applied Communications (AppCom).

Affordable housing	Housing for purchase or rent that can be obtained by a person or family earning up to 125% of the area median income, and all housing costs (PITI or monthly rent, association fees, utilities) do not exceed 30% of the gross household income. (WHA, WF Growth Policy)
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Federal law enacted in 1990 that prohibits discrimination based on disability in employment, state and local government activities, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. ADA requires most public buildings to be accessible to those with disabilities. (US DOJ web site; AppCom)
Arterial street	A street designed or utilized primarily for high vehicular speeds or for heavy volumes of traffic on a continuous route with intersections at grade. Direct access to abutting properties is provided and traffic control measures are used to grant priority to the movement of through traffic. (PD)
Base economy	Activities that produce and distribute goods and services for export to firms and individuals outside a defined localized economic area. Basic activity exports goods and services and brings new dollars into the area. (PD)
Big box store	A single retail establishment that is the sole occupant of a structure of 15,000 square feet or more of gross floor area. Regional and/or community-wide retail/wholesale sales can include but are not limited to membership warehouse clubs that emphasize bulk sales, discount stores, and department stores. (PD adapted by AppCom)
Bollard lighting	Refers to a type of lighting fixture (usually outdoor) that is usually in the shape of a round or square column, is affixed to the ground, but rises to a height of only four feet (more or less). Often referred to generally as “pedestrian level” lighting. (AppCom)

BTEX (water pollutant)	Benzene, toluene, ethyl-benzene, xylene. Gasoline constituents that can be detected in water samples to indicate that motor fuels have been introduced to a water body. BTEX are known to have the potential to cause human health problems and to affect the aquatic environment. (WF Lake Institute and AppCom)
Bulb-out	This is one of several terms used to describe radiused curb extensions into the intersection. Their purpose is to slow vehicle speed through the intersection, and to improve pedestrian safety by increasing the pedestrian's visibility and decreasing the distance the pedestrian must travel to cross the street. (AppCom from various sources.)
Capital improvement	Any physical asset constructed or purchased to provide, improve, or replace a public facility and which is large scale and high in cost. The cost of a capital improvement is generally nonrecurring and may require multiyear financing. (PD)
Category killer	Term used in marketing and strategic management to describe (usually) a large retail chain store that through advertising, brand identity, and pricing, has such a distinct sustainable competitive advantage that competition finds it almost impossible to operate profitably in that industry or market. Examples include Best Buy, Petco, and Toys R Us. (AppCom and various Internet sources.)
Collector street	A classification of street that "collects" traffic from minor (usually residential) streets and conveys it to the arterial street system. Collector streets are designed to both move traffic efficiently and to serve adjacent land uses. Typical daily vehicle counts range from 5,000 up to 20,000 trips in larger cities. (City of Denver and AppCom)
Community (neighborhood) character	This term is used in planning and urban design to describe the relationship among predominant structure size, spacing of structures, spacing from the street, open spaces, landscape, and streetscape within a specific area or neighborhood. (AppCom)
Concurrency	That the necessary public facilities and services (water, sewer, stormwater management, parks, schools, street, pedestrian/bikeways, etc) to maintain the adopted level of service standards are available when the impacts of development occur. (PD)
Connectivity	Term used to describe the relationship between a structure (usually a single-family home) and the street on which it is located. Houses with minimal setbacks and open porches, decks, or similar outdoor living spaces are considered to have a high degree of connectivity with the adjacent street. (AppCom)
Conservation easement	A nonpossessory interest in real property imposing limitations or affirmative obligations, the purposes of which include retaining or protecting natural, scenic, or open space values of real property; assuring its availability for agricultural, forest, recreational, or open space use; protecting natural resources; or maintaining air or water quality. (PD)
Conservation subdivision	A form of planned residential development that concentrates buildings on a part of the site (the cluster area) to allow the remaining land (the open space) to be used for recreation, common open space, or preservation of environmentally sensitive areas. The open space may be owned by either a private or public entity. (PD)
Continuity (streets)	The degree to which streets continue through the community and/or connect with other streets, as opposed to looping or terminating in a cul-de-sac. (AppCom)
Cost burdened	Term used to describe households in which housing costs exceed 30% of the gross household income. (WHA, AppCom, and other sources.)
Critical areas	See 'Environmentally sensitive areas'
Density	The number of dwelling units per gross acre devoted to residential development. (PD)

Entitlements	Refers to permits granted or other actions taken by local government that “vests” a developer and/or property owner in a certain type and/or density of development. (AppCom)
Environmentally sensitive areas	Any area in which plant or animal life or their habitats are either rare or especially valuable because of their special nature or role in an ecosystem and which could be easily disturbed or degraded by human activities and developments. (PD)
Eutrophication	Eutrophication is a process whereby water bodies, such as lakes, estuaries, or slow-moving streams receive excess nutrients that stimulate excessive plant growth (algae, periphyton attached algae, and nuisance plants and weeds). This enhanced plant growth reduces dissolved oxygen in the water when dead plant material decomposes and can cause other organisms to die. (USGS web site.)
Fair market rents	The rent, including utility allowances, determined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development for purposes of administering the HUD Section 8 Existing Housing Program. (PD)
Floodplain	The special flood hazard lands adjoining a watercourse, whose surface elevation is lower than the base flood elevation, that are subject to periodic inundation during floods. (PD) (Note: The base flood elevation is defined by the “100-year” flood.)
Gasoline constituents	The various hydrocarbons found in gasoline, many of which are detected as pollutants when gasoline has been introduced into lakes and streams. (Various Internet sources.)
Growth Management	The use by a community of a wide range of techniques in combination to determine the amount, type, and rate of development desired by the community and to channel that growth into designated areas. Growth management policies can be implemented through growth rates, zoning, capital improvement programs, public facilities ordinances, urban limit lines, standards for levels of service, and other programs. (PD)
Hydric soils	Somewhat poorly drained to very poorly drained soils where the water table is at or near the surface during the growing season. (NRCS web site.)
Impact fee	A fee charged by local governments to developers as a total or partial reimbursement for the cost of providing additional facilities or services needed as a result of new development (e.g., wider roads, new sewers, etc.) (PD)
Implementation	A series of steps or actions to ensure attainment of planning, development, and environmental goals, policies, and recommendations of the Growth Policy over time. These implementation steps and actions are set forth in the final element of the Growth Policy. (PD adapted by AppCom)
Important farmlands	A land use designation used in the 1996 Whitefish City-County Master Plan that called for residential densities of one unit per 20 acres. It included lands characterized as “prime”, “prime if irrigated”, and “lands of state importance” by the Soil Conservation Service. (1996 Master Plan)
Inclusionary (housing provision)	This term is used to describe a voluntary or mandatory program of providing a specified percentage of affordable housing units to be included within a market rate project. (AppCom)
Infill	The development of vacant or under-utilized land within urbanized areas of a community that generally is already served by water, sewer, streets, and other essential services. (AppCom)
Interlocal agreement	This refers to the agreement executed between Flathead County and the City of Whitefish in 2005 that established the current “two mile” Whitefish planning and zoning jurisdictional area. (AppCom)
Lakeshore protection zone	An area 20 feet (measured horizontally) above mean high water of a lake of at least 160 acres in size that is subject to lakeshore protection regulations adopted and administered by local governments pursuant to Title 75, Chapter 7, Part 2, Montana Code Annotated. (MCA and WFCC)

Late comers agreement	A procedure through which a developer who extends utility mains and/or streets to serve a proposed development may be partially reimbursed by developers and individuals who subsequently use said extensions for development. (AppCom)
Limnology	The study or the biological, chemical, hydrological, geological, and physical aspects of inland fresh water lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, wetlands, and groundwater. (Wikipedia)
Linkage (housing provision)	Refers to zoning provisions that “link” the development of commercial space to the need for appropriate workforce housing.
Low impact development (LID)	LID describes both the practice and techniques of treating stormwater at its source as opposed to concentrating it in pipes, then conveying it to where it can be treated and/or disposed of. LID techniques include restricting impervious surfaces in development, permeable pavement, and the storage of rain water for irrigation of green space and even for flushing toilets. (AppCom from various sources.)
Median home price	The price of a home in a designated area in which 50% of the homes sold for below that price, and 50% of the homes sold for more. (Note: The median home price can be significantly different than the mean, or “average”, home price. (AppCom)
Modes (transportation)	This term refers to the various means of transporting people around a community. The usual means, or “modes”, of transportation may include walking, cycling, mass transit, or automobile. (AppCom)
Neighborhood conservation district	A district intended to accommodate unique land use, urban design, and other distinctive characteristics of older established neighborhoods. (PD)
Nexus	A legal and/or rational basis, set forth in the Growth Policy, for enacting a regulation or program to address community issues. (AppCom)
Non-attainment	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designation for a community that does not meet ambient air quality standards for CO and/or particulates. (AppCom from published sources.)
Nutrients (as related to water quality)	Term includes carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, that when introduced into the water column, spur the growth of algae and other phytoplankton. (WF Lake Institute and other sources.)
Oligomesotrophic	Describes the condition of a lake that is experiencing higher levels of phytoplankton productivity, including algae blooms, with decreasing clarity and quality. (AppCom)
Oligotrophic	A term that describes lakes that are clean, clear, of very high quality, and low nutrient levels. (WF Lake Institute)
Oversizing	The practice of installing larger diameter water or sewer pipe than needed to serve the intended development in order to allow for additional development in the future. The developer is reimbursed the cost differential for the larger pipe. (AppCom)
Planned unit development (PUD)	A development planned as a single unit, rather than as an aggregate of individual lots, with design flexibility from traditional siting regulations (such as side yards, setbacks, and height limitations) or land-use restrictions (such as prohibitions against mixing land uses within a development). (PD)
Plant investment fee (PIF)	Connection fee for new water and sewer service charged at the time a building permit is issued. Charges are based on capital investments in the plants after they were built so that new development essentially “buys into” the infrastructure by paying a proportionate share. (WF Growth Policy)
PM-10	Airborne particles (air pollution) that are 2.5 to 10 micrometers in size. (WF Growth Policy and other sources)
Riparian areas	Land areas that are traversed by or that otherwise border lakes, rivers, streams, or estuaries, and that perform some of the same ecological functions as wetlands. (AppCom using multiple sources.)

Scale (of development)	This term describes the size of structures, amount of yard area and other open spaces, and their proportionality to the street and the area or neighborhood as a whole. (AppCom)
Seismic hazard zones	For purposes of designing structures to better withstand earthquakes, the International Construction Codes Council has designated five separate seismic hazard zones. The Whitefish area is Zone III, which indicates significant potential for seismic activity. (AppCom from multiple sources.)
Streetscape	A design term referring to all the elements that constitute the physical makeup of a street and that, as a group, define its character, including building frontage, street paving, street furniture, landscaping, including trees and other plantings, awnings, and marquees, signs, and lighting. (PD)
Sustainability	For purposes of this Growth Policy, this term means meeting the needs of the present while ensuring that future generations will have the same or better opportunities. (WF Growth Policy)
Tax increment financing (TIF)	A tool used by cities and other development authorities to finance certain types of infrastructure and other public improvements. The public purposes of TIF are the redevelopment of blighted areas, construction of low- and moderate income housing, provision of employment opportunities, and improvement of the tax base. With TIF, a city “captures” the additional property taxes generated as a result of the public improvements, and uses those additional funds to retire debt used to make the improvements. (PD, adapted by AppCom)
Timberlands	A land use designation from the 1996 WF City-County Master Plan; density of one unit per 20 acres on land public and private lands rated high for timber productivity. (1996 Master Plan)
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Loading. This term describes the maximum amount of nutrient and other pollution loading that a water body can receive and still meet water quality standards for various functions (recreational, agricultural, industrial, domestic water supply, etc.). (AppComm and published sources.)
Traffic calming	A concept fundamentally concerned with reducing the adverse impact of motor vehicles on developed areas. Usually involves reducing vehicle speeds, providing more space for pedestrians and cyclists, and improving the local environment. (PD)
Transfer of development rights (TDR)	The removal of the right to develop or build, expressed in dwelling units per acre or floor area, from land in one zoning district, and the transfer of that right to land in another district where such transfer is permitted. (DD)
Vehicle trip	Term used to describe a single vehicle arriving or leaving a site. Also used to describe a single vehicle traveling in past a trip meter or other vehicle counting device. (AppCom)
VMT	Vehicle Miles Traveled. Used as a measure of vehicle use within a community. (AppCom)
VOC	Volatile Organic Compounds. Organic chemical compounds that have high enough vapor pressures under normal conditions to significantly vaporize and enter the atmosphere. VOCs include a wide range of molecules including hydrocarbons. For purposes of this Growth Policy, VOCs are a documented pollutant found in Whitefish Lake. (WF Lake Institute and various sources.)
Wetlands	Those areas that are inundated and saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions, including swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. (PD)
Zoning district	A part, zone, or geographic area within the city or under its extraterritorial jurisdiction within which certain zoning or development regulations apply. (PD) This term also describes a specific zoning district contained in the city zoning code, ie., WR-1, WB-2, etc. (AppCom)

PLANNING & BUILDING DEPARTMENT
1005C Baker Ave Whitefish, MT 59937
(406) 863-2410 Fax (406) 863-2409



To: Whitefish City Council
From: David Taylor, Director of Planning & Building
Date: November 16, 2009
RE: 2009 Review Summary of 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy

Summary

The 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy was adopted in November of 2007 to be the baseline long-range planning document for the greater Whitefish area over the next 10 years. It established issues, goals, policies, and recommended actions for natural resources, land use, economic growth, transportation, housing, and community facilities. The Implementation Element of the plan requires a periodic two-year review, with recommendations to the City Council by the Whitefish City-County Planning Board. It has been two years since the plan was adopted, therefore it is time to analyze how effective the Policy has been in carrying out the adopted community vision. The Planning Board completed their review, after several minor changes this document was forwarded it to the City Council, which adopted it by resolution on November 2, 2009 as an addendum to the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy, keeping the infill policy.

The Growth Policy calls for biennial reviews of the following six items:

- Revisit trends and projections presented in the Resource Analysis, and update if new data becomes available.
- Note which Recommended Actions have been, or are being, carried out. If there is sufficient history, analyze the Recommended Action's effectiveness in addressing the issue(s) for which it was intended.
- Document any "unintended consequences" that may be occurring as a result of Policies and Recommended Actions.

- Note programs which have been completed or begun since adoption or the most recent review. Note priority programs (if any) that have not yet begun.
- Check for changes in community conditions, demographics, economics, and other factors that would require revisions to the Growth Policy.
- Note any new issues which may have arisen in the community since adoption or most recent review, and recommend the appropriate process through which to address those issues.

The Planning Board was tasked with submitting a written report of the review to the City Council, with recommendations as to any revisions that might be warranted. The Growth Policy calls for the Planning Board to recommend updated implementation priorities for the council to establish. This is the report submitted, and the report, the infill policy, and implementation priorities were ratified by the City Council.

In the two years since its adoption by the Council, Growth Policy implementation has gotten off to a good start. Major priority projects such as the Critical Areas Ordinance, the Subdivision Code update, and implementation of elements of the Downtown Master Plan have all been accomplished or are underway.

The only significant new issues are slowdown in construction growth trends and the breakdown of the Interlocal Agreement between the City of Whitefish and Flathead County. The Interlocal Agreement issue should be at least partially resolved by the next two year review. The construction slowdown may impact some of the land use policies and the urgency for affordable housing solutions.

Current Report

As outlined in the Growth Policy biennial review prescription, staff has gone through the Growth Policy and analyzed its effectiveness in working toward community goals and carrying out its vision. What follows are updates and comments on various aspects of the Policy, notably the Resource Analysis and Recommended Actions adopted. At the end, staff will make recommendations on a revised implementation strategy.

Trends and projections from the Resource Analysis

Staff reviewed the Resource Analysis and found several changes in conditions in the two years since the Growth Policy was adopted.

On July 1, 2009, the US Census Bureau issued updated estimates for 2008. As of July 1, 2008 Whitefish is the 10th most populated city in the state of Montana with a population of 8,281. This is a 64.6% increase since the 2000 census when the city had a population of 5,032. The population estimate for Flathead County is 88,473, an 18.8% increase since the 2000 census.

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>2008 Population Estimate</u>	<u>% Change 2000-2008</u>	<u>% of Total County Population</u>
Whitefish	8,281	64.6%	9.4%
Columbia Falls	5,261	44.3%	5.9%
Kalispell	21,182	48.9%	23.9%
Flathead County Total	88,473	18.8	100.0%

Table 4: Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places in Montana: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008 (SUB-EST2004-04-30)

Source: Population Division, US Census Bureau

Release Date: July 1, 2009

Table 1: Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties of Montana: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008 (CO-EST2008-01-30)

Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau

Release Date: March 19, 2009

NEW RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION

New residential construction peaked in 2005 with 292 total dwelling units constructed. New residential construction has slowed significantly in the last year with residential remodels outpacing new construction nearly 3:1.

Whitefish is not unique in the dramatic drop in building permit activity. Nationwide, housing authorizations (building permits) are down 32.4% in August 2009 compared to August 2008.

TYPE	2006	2007	2008
Single Family	60	22	29
Duplex	48	20	6
Multi-Family	23	32	0
Mobile	0	0	0
TOTAL	131	74	35

Source: Whitefish Building Department records

TYPE	1980-1989 average annual	1990-1999 average annual	2000-2008 average annual
Single Family	18	29	56
Duplex	5	9	25
Multi-Family	19	12	47
Mobile	1	0	0
TOTAL	43	50	128

Source: Whitefish Building Department records

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Total student enrollment in the 2008-09 year has dropped 12.1% since the last enrollment numbers were calculated for the Growth Policy Resource document. According to the Flathead County Superintendent of Schools *2008 Statistical Report of Schools*, the Whitefish School District enrollment is down 11% over the previous 10 years for the elementary grades (K-8) and down 14% for the high school. For all schools in the entire County, enrollment is down 1%.

	<u>1980</u> <u>1981</u>	<u>1985</u> <u>1986</u>	<u>1990</u> <u>1991</u>	<u>1995</u> <u>1996</u>	<u>2000</u> <u>2001</u>	<u>2004</u> <u>2005</u>	<u>2008</u> <u>2009</u>
Public Schools	(Muldown, Central, Whitefish High)						
K-8	941	1140	1216	1364	1279	1192	1130
9-12	541	515	493	606	697	692	551
TOTAL PUBLIC	1482	1655	1709	1970	1976	1884	1681
Private Schools	Whitefish Christian Academy						
K-8	Not open	57	125	114	105	121	82
TOTAL	1482	1712	1834	2084	2081	2005	1763

HOUSING COSTS & AFFORDABILITY

Housing prices across the valley continue to rise. Interestingly, housing prices in Whitefish were higher in 2005 than in 2008 with a 4 percent drop in the value of the median houses sold.

Location	Median Price 2004	Median Price 2005	Median Price 2008	% Change 2004- 08
Bigfork	\$238,500	\$297,400	\$315,000	35%
Columbia Falls	\$148,000	\$199,250	\$202,000	36.5%
Kalispell	\$169,000	\$192,000	\$213,900	26.6%
Lakeside/Somers	\$276,000	\$274,900	\$335,000	21.4%
Whitefish	\$265,000	\$319,000	\$305,000	15.1%
Total Residential	\$179,000	\$214,450	\$235,000	31.3%

Source: Northwest Montana Association of Realtors

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLAN

The city is engaged in a number of public infrastructure projects including a new Emergency Services Building in Baker Commons. This facility will house the fire department, police department and the municipal court. The facility is a \$6.6 million project and is 32,044 square feet. It is scheduled to be completed in the Spring of 2010.

The other major capital improvement being undertaken by the city involve improving the downtown business district streets. Third Street from Spokane and Baker Avenues is being reconstructed in the fall of 2009, followed by the south half of Central Avenue (between 2nd and 3rd Streets) in the spring 2010 and the north half of Central Avenue (between 2nd and Railway Streets) in the fall 2010. Prior to the start of these projects, the city completed a parking lot at the northwest corner of Spokane Ave and 2nd Street. This parking lot is intended, in part, to provide overflow parking during the reconstruction of the downtown streets.

ECONOMICS

According to the National Bureau for Economic Research, the United States has been in a recession since December 2007. However, the state of Montana overall has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country at 5.4% compared with a nationwide rate of 8.1%. According to the *Labor Day Report to the Governor*, Flathead County and the entire northwestern part of the state has been hit harder by the recession than the rest

of the state. The unemployment rate in Flathead County is 9.1% - higher than the national average.

“Northwest Montana’s timber industry has been severely impacted by the deflation in the housing bubble and the resulting slowdown in demand for building products. In addition, the Flathead area, which relied heavily on the construction industry for income growth in recent years, has also been harmed by the burst of the housing bubble. The loss of income from the timber and construction industries has led to layoffs in retail and other consumer-based industries.

“Construction employment has decreased by 21% since the start of the recession, and employment in durable goods manufacturing (which includes wood products manufacturing) has declined by 11%. Real estate has also lost 9.8% of its employment since December 2007. Northwest Montana and the Bozeman area have above average concentrations of these three industries, which helps explain the large recessionary impacts in these communities.”

Source: ‘Labor Day Report to the Governor’ September 2009 Montana Department of Labor and Industries

Locally, of the top ten employers identified in the 2005 Resource Document, Idaho Timber shut down operations in 2009. The other businesses are still operating.

TRANSPORTATION

In the 2006 Resource Analysis, the only transit service in Flathead County was Eagle Transit which only provided service to the elderly and disabled. In early 2008, Eagle Transit expanded their services to provide three weekday morning routes out of Whitefish to Kalispell and three weekday evening routes back into Whitefish from Kalispell.

Work continues on the completion of a Transportation Plan and Corridor Study for Whitefish.

2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy Recommended Actions Review

Below we provide notes on those adopted Recommended Actions which have either been achieved or are underway, with comments on their effectiveness if applicable. We also review the controversial 50% Infill Policy under the Land Use Element section on page fourteen. Items with no comments have either not been initiated, or not enough information was available on the progress to provide information.

Natural Resources Element

Air Quality

1. Require dust-free surfaces on all new driveways and parking and vehicle storage areas within the planning jurisdictional area.

Underway. The parking section of the zoning code already requires this for new construction and existing multi-family and commercial use, but does not require it for existing single family residential unless the house is expanded by 50% or more.

2. Require developments to provide off-site pedestrian and bikeway improvements “up front” so that facilities are available concurrently with demand.
3. Continue to work and cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies on air quality monitoring programs for the Whitefish area.
4. Continue to explore programs and regulations that will improve, or at least maintain, Whitefish’s air quality over time.
5. Initiate a program to establish reasonable benchmarks for VMT, and to reduce VMT growth as the city grows.

The updated Whitefish Area Transportation Plan due in 2010 should dictate growth in alternative transportation modes to reduce carbon emissions.

6. Evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of a wood stove buy-back program.

Water Quality

1. Ensure that baseline water quality monitoring programs are established for all Whitefish area lakes, rivers, and streams, and use the outcomes to target measures to improve water quality.

Underway. The City of Whitefish supports the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) water quality monitoring program via a grant in the amount of \$15,000 annually. The grant money is split evenly in the Public Works Department Water Fund (\$5,000) , Wastewater Fund (\$5,000), and Stormwater Fund (\$5,000). The grant money supports physical and chemical monitoring at two locations on Whitefish Lake, in addition to tributary inputs including; Lazy Creek, Swift Creek, Hellroaring Creek, Smith Creek, Viking Creek. Lake output is monitored on the Whitefish River at the Hwy 93 Bridge. WLI also monitors atmospheric nutrient deposition as related to water quality. Monitoring sites within the Whitefish Planning Jurisdiction not included in the WLI program include the Whitefish River downstream of the Hwy 93 Bridge, Haskill Creek and Cow Creek.

2. Formulate and adopt regulations that would “piggy back” onto the 20-foot lakeshore protection zone and 10’ structural buffer to address water quality issues such as erosion, sedimentation, nutrient loading, and pollutants from construction (paint, stains, corrosives, etc) farther landward adjacent to Whitefish, Lost Coon, and Blanchard Lakes.

Achieved. The Critical Areas Ordinance, adopted by the City Council in 2008, established buffers and performance standards for new construction around Whitefish, Lost Coon, and Blanchard Lakes.

3. Initiate stream bank regulations, including minimum setbacks and undisturbed buffer areas, that are expressly designed to protect and enhance water quality, and to keep stream banks and shorelines in their natural condition to the extent possible.

Achieved. The Critical Areas Ordinance, adopted by the City Council in 2008, established stream bank regulations and minimum setbacks.

4. Enact water quality enhancement measures in the Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan (WSSUP).

Achieved. The Whitefish Stormwater System Utility Plan was recent updated and adopted as the City of Whitefish Engineering Standards. The document provides updated performance standards for erosion control, stormwater, and water quality enhancement.

5. Initiate an intense public information campaign on how fertilizers and pesticides can impact the water quality of Whitefish's lakes and streams.

Through the support of the City of Whitefish, WLI is able to promote educational and outreach programs that speak to the issue of fertilizer and pesticide application. These programs include presentations to HOA's, information in WLI's quarterly newsletter *LakeFront* and WLI education boat tours. However, a specific public information campaign is not currently in place. More work needs to be done in this area.

6. Study seasonal ordinary high water (OHWM) on Blanchard Lake for a period of five years in order to establish OHWM in accordance with Montana law.

Underway. Last spring was the fourth year of a five year study initiated to establish the seasonal ordinary high water on Blanchard Lake.

7. Based upon the VOC study produced by the Whitefish Lake Institute,
 - a. Strongly encourage the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to consider banning carbureted two-stroke engines from Whitefish and Blanchard Lakes.

As a result of the WLI VOC study, State Senator Dan Weinberg introduced a bill to restrict the sale or resale of carbureted two-stroke engines. The bill failed in committee. However, the marine engine industry is responding to public pressure by phasing out carbureted two-stroke technology and replacing it with cleaner burning fuel injected four stroke technology.

- b. Encourage the City of Whitefish to provide a bilge purge area at the City Beach boat launch in order prevent gasoline constituents from entering the lake directly.

Underway. As a result of the WLI VOC study, the Whitefish City Council approved the installation of an interceptor ditch and dry well type structure on the City Beach Boat Ramp. Due to a complicated permitting process for allowing an overflow discharge to Whitefish Lake, this project is on hold. The city will continue to discuss options with MDEQ. At a minimum, educational signage concerning boat bilge pollution should be installed at the boat ramp.

8. In order to avoid concentrations of impacts on the resource, encourage the City, County, and State of Montana to provide additional public access points to Whitefish Lake.

Underway. Last year the State of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks took over management of Les Mason Park from the Friends of Les Mason Park. Recently the Public Works Department had a conversation with a land owner along the Whitefish River that is considering donating the property as a City Park and memorial. The City will continue to pursue further discussions with this property owner.

9. Work with and support non-profit conservation groups such as the Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Whitefish Lake Institute, and Nature Conservancy to preserve and maintain critical waterfront sites as open space.

Underway. Thus far the only wetlands preserved as open space have been those at Viking Creek given to the Whitefish Lake Institute for management

10. Execute an agreement with the Montana DEQ and the Flathead County Health Department to actively identify, pursue, and correct failing and substandard individual sewage disposal systems that are polluting surface and/or ground waters.

Critical Areas

1. Initiate a public awareness program on the value and function of wetlands in both an urban and rural environment.

In 2008, the City of Whitefish approved the Viking Creek Development Proposal which included a 30 acre wetland gift to the Whitefish Lake Institute. WLI will protect the area for water quality and wildlife habitat in perpetuity while opening a portion of the area to an interpretive nature trail. WLI has been active in creating public awareness about the wetlands.

2. Map environmentally sensitive areas at an appropriate planning level so that developers and the general public are made aware of their presence.

Achieved. Environmentally sensitive areas were mapped as background data for the Critical Areas Ordinance. That information is being integrated into the City's GIS database. Upcoming DNRC aerial photography of the planning jurisdiction will improve our sensitive areas mapping considerably by providing more detailed topography and more accurate photography.

3. Enact regulatory requirements for site specific wetland identification, evaluation, preservation, management, buffering, and enhancement in conjunction with new and expanded development.

Achieved. The Critical Areas Ordinance fulfilled this recommended action.

4. Develop a comprehensive critical area ordinance (CAO) that:
 - a. Identifies the critical resources to be protected
 - b. Establishes benchmarks for each resource (current condition)
 - c. Establishes goals desired for each resource
 - d. Determines the existing impacts and threats that are contributing to the degradation, or potential degradation, of the resource, and determine the relative significance of each impact
 - e. Establishes performance-based standards to achieve desired goals
 - f. Establishes guidelines to achieve standards
 - g. Establishes guidelines and mitigation measures for stream crossings, terrain disturbance on steep slopes, and stream and wetland encroachments

Achieved. The Critical Areas Ordinance enacted by the Council fulfilled this recommended action item.

5. Promote a greater understanding of what specific natural hazards are prevalent in the Whitefish area, and how they can be avoided or mitigated.
6. Add a menu of effective mitigation measures for high ground water to the building code through adoption of supplementary regulations.

Achieved. The 2008 Engineering Standards address this issue through strict requirements for development in high groundwater areas. The CAO also provides requirements for development in these areas.

7. Define a "maximum buildable" slope and establish it consistently in zoning and subdivision regulations and in the public facility design standards.

The Critical Areas Ordinance does not define a "maximum buildable" slope, however the revised subdivision regulations requires newly created lots to have a buildable area with slopes no greater than 30%.

8. Initiate a program to establish baseline data on critical wildlife habitat at a sufficient level of detail to alert developers and landowners of wildlife issues.

9. For areas of severe soil limitations, as mapped by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), require site specific soil and subsurface investigations and mitigation measures for all developments.
10. Incorporate environmental standards into the City's floodplain ordinance, and encourage floodplains to be retained in their natural state.

Achieved. Updated floodplain regulations were adopted by the City Council in March, 2008. The floodplain is also identified for protection in the CAO and the Subdivision Regulations.

Economic Development Element

1. Implement code and master plan (Growth Policy) amendments recommended in the Downtown Master Plan.

Achieved. Zoning code and Architectural Review Standards amendments were approved by the City Council in 2008 as part of the Downtown Master Plan implementation.

2. Research regulatory amendments to discourage or prohibit formula business from locating in the downtown area.

Achieved. The Downtown Master Plan implementation zoning code changes prohibit formula retail from locating in the Old Town Commercial District downtown.

3. Explore adding an economic impact analysis requirement to the permitting process for big box commercial facilities.

Pending. Staff anticipates adding additional big box regulations when the Zoning Ordinance is revised to include character based zoning.

4. Review design and signage standards, propose amendments where necessary, and continue to support the current regulations on billboards.

Underway. The Architectural Design Standards have been completely revamped, with changes approved by the City Council. Staff is currently initiating a housekeeping revision of the sign standards.

5. Work with the DNRC and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to explore ways to promote resource based tourism without endangering vital natural resources.
6. Investigate alternatives and possible partnerships to identify and recruit clean, community-compatible industry to Whitefish.

7. Conduct asset mapping and SWOT assessment to identify clean industries and businesses compatible with the character and qualities of Whitefish.
8. Actively pursue partners and grants to fund and establish a business incubator to provide technical and logistic support to new businesses that would diversify the community's base economy.
9. Establish development and design standards in the WI and WB-4 zoning district sufficient to attract and protect private investment.

Achieved. The revised Architectural Design Standards added the WI and WB-4 to the Highway Design District.

10. Map active local agricultural operations as part of the land use data base.
11. Establish low-density and rural zoning districts in local farming areas, and protect existing operations to the extent possible through agriculture indemnity statements on plats and prior notice conditions of approval.

The 2007 adopted Growth Policy did establish low-density and rural for the underlying land use in many important agricultural areas, and the infill clause was put in to help protect those areas from rezoning to higher density development. Staff is also anticipating creating a 5-acre agricultural zoning district.

12. Explore incentives for the growth and retention of localized agriculture.

Land Use Element

1. In order to protect and preserve the character, scale, and qualities of existing neighborhoods, the City of Whitefish shall revise the Zoning Jurisdiction Regulations and adopt "character based" standards and "neighborhood conservation" districts for new development, redevelopment, and infill. For newly developed areas, regulations shall provide for cluster and "conservation" subdivisions in order to preserve rural character and environmentally sensitive areas.

This item was on the original implementation schedule, and should still be a priority. Because it is a fairly major undertaking to revise the zoning ordinance and will likely be done entirely in-house due to budget constraints, staff is anticipating initiating this sometime in the Spring or Summer of 2010, depending on how quickly we can get the Parks and Recreation Master Plan completed and whether we do a corridor plan for Highway 93 West.

2. In order to preserve and protect historic Whitefish buildings and neighborhood character, the City of Whitefish shall initiate a Historic Properties Survey of downtown and the Railway District, and explore options with regard to historic preservation, including historic overlay zones, preservation incentives, and public education.

This item is dependent upon having consulting fees available in the Planning budget, and only a negligible amount was allocated for the 09/10 fiscal year. The Stumptown Historical Society does have a program to place plaques on historic buildings.

3. The City shall formulate and adopt a comprehensive critical areas ordinance (CAO) to protect and manage designated environmentally sensitive lands.

Achieved in March of 2008.

4. All zoning district designations may be reviewed for conformance with this Growth Policy. The City or neighborhoods may initiate rezonings in order to bring zoning into compliance.

Underway. The City has worked with at least one neighborhood to create a new zone and initiate rezoning to bring conformance with the Growth Policy (Highway 40 and Dillon Road).

5. The City shall actively and aggressively pursue an agreement with Flathead County for cooperative planning outside the Whitefish planning jurisdictional area.

The Flathead County Commissioners have been discussing recompiling the Flathead County Long Range Planning Task Force with cooperation from various planning boards, which would go a long way toward accomplishing cooperative area-wide planning.

6. The City shall actively pursue conservation easements, transfer of development rights (TDR), and other mechanisms to protect and preserve rural lands surrounding the Whitefish urbanized area.

This item could be addressed by adopting an Open Space Designation and Acquisition Strategic Plan, as called for elsewhere in the Growth Policy. Retaining the current infill policy to protect rural areas is an important component.

7. The City shall develop special regulations for “big box” commercial structures to ensure that the scale and character of the community are maintained.

Currently the city requires conditional use permits in commercial zones for buildings exceeding 15,000 square feet (7,500 in the Old Town Central district), but there are no other specific regulations for “big box” structures as of yet. This should be addressed during the “character based” zoning code update.

8. The City shall explore a zoning text amendment to allow offices, galleries, and similar uses as conditional uses in the WR-2 zone along Baker Ave. from 10th Street to the Whitefish River.

Achieved through a zoning text amendment passed in the Summer of 2008.

9. The City shall formulate, or shall facilitate the development of, corridor plans for all major transportation corridors to address land use, transportation function and modes, noise, screening, landscaping, and all aspects of urban design. Corridor plans shall address the issues and concerns set forth in this element of the Growth Policy. The Hwy 93 South corridor shall be the first priority, and the remaining corridors shall include:
 - US 93 North
 - Montana Hwy 40
 - Wisconsin Avenue
 - US 93/Spokane Avenue

Staff has been meeting with property owners and a planning consultant with regard to a future corridor plan for Hwy 93 South. However, initiating corridor plans outside of the City Limits would be unwise until the issues with regard to extra-territorial zoning jurisdictions are resolved with the county and the State Supreme Court.

10. The City shall explore adding noise standards to its Community Decay ordinance.

Noise ordinances are best enforced through police powers rather than planning, as the majority of complaints occur after business hours. Staff did initiate code amendments requiring noise mitigation from HVAC equipment on new buildings.

11. Work with Flathead County to adopt firewise practices for development and construction in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Underway. The revised subdivision regulations include development restrictions adopting firewise practices for development and construction in the Wildland Urban Interface. The 2009 Whitefish Area Wildfire Protection Plan was also completed in cooperation with the Whitefish Area Firesafe Council.

12. Revise jurisdictional zoning regulations to include special standards for gravel extraction, including but not necessarily limited to:
 - Screening and landscaping
 - Noise and dust abatement, including the tracking of material onto public streets
 - Surface and ground water quality monitoring
 - Preventive and mitigative measures to protect water quality
 - Access plans to avoid adverse impacts on existing neighborhoods
 - Street reconstruction plans (as necessary)
 - Sequential reclamation plans

Standards for the development of gravel pits could be added to the zoning code during the “character based” zoning code rewrite called for elsewhere in the Growth Policy.

13. The City shall adopt standards for widths of waterfront lots in order to control waterfront congestion.

This is something that could also be addressed with the “character based” zoning code re-write.

Infill Policy

Additionally, the Growth Policy calls for a special review of Land Use policy 3I:

3I. Land designated Rural or Rural Residential on the Future Land Use Map shall not be redesignated by the City of Whitefish through a Growth Policy amendment, neighborhood plan, or subarea plan, except as set forth in the Implementation/Intergovernmental Element, until at least 50% of the previously entitled dwelling units, as depicted on the Approved Entitlements Map dated September 20, 2007, is actually constructed. Should the Whitefish City Council fail to conduct a review of this Growth Policy, with or without a written report from the City-County Planning Board as set forth in the Implementation/Intergovernmental Element, within 26 months following adoption of this Growth Policy, enforcement of this policy 3H shall be automatically suspended. Upon completion of the Growth Policy review, the City Council may reinstate policy 3H by simple majority.

Because of the vast quantity of available entitled developable lots within the City limits, it was determined that encouraging construction on vacant lots already platted as infill was preferred to developing more prime agricultural lands and extending more infrastructure and utilities outside city limits before that land is truly needed for residential purposes. This policy was controversial when it was adopted, and is still often misunderstood. The policy does not specifically prevent property outside the city from being rezoned to higher densities, and it does allow zoning changes consistent with the underlying Future Land Use map. For example, even with the infill policy, property within a Rural Residential land use overlay could potentially rezone from a 15 acre minimum zone to a 2.5 acre minimum zone to add density. Both Country Residential (WCA) and the Agricultural (WA) zones are allowed under the Rural Residential land use overlay. Even greater densities are allowed through the Planned Unit Development process for new subdivisions. It does prevent the Growth Policy adopted future land use maps from being amended to allow zoning changes to higher than allowed densities until the infill goal of 50% is reached.

How the city arrived at the number of vacant newly subdivided lots and entitlements is an important consideration in making a decision.

As used in the Growth Policy, the term “entitlement” refers to a legal status whereby the right to develop something, in this case a dwelling unit, has been established through some development review, approval, or permitting process. In very simple terms, an entitlement is an approval of some kind, but that approval has not yet been exercised---like a legally platted lot that is vacant.

For purposes of the Growth Policy, entitlements were tabulated as a way to assess the infill development potential in Whitefish. All known approved development projects located generally within the urban service area of the city were inventoried, and the most accurate tabulation possible was made of the units left to be built within each. The units were then added up to arrive at a total number of 1,578 entitlement units as of September 20, 2007. After re-checking the numbers, staff has modified that total to 1607. For 2009, we subtracted all the subdivisions that have expired or will soon expire, as well as a number of lots that were counted that are already in a Rural designated area, but we did not add in any of the 100 or so newly created lots since 2007 and we arrived at a new baseline total of 1369 (see attached Exhibit A).

It is important to note that in identifying development projects to be included in the calculation, only the most recently approved developments were considered. While there are scattered vacant lots all over Whitefish, they were not added up individually to arrive at the entitlement figure. Also, as stated previously, only projects generally within the urban service areas of Whitefish were considered. Subdivisions in rural areas not served by city water and/or sewer are not considered to be a component of infill. The different types and levels of approval for these projects are:

- Final plat - These are vacant lots and/or as yet un-built units within an area that has received final plat approval. Examples are Ironhorse, Great Northern Heights, and The Lakes Subdivision.
- Preliminary plat - These projects have an approved preliminary plat, but no final plat had been approved as of August, 2006. Examples are Hidden Meadow Preserve and Karrow Glen.
- Planned Unit Developments (PUD) - Approved PUDs include Bridgewater Trails, Old Towne, and The Views Condos. (Note: Some projects have both approved PUDs and preliminary plats.)

All projects used in the tabulation of entitlement units are depicted on the 2007 Approved Entitlements Map (Exhibit B). Attached as Exhibit A is the updated list of vacant newly subdivided lots counted with the number of units remaining, which was revised after the Planning Board hearing to fix an error.

As mentioned above, some of the approved Preliminary Plats counted have now expired, so the baseline number has been re-compiled by removing those lots originally counted that were in subdivisions that are now defunct, as well as other lots that are already in a rural designation. We also did not count Preliminary Plats approved since September, 2007 (approximately 100 new lots). The total baseline number drops from 1607 to 1369, with 1230 of those still vacant. Based on that, 685 new units would need to be built to reach that 50% infill number. Right now, 139 units have been removed from the total, which is roughly 10% of that 50% number after two years.

Although some may argue that because there are no new subdivisions being created because of the economy, the infill policy should be abandoned. However, that is precisely why that policy should probably be retained. The city will grow, but there are

still over 1200 lots available to be built upon just in the subdivisions approved the last several years. If you add in the 100 new lots approved in the last two years, the total is increased to 1330 lots available for infill. Based on our current growth pattern of 35 new units a year, it would take 38 years to build 1330 units, or an estimated 19 years to reach that 50% infill plateau. Taking the height of the building boom numbers of 130 units per year, it would take 10 years to build 1330 units, or 5 years to reach that 50% infill number. And we haven't even taken into account all the land in our rural areas that has existing zoning and underlying Growth Policy future land use designation that could accommodate smaller lot subdivisions.

At the very least, it is clear that Whitefish has an overabundance of available lots, and it will take years before those are built on and the community truly needs to extend more utilities to subdivide additional rural lands into suburban lots. The amenities of open space and high yield prime agricultural land surrounding our community are one of the main reasons many people choose to move to our beautiful community. It would seem foolish to sacrifice that in the name of real estate profits, at least until the city has grown to such an extent that there is no other place to accommodate new residential development. By the time growth in those areas is needed, the city should have some more comprehensive character based development regulations in place which may mandate more clustered developments with open space and agricultural land protections as set out elsewhere in the Growth Policy

Community Facilities Element

Municipal Water Services

1. Continue communication and cooperation with the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), the Whitefish Water & Sewer District and other agencies to monitor and protect the quality of Whitefish Lake and Haskill Creek (as direct sources of drinking water), and all other local lakes and streams so that point and non-point source pollution can be effectively targeted in regulations and programs.

The City of Whitefish provides funding support and a member to the WLI technical and citizens advisory committees and openly cooperates with WLI, the Whitefish Water District and the Haskill Basin Group. A member of the Public Works Department serves on the Technical Advisory Board of the WLI.

2. Continue to study and investigate pollution from septic systems and implement regulatory and/or programmatic measures to curtail eutrophication of Whitefish Lake.

In 2009, the Whitefish County Water and Sewer District was awarded a grant through the DNRC Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Program to implement a study methodology developed by the Whitefish Lake Institute entitled "Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Littoral Areas of Whitefish Lake, Montana." The grant is expected to be executed in 2010 after contract modifications and negotiations with DNRC.

3. The City of Whitefish shall institute a comprehensive water conservation program that includes public education/information and promotes the principals of sustainability and low impact development.

Underway. The Public Works Department has water conservation brochures available for the public.

4. The City shall explore improving the efficiency of its irrigations systems for parklands and other irrigated open spaces.

The Public Works Department has plans to coordinate with the Parks Department to further improve the efficiency of parkland irrigation systems.

5. The City of Whitefish shall institute a public education program on the use of lawn and garden fertilizers and pesticides, and how nutrients from lawn chemicals impact the area's lakes and streams.

Public Works Department staff will be applying for a MDEQ 319 grant to assist with this education program in coordination with other agencies. The goal is to create a water quality education center, perhaps using a section of the local library.

6. For subdivisions and other developments within the Whitefish Planning Jurisdictional Area that propose individual and/or private water systems, require contingency plans to connect to the municipal system at some future time.
7. Formulate comprehensive hillside development and critical areas ordinances to directly address the causes and sources of water pollution and sedimentation, integrating and balancing economic, environmental, and social goals.

Achieved through the Critical Areas Ordinance and revised subdivision regulations, as well as ridgeline development standards in the revised Subdivision Ordinance.

8. Developments in the 2nd Creek watershed shall be closely evaluated and conditioned to protect the City's domestic water supply source.

The city has begun having conversations with Stoltze about acquiring a conservation easement for the watershed, and is also exploring grant opportunities and cooperative agreements with State and Federal agencies. The city should also explore the feasibility of a backup groundwater source for municipal water.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment

1. New developments within the Jurisdictional Area which propose on-site sewage disposal shall submit contingency plans for eventual connection to the municipal wastewater system.

2. Continue to work with the Whitefish County Water and Sewer District and the Big Mountain Sewer District to develop and implement long range wastewater management plans for the urbanizing areas of the Planning Jurisdictional Area, including those areas around Whitefish Lake where much of the new construction continues to rely on individual sewage disposal systems.
3. Work with the Flathead County Health Department to prepare a public education program on the proper operation, life expectancy, and potential pollution problems associated with individual on site disposal systems.

Underway. Part of the MDEQ 319 grant (see #5 under Municipal Water) is for a water quality education center.

4. Work with the Flathead County Health Department and the Whitefish Lake Institute to monitor existing on-site sewage disposal systems around Whitefish Lake to detect failed systems, and devise a plan for corrective action.

In 2009, the Whitefish Water District was awarded a grant through the DNRC Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Program to implement a study methodology developed by the Whitefish Lake Institute entitled "Investigation of Septic Leachate to the Littoral Areas of Whitefish Lake, Montana." The grant is expected to be executed in 2010 after contract modifications and negotiations with DNRC. According to the Whitefish Lake Institute, no communication or cooperation has been done with the Flathead County Health Department since the early 1980's when some dye testing was done.

5. Study the feasibility of extending sewer mains to serve lakefront properties.

The Public Works Department has plans to create a map showing properties on or near Whitefish Lake that are on a septic system.

Stormwater Management

1. Formulate and adopt comprehensive hillside development and critical area regulations aimed at eliminating sedimentation and nutrient loading to receiving water bodies from urban runoff and site drainage in order to achieve established water quality standards for receiving water bodies.

Achieved through the Critical Areas Ordinance adoption.

2. Develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce water quality impacts associated with the City's urban drainage system to achieve established water quality standards for receiving water bodies over the long term, and to establish Whitefish as a regional leader in environmentally responsible stormwater management.

The City adopted the updated 2008 Engineering Standards which include water quality treatment requirements for new development. The Public Works Department need to improve the maintenance checkups on City storm water treatment facilities. The City should also provide for some inspection of private stormwater treatment facilities that require maintenance. An operation and maintenance plan should be prioritized.

3. The City shall explore an incentive-based program that provides for “green roofs” and the reuse of stormwater for irrigation.

This has not been done. However, a Public Works staff member has received LEED A.P. certification for new construction.

Financing and Improvement Mechanisms

1. Continue to explore impact fees as a mechanism for funding future public facility needs resulting from new development.

The City of Whitefish did adopt Impact Fees, which are found under Municipal Code Section 10-2-1 in August of 2007. Transportation impact fees will not be adopted until the Transportation Plan is complete.

2. Formulate and adopt a concurrency policy for sidewalks, parks, bike and pedestrian ways, and other related facilities that integrates with an overall master plan for such facilities.

The Parks and Recreation Department has plans to update the City's Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan, which will address that issue, with new regulations added to zoning. Also, the updated Transportation Plan will address those issues.

Solid Waste

1. The City of Whitefish shall explore options for a community-wide recycling program, including public education a community recycling center.

The City is exploring curbside recycling, and will likely ask for input from the Council in the near future on the costs/benefits of such a program.

2. Develop construction management guidelines and incentives for reduction of construction waste through reuse, recycling, and composting.

The City could coordinate with the Flathead Building Association's Green Builder's Group to provide workshops on this subject.

3. The City of Whitefish shall support and promote recycling through the placement of recycling containers in all city facilities.

The city council chambers has recycling containers, and most city departments recycle paper.

4. The City shall formulate and adopt regulations that require refuse disposal for the unincorporated portions of the Whitefish Planning Jurisdictional Area.
5. Institute a public education program for the proper use and disposal of household chemicals.

This will be combined with the Public Works Department MDEQ 319 education grant application. Citizens for a Better Flathead also sponsors programs for household chemical disposal at the landfill.

6. Coordinate community recycling for used electronics.
7. Promote special events and promotions to emphasize the importance of recycling and sustainability to the community.

Emergency Services

1. The City of Whitefish shall explore community policing, community resource officers, and other means to provide efficient and localized police services as the community grows.
2. The City's fire prevention program should be expanded to the unincorporated portions of the planning jurisdictional area. It should be integrated with the City's new Zoning Compliance Permit for the unincorporated areas.
3. The City must continue to work with Flathead County and the cities of Kalispell and Columbia Falls, and continue to be a leader in the implementation of E-911.

Underway. The city has been diligently working with Flathead County and the other cities on a unified 911 dispatch center, which should be operational shortly.

4. The City shall explore one or more emergency at-grade crossings of the BNSF rail lines in order to enhance emergency access.

Human Infrastructure

1. The City should form and ad hoc committee to review existing community services, determine any additional community service needs, and report its finding and recommendations to the City Council

Parks and Recreation

1. The City of Whitefish shall formulate and adopt a comprehensive park and recreation master plan to assess current parkland and recreational programs and facilities, and to identify and anticipate future needs, and explore funding options for new and/or upgraded facilities.

Almost underway. A Parks and Recreation Master Plan is about to be initiated this fall by the Parks and Recreation Department in conjunction with the Parks Board and the Planning Department, and should remain high on the City's implementation schedule.

Open Spaces

1. In addition to a Park and Recreation Master Plan, the City should consider an Open Space Designation and Acquisition Strategic Plan that would identify, prioritize, and set forth realistic recommendations for open spaces of all types.

It is recommended that the council consider making this a city priority project, and the plan could address the additional recommended actions with regard to open space below.

2. The City should be proactive in determining new urban forms and neighborhood types as the urbanized area grows so that important open spaces can be retained.
3. The City shall investigate mechanism to designate open spaces including transfer of development rights, purchase of development rights, scenic easements, conservation easements, and life estates.
4. The City shall investigate the formation of an Open Space Board to coordinate and investigate all aspects of open space designation, priorities, and funding.
5. The City shall seek ways to increase public access to Whitefish Lake, as well as to the Whitefish River and local streams and creeks.
6. As new development occurs, the City shall work cooperatively with land owners and developers to identify and maintain access to publicly and privately owned roads, trails, and lands.

The revised subdivision regulations include language that prohibits gated subdivisions, which helps improve access to private roads and adjacent public and private lands.

Sustainability

1. The City shall appoint a Sustainability Task Force to research and recommend educational community and neighborhood programs with the objective of making Whitefish a sustainable community.

2. The City shall calculate its municipal carbon footprint for daily operations and identify ways to reduce it. The City shall issue challenges to the North Valley Hospital, Whitefish Mountain Resort, and the local school district to do the same.

The Public Works Department could coordinate with a student intern from the FVCC's energy program to provide an energy audit. The Public Works Department should investigate the possibility of running some equipment on a percent biodiesel.

3. The City shall explore the incorporation of sustainability concepts, principles, and incentives into its land development regulations.

Some sustainable concepts were incorporated into the recently adopted Engineering Standards update.

Housing Element

1. The City of Whitefish shall partner with the Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) to update the 2003 Housing Needs Assessment in order to provide the information and analysis necessary to:
 - Reexamine the existing voluntary program
 - Determine other needs that should be addressed through additional programs
 - Assess the feasibility and potential effectiveness of a mandatory inclusionary affordable housing program
 - Assess the linkage between high-end market rate housing and the need for affordable housing.

Achieved. An updated Housing Needs Assessment was completed in 2008.

2. The City shall, with the cooperation and participation of the WHA, fully investigate mandatory housing programs for both workforce housing, and a linkage program for seasonal and full-time employees in businesses related to the visitation industry.

Underway. The Planning Department has been in dialogue with the City Council on a number of occasions on the topic of mandatory housing programs. While staff is looking into incorporating additional incentives for affordable housing in new code updates, the City Council needs to take the lead on any mandatory programs, which staff will initiate at their direction.

3. The City shall review its codes and ordinances for additional opportunities to support and provide for affordable housing.
4. The City and the WHA shall proactively identify the prime locations for affordable housing in the community, and designate those areas on the Future Land Use Map that is contained in this Growth Policy.

5. The City shall investigate the community benefits to adopting and administering a housing code.
6. The City and WHA shall investigate the feasibility of an Affordable Whitefish Housing Foundation in order to bring additional financial resources to the affordable housing problem.
7. The City and WHA shall jointly explore a program to encourage the privately funded construction of accessory residential units and to ensure their continued affordability.
8. The City of Whitefish shall investigate and adopt special standards for residential construction in areas with high groundwater.

Achieved through the adoption of the Critical Areas Ordinance.

Transportation Element

1. Make construction of new sidewalks and pathways a priority in areas where they do not currently exist.

The City has constructed several new bike/pedestrian paths in the past 2 years. We are in the process of updating our Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan. The City receives money for sidewalks in lieu of constructing them and Public Works will install new ones when there is enough money in the fund for the various sections of town.

2. Plan for through, continuous streets to the extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are appropriate due to ownership, topography, or other constraints, ensure that a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.

The City's 2009 Transportation Plan will be presented to the Planning Board along with the draft executive summary of the Urban Corridor Study in November. Also, our revised Subdivision Regulations address these issues for new developments.

3. It is highly recommended that no additional land in the Monegan Road area be designated for urban or suburban development until such time as additional connections are made available.

The city should also consider limits on density east of the WWTP between Monegan and Voerman Road due to odors from WWTP (it will get worse in approximately 10 years when we are required to build a mechanical plant). In addition, the area has drainage limitations.

4. Through the community-wide transportation plan, explore possibilities for an additional grade separated crossing of the BNSF rail facilities.

This issue is also highlighted in the updated Transportation Plan draft.

5. The City shall make the provision of sidewalks, pathways, and other non-motorized transportation facilities part of a concurrency program and policy.
6. The City shall research and develop a set of alternative “neighborhood sensitive” designs for local residential streets.

Underway. This was partially addressed in the City’s 2008 Engineering Standards.

7. The City shall develop a menu of traffic calming measures for use residential collector streets.

This was included in both the 2008 Engineering Standards and the 2009 draft Transportation Plan.

8. Through the community-wide transportation plan, the City shall assess the need and feasibility of a highway by-pass to alleviate through traffic in the downtown area.

This was investigated as part of the 2009 draft Transportation Plan.

9. Continue support for federal funding that will keep Amtrak passenger service operating in Montana.
10. Continue to support agreements with Eagle Transit and the Snow Bus, and encourage them or other enterprises to expand existing services to provide daily and year-round public transportation options in Whitefish.

This is addressed some in the 2009 draft Transportation Plan. The City needs to further promote bus commuting by creating covered bus stops, park and ride areas, and promoting the benefits of public transportation. The snow bus program should continue to be supported and promoted by the City. Eagle Transit has recently expanded their service to year around daily service between Whitefish and Kalispell and Columbia Falls. While ridership numbers are not high, the program is continuing. One additional issue is that Whitefish has lost its only local taxi service, which makes it extremely difficult for visitors without vehicles and people with disabilities to get around. It also affects individuals wishing for a sober ride home when the downtown bars close down. The City could look into providing incentives for new local taxi services.

11. Coordinate with the Montana State Department of Transportation in developing corridor studies for state highways within the planning jurisdiction.

The Urban Corridor Study will be completed in spring of 2010. The draft executive summary and draft recommendations will be available to the Planning Board and Council in the next few weeks.

12. Explore alternative vehicular routes to the Whitefish Mountain Village.

In combination with the fire-wise program, the city is working with the resort and local land owners and developers to ensure alternative routes are considered in the future.

Implementation Element

The 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy states the following with regard to the review of implementation priorities:

It is recommended that immediately upon adoption of this Growth Policy, the City Council and City Manager, in consultation with the Planning Board and Whitefish Planning & Building Director, establish a priority list of programs and regulations for the next two years. Upon the biennial review of the Growth Policy by the Planning Board (as set forth in this element under **Periodic Review**), implementation priorities shall again be set for the next two-year period.

Initially, it is recommended that implementation priorities include:

- Update of the subdivision regulations as required by amendments to Montana law enacted in 2005
- Critical Areas Ordinance
- Rewrite of the zoning code to adopt “character based” regulations and to address other issues set forth in this Growth Policy
- Evaluation of additional affordable housing programs and/or regulations
- Corridor plans

Staff has been diligently completing the elements in the implementation plan as well as the Recommended Actions of the Growth Policy. Major projects such as the Critical Areas Ordinance and the Subdivision Regulations update have both been addressed, in both cases with the assistance of outside consultants for a portion of the work. Although the elimination of budget monies for consultants coupled with the loss of planning staff and re-assignment of code enforcement duties will impact time available by staff for long range planning assignments, we are confident that we can still effectively accomplish the long range planning goals established by the council in a timely manner.

We recommend the following revised priority implementation list:

- Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Planning staff agreed to assist the Parks and Recreation Department with the development of a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which will take several months to complete

- Open Space Designation and Acquisition Strategic Plan

Our suggestion is to make this an element of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

- Evaluation of Affordable Housing Programs

Mandatory workforce housing has been a hot topic for many years. Due to a slowdown in new housing starts due to the economy, this item has been put on the backburner a bit on the priority list by the Council. The City Council will need to take the lead on directing staff to make this a priority.

- Corridor Plan for Highway 93 South

This item remains important, but is dependent on the doughnut jurisdictional issues being resolved and the State's local transportation corridor plan being completed. Staff is currently in dialogue with a local planner that represents the neighborhood group about initiating some joint planning of the area with Flathead County.

- Rewrite Zoning Code to "character based" regulations

This is a major project (estimate of 4-6 months to accomplish) on staff's radar that we will not initiate until the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and updated Landscaping Regulations are complete.

Summary

The Planning Board's unanimously recommended approval of this 2009 Review Summary of the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy and our progress to date in implementing the Recommended Actions, upholding the 50% Infill Policy, and setting a fresh Implementation Element priority list by adopting this report by resolution as an addendum to the policy. The City Council agreed, approving this document and the recommendations on November 2, 2009 with Resolution 09-41.