



# **GROWTH POLICY**

**2013 Edition**

**City of Columbia Falls  
130 6th Street West  
Columbia Falls, Mt**

# COLUMBIA FALLS GROWTH POLICY

December 2005

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**A. VISION STATEMENT:**

**A community maintaining quality embracing change**

**B. INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS A GROWTH POLICY**

The community of Columbia Falls has an ever changing and growing population. As growth and development occur, it is important for the residents of our community to participate in planning and implementation of a plan that will maintain the quality of our community. Through planning, people can have an active voice in directing the affairs of the city and surrounding area as we affect the change around us to ensure a more desirable future.

The State has given cities and counties ample authority to carry out long-range planning activities. Section 76-1-101 of the Montana State Code states that any city, county or combination thereof may, “create a planning board in order to promote the orderly development of its governmental units and its environs.” Section 76-1-601 gives the planning board authority to create a growth policy that covers all or a portion of the jurisdictional area. Finally, Section 76-1-605 M.C.A. states, “After adoption of the plan, the City Council, Board of County Commissioners or other governing body in the jurisdiction shall be guided by and give consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the Growth Policy.”

The City of Columbia Falls has been involved in community planning since the early 1960’s when a city-county planning board was formed and, in 1963, the first “Master Plan” for Columbia Falls was prepared. It was updated in 1978 and 1984. As part of an ongoing process, the Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board continues to update the Growth Policy in order to keep it current and viable.

The Columbia Falls City-County Growth Policy is an official public document adopted by the Columbia Falls City Council. It is a policy plan intended to guide decisions concerning the physical, social, economic and environmental development of the Planning Jurisdiction. The essential characteristics of the plan are that it is comprehensive, general and visionary:

“Comprehensive” means that the Growth Policy applies to all geographical areas of the Planning Jurisdiction. Montana statute provides that by mutual agreement of the city and county, the Planning Jurisdiction may extend up to four and one-half (4 ½) miles beyond the city limits. In the case of Columbia Falls, the Planning Jurisdiction originally created in the 1970’s extended approximately 3 miles beyond the city limits creating a jurisdiction that extended north-south approximately 8 miles and east-west, 7 miles. In January, 2005 the City Council and Board of County

Commissioners re-negotiated a new planning jurisdiction boundary (Figure 1). This boundary extends generally one mile beyond the city limits in all directions and in addition it extends north approximately 3 miles using the North Fork Highway as its western boundary.

“General” means that the Growth Policy presents the goals and policies necessary to give guidance to making decisions concerning development but does not indicate site-specific locations, engineered solutions, or detailed regulations. That is not to say, however, that it can be disregarded. For example, case law specifies that zoning documents and decisions are to be in substantial compliance with the Growth Policy. All decisions affecting land use should be based on and be in substantial compliance with the Plan.

“Visionary” means that it looks beyond the present situation in an attempt to anticipate future problems and possibilities. The Growth Policy is directed toward the future and is intended to guide development patterns to the year 2020. The Growth Policy will help to maintain the quality of our community as we embrace the change before us.

## **C. GROWTH POLICY COMPONENTS**

The Growth Policy is composed of two major components, the text and the growth policy map, and supported by a comprehensive Resource and Analysis Document. Both the text and map are equally important and must be equally weighed. The Resource and Analysis Document provides valuable information that supports the Growth Policy recommendations. To adequately interpret and implement the Growth Policy, all three must be consulted for insight and direction. Relying on only one component will not always give a clear picture of the broad community concepts or the spirit of the Growth Policy. Worse, it may lead to a twisting or manipulation of the Growth Policy. Each of the components is explained below in greater detail.

### **Text**

The text contains 11 major elements as described in the Table of Contents. Each element or chapter contains a series of issue statements intended to summarize the most important issues, trends, positive attributes or perceived problems surrounding the element. Each chapter then contains one or more broad goals. These goals provide the publicly stated direction. Policies are then listed which are intended to give more detailed direction in land use decisions to achieve the goals. Finally, each chapter contains recommendations that put forward specific public actions to implement the Growth Policy.

Areas of specific applicability include any zoning action, subdivision review, parklands planning or development, road extension or abandonment, and public facility planning or development. Each time a proposed action may impact an

element of the Growth Policy, the Growth Policy should be consulted and relevant goals, policies, and recommendations should be identified. Specific findings should then be made as to the conformance of the issue with the identified goals, policies and recommendations. Where policies are not or cannot be met, a specific finding should be made distinguishing whether or not site conditions or other extenuating circumstances justify nonconformance with the Growth Policy.

## **Map**

The Growth Policy Map is the graphic illustration of the Growth Policy reflecting a composite of all 11 major plan elements. Based on the Natural Resources Element, environmentally sensitive areas are identified, generally consisting of steep topography, river and riparian areas, wetlands, or critical habitat. Based on the Land Use Elements, the Growth Policy Map represents the recommended growth patterns for residential, commercial or industrial development for the Planning Jurisdiction. Based on the Agricultural Element, the most productive agricultural and forest management lands are designated for consideration. Based on the Transportation Element, the Map presents the present and future major road and pedestrian trail systems. Based on the Public Facilities and Services Elements, present and future public lands are shown as they interrelate with the overall community design. Finally, the Parks and Recreation Element presents the existing parklands as well as optimum locations for new parklands to meet the growing needs of the Planning Jurisdiction. (Growth Policy map is located at the end of Growth Policy).

The Growth Policy Map is a visual policy statement. Future public facilities sites indicate generalized locations and should not be construed to be site-specific. Proposed extensions to the arterial-collector street system indicate desired routes and access points. They have not been engineered. Likewise, future land use designations are not fixed or rigid boundaries. The land use districts are separated by transition areas in which uses from one district can transition or blend into an adjacent land use district. Transition areas can take several forms. They can be natural barriers such as highways, streams, extremely steep terrain or open space. Such barriers usually allow for a safe separation between negative impacts that might be associated with uses in a particular district such as industrial or commercial from infringing upon a less intense use such as residential. Where natural barriers are not present, it is intended that the transition area take the form of intermediate or less impacting uses or else incorporate green belts, landscaping, or other mitigating design techniques. The purpose of transition areas is to provide an area where adverse impacts (e.g., noise, odor, vibration, traffic, density, height) can be mitigated. Hence, to fully appreciate and interpret the Growth Policy Map, it must be viewed in light of the Goal and Policy Statements provided in the text of the Growth Policy.

## **Resource Document**

The Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction Resource and Analysis Document was developed under separate copy to provide the background, existing conditions and the present and projected trends that are integral in developing the Growth Policy and understanding the Planning Jurisdiction as a whole.

### **D. COMMUNITY STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES/OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS**

An initial step in the development of the Growth Policy was a current analysis of the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Typically called a SWOT analysis, it offers an introspective view of Columbia Falls and the surrounding area. The analysis is provided below and was developed during Columbia Falls' workshops and verified by the Planning Board and public input:

#### **STRENGTHS**

Strengths are those positive elements that define a community and that form a spring board with which to build a better future. Strengths already exist in a community, they can be improved upon, they can be refined and directed and they can also be lost. It is critical for a community to understand what their strengths are as these will form the basic building blocks for the future.

- The Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction has an excellent location serving as the Gateway to Glacier National Park and the North Fork Valley of the Flathead with immediate access to the Flathead River, Hungry Horse Dam and Reservoir, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the Flathead Forest, several golf courses, and the Big Mountain Ski Resort.
- Columbia Falls has immediate access to North Valley Hospital, Kalispell Regional Medical Center, and Flathead Valley Community College, the fourth largest college in Montana.
- Locally, the city offers an attractive library and a strong primary and secondary educational system.
- The city offers an outdoor aquatic center, a developing trail system, neighborhood parks, and the River's Edge Park.
- Columbia Falls has excellent transportation access via US Highway 2, the main line of the Burlington Railroad and rail yards and Glacier Park International Airport.
- Columbia Falls is the employment hub of Flathead County and a major center in Montana hosting two lumber companies, Plum Creek and Stoltze, and several smaller associated timber enterprises.
- The community boasts world class water quality and clean air. Columbia Falls is the municipal water system that is un-chlorinated.
- Significant commercial expansion has occurred along Ninth Street (US 2 corridor) and there is room for additional commercial development.

- Personal services and facilities in Columbia Falls are close at hand and accessible including a local weekly newspaper, a downtown post office, medical offices and financial institutions.
- Excellent police and fire departments with good ISO ratings (Fire – most recent rating = 5).
- A municipal wastewater treatment plant with recent upgrades that provide capacity for future growth.
- Retirement and assisted living facilities provide options for area families.
- Columbia Falls maintains its position in the Flathead as the most affordable housing option.
- Strong community image as a hard working City

## **WEAKNESSES**

Weaknesses are traits, conditions or shortcomings in a community. They hinder progress, detract from the quality of the community or restrict opportunity in some form or fashion. Weaknesses reflect an existing situation. It is important for a community to identify and acknowledge weaknesses. Once identified, weaknesses can be improved upon or overcome, however this requires effort in terms of resources, time and commitment.

- Limited tax base (significant industrial, commercial and residential tax base lies just outside the immediate boundaries of the city)
- Limited retail shopping
- Limited in-town lodging accommodations
- Commercial development continues to shift to 9<sup>th</sup> (US 2) while old downtown (Nucleus) declines
- Sprawl on the outskirts of the community
- Infrastructure needs
  - Curbs and sidewalks/bikepaths
  - Pedestrian bridge over river
  - Sewer and water extensions to growth areas
  - Railroad crossings (13<sup>th</sup>)
- Lack of a dedicated community building or civic center
- Lack of activities for young adults
- Brain drain (young people leave after high school or college for job opportunities elsewhere)

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Opportunities are actions or circumstances which if capitalized upon can be used to overcome weaknesses or build on strengths. Opportunities may be available for only a short time and are thus time sensitive. Therefore, it is important to constantly monitor opportunities in a community. Opportunities rarely happen

on their own and require energy and direction to accomplish them. Once lost, they are very difficult to retrieve or revive.

- Flathead River access
- Development and expansion of the existing trail system in the community
- Vacant lands on the east and west sides of the community that could accommodate future growth
- Paving of the North Fork Road to Camas Creek Road providing a direct access through Columbia Falls to Glacier National Park.
- Tourist development due to location
- Good market for retail expansion
- Existing industrial base already here
- Access to Flathead Valley Community College for training and education
- Retirement housing – opportunities to expand here
- Good pool of quality youth and volunteers.
- The extension of Homestead Drive at North Hilltop and the extension of 13<sup>th</sup> across the railroad tracks.
- Tax incentive programs to revitalize Nucleus and blighted areas.
- Grant programs/funding opportunities
- Quality of non-college educated workforce

## **THREATS**

Threats are actions, circumstances or events which limit an opportunity or undermine community strengths. Threats by their nature may be imminent or long term, they are future oriented. Threats may be dispelled on their own being overtaken by the events of time or they may fester and build. Typically threats range from reducing the positive influence of some action on one hand to impacting the stability of a portion of or all of a community. They may challenge the peaceful and orderly growth of an area. If left unattended, they may alter the way of life for a community and its residents.

- Declining job opportunities and industrial capacity
- Industrial interface with residential areas in community
- Significant rural residential growth on fringes of Columbia Falls which will inhibit orderly expansion of city services and facilities to accommodate growth
- Continued commercial development along Highway 2 south of Highway 40/Blue Moon siphoning off potential development in the Columbia Falls community.
- Loss of tax base to projects locating just outside of the city.
- Lack of developable residential land within the city
- Loss of access to adjacent Flathead National Forest
- Sewer and water rate increases
- A community afraid of change

- Limited opportunity for educated / skilled young people in their family raising years

**E. PROJECTIONS – POPULATION AND HOUSING**

**POPULATION:**

In order to plan for the growth of a community, it is important to understand the scale of growth that the community is anticipating. Based on past trends and current activity, a series of population projection models were prepared and further analyzed in the Columbia Falls Resources and Analysis Document dated May, 2005. Ultimately, a 25%/decade growth model for the city and a 10%/decade growth model for the rural unincorporated portion of the planning jurisdiction were selected. This equates to a 2¼ %/year growth rate for the city and a 1%/year growth rate for the unincorporated portions of the planning jurisdiction. Growth in the adjacent rural areas may seem low at 10% per decade, based on past county-wide trends, however, it is selected because of the high likelihood that significant growth adjacent to the city will utilize city sewer and water facilities and concurrently annex into the city. Projections should only be used as a guide.

**Table 1**  
**Population Projections**  
**City of Columbia Falls and Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction**  
**2000 - 2025**

	<b><u>2000</u></b> <b><u>Census</u></b>	<b><u>2005</u></b>	<b><u>2010</u></b>	<b><u>2015</u></b>	<b><u>2020</u></b>	<b><u>2025</u></b>
City of Columbia Falls	3,645	4,500	4,688	5,274	5933	6674
Columbia Falls Rural Planning Jurisdiction	2,793	2,950	3,111	3,499	3,936	4428
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,438</b>	<b>7,450</b>	<b>7,799</b>	<b>8,773</b>	<b>9,869</b>	<b>11,102</b>

Source: U.S. Census for year 2000, Tri-City Planning Office for years 2005  
U.S. Census for year 2010, Columbia Falls Planning Office year 2015-2025

**HOUSING:**

Housing is a key component of a community. Supply and location are critical to meet the demands of a growing population. Below is a projection of housing unit needs based on several assumptions. Community population is projected to grow at a rate of 25% per decade. It is logical to conclude that housing will at least need to expand at a rate of 25%/decade. In addition, a vacancy factor and a demolition/conversion rate are also factored in an attempt to give a more accurate picture of housing needs.

*Table 2*

**Housing Projections  
City of Columbia Falls  
1980 - 2025**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>HOUSING SUPPLY</b>	<b>INCREASE OR PROJECTED INCREASE %</b>	<b>OCCUPIED HOUSING</b>	<b>*VACANT HOUSING</b>	<b>**HOUSING LOST</b>	<b>NEW UNITS NEEDED</b>
1980	1,170	*				
1990	1,227	+4.9%	1,139	88 -7.1%		
2000	1,470	+19.8	1,400	70 - 4.7%		
2010	1,994	35.6%	1,863	131 - 6.5%	19	
2015	2,233	12%	2,122	111	22	239
2020	2,500	12%	2,375	125	25	267
2025	2,800	12%	2,600	140	28	300

\*Vacant housing assumes a 5% vacancy rate for 2015-2025.

\*\* Housing lost assumes 1% of the preceding decade lost to demolition, removal or conversion.

\*\*\*Housing units needed to address increase in housing supply and lost housing.

Source: 1980-2010 U.S. Census; 2015-2025 Projections: Columbia Falls Planning Office

## **1. NATURAL RESOURCES**

Important natural resource and environmental factors in the growth policy area include hydrology, floodplain, air quality, steep slopes, soil limitations, sand and gravel resources, wildfire hazards, important habitat and important agricultural lands. The topography and geography of the Columbia Falls Growth Policy area presents certain development constraints due to hydric soils, steep slopes, floodplain and other soil limitations. Most of the growth policy area consists of nearly level alluvial lands, bottom lands and low terraces. The Flathead River which bisects the eastern portion of the planning jurisdiction creates a large floodplain area. Steep slopes in the eastern most portion of the growth policy area pose limitations to development but much of this land is in public ownership already. Timber stands and corporate land ownership (Stoltze, Columbia Falls Aluminum Company and Plum Creek) with sizeable ownership by the Forest Service covers much of the northern portion of the jurisdiction. The steep slopes in combination with timberlands create wildfire hazards. Productive farmlands in the southern portion of the growth policy area provide an important element to the cultural, economic and historic element in the growth policy area.

In 2009, the State Legislature added a new element, sand and gravel resources, to the list of required topics to be described and inventoried (76-1-601(3) (viii)). Sand and gravel are important natural resources that are found within the Columbia Falls Growth Policy area. Access to local gravel resources benefits the residents of the Columbia Falls area by reducing transportation and production costs in the construction of roads, bridges, buildings, sidewalks, and bike paths.

Currently, there are seven active permits and one inactive permit for open cut mining of record with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Open Cut Mining Program. A Map is included in this document that was prepared with data provided on soil classifications by the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, open cut mining permits issued by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and data compiled by the Flathead County Planning Office in the Flathead County Growth Policy, 2012 update. The result of the collected data is the Columbia Falls Gravel Resources Map.

### **Issues:**

1. The natural environment is an important part of what makes the area an appealing place to live and could be jeopardized if growth is not properly guided.
2. Various key sectors of the area's economy depend upon and impact the natural environment.

3. Development of the farming, ranching and woodland areas reduce open space that functions in a practical and productive manner. Development of these areas can diminish the quality of the natural environment.
4. The presence of the 100-year floodplain is prevalent along the Flathead River and may pose significant development limitations.
5. Un-regulated development of hillside areas may pose limitations due to soil disturbance and potential erosion.
6. Water quality continues to be an important issue to the community and ways to avoid nutrient loading and other forms of water contamination to the Flathead River Basin become critical.
7. Flathead County has been historically considered for designation as a non-attainment area for air quality. Both Kalispell and Whitefish have already been designated by EPA as a non-attainment area primarily because of small particulate matter (road dust) in the air. Air quality is a concern and the City is working to address this with land use tools such as, paving of parking lots and streets.
8. Water quality has the potential to be degraded by development due to erosion, storm water discharge and on-site sewage treatment systems. As such, the Wellhead Protection Zone, floodplains, riparian zones, and stream outlets should be protected.
9. Wildlife and wildlife habitat is being displaced by residential development resulting in the loss of important habitat.
10. Areas disturbed during development of subdivision roads, building sites and other construction activity can contribute to erosion and the spread of noxious weeds if not properly re-vegetated and maintained.
11. Continued growth and development in areas of the planning jurisdiction where sand and gravel resources are currently found will result in continued land use conflicts and may limit the availability of these types of resources into the future.

**Goals:**

1. Encourage development that is compatible with or enhances natural resource values including air, water, soil and vegetation.
2. Development near environmentally sensitive areas should be accomplished so that these features are left in a relatively undisturbed state.
3. High levels of air quality and water quality should be maintained through design standards.
4. Development should be compatible with important wildlife habitat and travel corridors.

5. Protect the health and integrity of the natural environment because of its importance in maintaining a competitive advantage with other regions and for the enjoyment and wellbeing of the people.
6. Support land use policies that ensure adequate quality and quantity of sand and gravel to meet current and future demands in the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction.

**Policies:**

1. Environmental impacts attributable to new development should be identified and mitigated, where necessary.
2. Encourage infill, clustering, and other compact development patterns to lessen impacts on sensitive lands.
3. Development in environmentally sensitive areas including 100-year floodplain and on steep slopes may pose inherent development limitations and design should be managed to avoid and mitigate environmental impacts and natural hazards.
4. Lands which are in excess of 25% slope are generally considered as unsuitable for development because of the potential for sloughing, erosion, difficult access and building limitations and are subject to additional review and requirements.
5. Filling of wetlands and the 100 year floodplain should be avoided.
6. Diversion, channelization and diking of natural rivers and streams should be avoided.
7. Implement measures to assist in maintaining high water quality for the Flathead Basin.
8. Development in areas that have known high groundwater should be discouraged until such time as public sewer is available.
9. New commercial and industrial development and residential subdivisions should be accessible by paved roadways to protect air quality.
10. Noxious weed controls should be implemented through re-vegetation of disturbed areas immediately after development along with adequate controls after development.
11. Wildlife travel corridors should be conserved and maintained possibly through easements or other voluntary restrictions.
12. Compromises to the built and natural environment should be avoided by requiring underground utilities in new development, encouraging simple and unobtrusive signs and avoiding excessive lighting.

13. Continue to provide opportunity for sand and gravel extractions (Extractive Industries) with a conditional use permit in the CR-1, CSAG-5, CSAG-10, and CSAG-20 zoning classifications.

**Recommendations:**

1. 1, Protect the 100- year flood plain through implementation of the Federal Flood Insurance Program for both the city and the county.
2. 2, Coordinate waterfront regulatory programs involving floodplain, habitat, and water quality.
3. Limit and mitigate impacts related to outdoor lighting and noise.
4. Protect the shallow aquifers as sensitive water quality zones and establish performance standards.
5. Protect and maintain the Columbia Falls Wellhead Protection Zone.
6. Encourage the County Weed District to educate and assist the public in the eradication and control of noxious weeds.
7. Consider adding “extractive industries” to the I-2 (Heavy Industrial) zoning classification.

## **2. GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

Growth in the Columbia Falls area has fluctuated with modest declines inside the city in the 1980's counter balanced by significant growth throughout the 1990's with peaks in 1996 and 2004. In 2008 through 2012, the mortgage crisis and resulting recession reduced demand and the resulting over supply of housing and lots resulted in a significant price reduction. Over the last ten years, the city has added a number of multi-family housing units, including a 16 town home project for Habitat for Humanity. More recently, developers have constructed over sixty assisted care units. Diverse housing opportunities, delivery of services, location of new development, redevelopment of the existing downtown core and quality of life are all issues that the City will continue to address.

### **Issues:**

1. Growth rates have fluctuated both rising and declining over the past 20 years making land use planning difficult. The City's population declined by 6.1% during the 1980's, grew by 24.8% in the 1990's, and grew by 28.6% in the 2000's for a 30 year average of 15.8% growth. During this same 30 year period, Flathead County grew an average of 20.6% per decade<sup>1</sup>.
2. The city population decline in the 1980's was directly related to decline in the major industrial employers in the Columbia Falls area and the opportunity for affordable rural development options for commercial and residential development. The current growth trend relates to the small town atmosphere and housing affordability within the community.
3. Population projections of over 20%/decade for the next 2 decades indicate Columbia Falls could become a Class 2 city (population over 5,000) by 2015.
4. Growth has had both positive and negative effects on the local quality of life. Along with increased construction, a more diversified local economy and many examples of well-designed development, the impacts of growth have also included disruption of neighborhoods, strain on public facilities and services, environmental impacts, increasing housing costs, and changing cultural values.
5. In 2012, an estimated 40% of the developed land in the city was tax exempt (streets, parks, government offices, churches, schools, etc.)
6. The city has physically grown 38% in the past 25 years. However, with current growth, there is limited vacant developable land within the city for significant residential, commercial or industrial undertaking. Future growth will occur through annexation and development of vacant lands on the perimeter of the city.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census for year 2000 and 2010; Flathead County Growth Policy (Draft) and Columbia Falls Planning Office

7. The population of Columbia Falls is mobile:

- a. 53.5% of the population living in Columbia Falls in 2000 lived in a different home 5 years ago. Compared to Flathead County only 47.6% of the population lived in a different home. It was estimated that in 2010 that 152 persons living in Columbia Falls moved from someplace else (city, county or state) in the past year.<sup>2</sup>
- b. 23.2% of the city population in 2000 did not live in Flathead County in 1995.
- c. In 2000, only 45.6% of the city residents were born in Montana.

8. Low density development in outlying areas has been the predominant local growth pattern of recent decades creating inefficiencies in providing services. Factors in this urban to suburban shift include national trends toward suburban and rural growth, the appeal of the Flathead Valley's rural setting and a variety of public policies that have made dispersed suburban development more attractive than concentrated urban development.

9. Zoning regulations were adopted by the city over 30 years ago covering the city and all areas within one mile of Columbia Falls to coordinate development on the urban fringe. On the western fringe of the planning jurisdiction near the Blue Moon/US 2 intersection, county zoning districts cover the Blue Moon intersection and the acreage southwest of this intersection. Much of the land north of Aluminum City along the North Fork Road is un-zoned with the exception of the City's Cedar Creek holdings which were zoned when the City decided to sell these properties.

10. Subdivision regulations which guide and regulate how building lots are created are administered by the city throughout the planning jurisdiction both within the city limits and in the unincorporated rural area. (Effective June 2008).

11. Columbia Falls administers building codes within the city limits but has no building code authority within its jurisdiction outside the city limits. While the State of Montana administers a building code program for commercial and industrial development and 5-unit and larger multi-family projects outside of the city limits, the State has no building permit authority of rural residential development less than 5-plex in size is not subject to building codes (electrical permits and sanitation approval is still required).

**Goals:**

1. A comprehensive growth management program incorporating zoning, subdivision regulations, floodplain regulations, building codes, capital

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<sup>2</sup> 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

improvements program, conservation easements and design review, into a unified program guided by the growth policy.

2. Managed growth in a way that alleviates the public burden of increased taxes for services and prevents congested infrastructure and services.
3. Orderly growth and efficient use of space consistent with fiscal soundness, environmental conservation, and community vitality.
4. A comprehensive, effective growth management program that upholds the general welfare of the community as well as individual rights.

**Policies:**

1. Zoning administration including zone changes, use permits and variances should be consistent with and guided by the Growth Policy Plan.
2. The City should allow extensions of urban services (sewer, water, police, parks, etc.) only to those properties inside the city limits. Where development has or will occur outside the city limits and immediate annexation is not feasible, certain municipal services may be provided in conformance with City policies and the Growth Policy Plan. Such properties being benefited should pay all costs of extension, hookup and maintenance of any improvements plus pay an appropriate capitalization fee to off-set capital improvements otherwise born by municipal property owners and waive protest to future annexation.
3. Encourage consistent government policies for development and infrastructure within the planning jurisdiction.
4. New development should pay its fair share for providing on-site and off-site capital facilities, giving consideration to the adequacy of provision and a tangible benefit to the new development.
5. Development by the public sector should comply with the same rules as that of private sector development. Encourage, where feasible, development by the private, rather than public sector.
6. Encourage infill development where full public services are available.
7. Affordable housing should be recognized as a primary consideration when adopting or amending land use regulations. The ability of the average wage earner to either buy or build a home is an essential component of the standard of living, quality of life, and general welfare in our community.
8. Overhead utilities should be underground where feasible for existing development and as a standard for all new development.
9. Storage areas, machinery, parking, service and loading areas, advertising, and other potentially objectionable facilities shall be set back

and/or screened to minimize adverse impact on safety, views, privacy, and general aesthetic value of surrounding properties.

10. Design and locate development to protect public health and safety; insure adequate provision of services; fit the character of its surroundings; and encourage the most appropriate use of land. Community character shall represent the following values identified by the community in the public input process: scenic, small town ambience, outdoor lifestyle, western town, historic/cultural assets, national park gateway, wildlife, walkable community, winter sports.

11. Individual property owners have the right to sell or to manage their own property as long as their actions do not adversely impact the rights of others.

12. Encourage resolution of disputes involving land use policy by broad participation, education, compromise and consideration of private property rights. Maintain mechanisms to provide for open, well publicized processes.

**Recommendations:**

1. Keep updated the Extension of Services Plan for the city and use it to guide annexation policy for the city.
2. Continually monitor, update, and streamline development codes to keep abreast of changing trends and technologies, to better coordinate the development review process, and to avoid unnecessary costly delays in processing applications.

### 3. LAND USE – RESIDENTIAL HOUSING

Decent affordable housing in a desirable living environment is the aspiration of every community. Providing such housing within the growth policy area has become an important issue. In first eight years of the decade of 2000, inflation of housing prices, increased demands due to population increases and rapidly escalating costs in neighboring communities have resulted in a critical need for additional housing in the community. In 2008 through 2012, the mortgage crisis and resulting recession reduced demand and the resulting over supply of housing and lots resulted in a significant price reduction. Over the last ten years, the city has added a number of multi-family housing units, including a 16 unit town home project for Habitat for Humanity. In addition, developers have recently constructed 65 assisted care units within the City. If the trends continue Columbia Falls will make strides in diversifying its housing inventory.

#### **Issues:**

1. Columbia Falls is the most affordable community in Flathead County.
2. Median cost of a house in the three Cities and the County:

	2004	2007	2011 <sup>3</sup>
Columbia Falls	\$148,000	\$183,000	\$100,000
Whitefish	\$225,000	\$322,000	\$240,000
Kalispell	\$169,000	\$190,000	\$145,050
Flathead County	\$179,000	\$250,000	\$180,000

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<sup>3</sup> 2011 Flathead County Real Estate Market, Jim Kelley, Kelley Appraisal - 2012

3. Housing prices have seen a significant drop over the last five years. Although this is difficult for those already owning a home, it is a good opportunity for those just entering the housing market. The median price of a house decreased 32% from 2004 and a decrease of 45% from the high in 2007.
4. During the 1990's, population (24.8% increase) outpaced new housing construction (20% increase) in the city pointing towards a future housing crunch. The housing crunch of the 1990's and early 2000's appears to have corrected itself with building boom of the mid 2000's and the subsequent mortgage crises.
5. Columbia Falls in 2000 was 2/3 owner occupancy -1/3 renter - (this was a stable trend over the past 20 years). Flathead County as a whole was 3/4 owner occupied – 1/4 renter in comparison. These trends continued through the decade of 2000 with 64.3 owner occupied units and 35.7% renter occupied in Columbia Falls.<sup>4</sup>
6. Average household size in Columbia Falls decreased from 2.83 (1980) to 2.52 (2000) but remained steady at 2.52 in 2010. New housing developments should anticipate the need for smaller units.
7. The median age in Columbia Falls has increased from 27.7 to 35.7 years (1980 – 2000); however it leveled off between 2000 and 2010 with the median age of 35.6 in 2010<sup>5</sup>. This is younger than Flathead County whose median age is 39 (year 2000) and 41.2 (2010). This will continue to influence housing choice and style.
8. The city has a moderately young housing stock. The median age is 1981 construction (approximately 30 years).
9. New house construction has fluctuated considerably over the last 20 years:

Building Permits for all Residential Uses <sup>6</sup>	1990	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
	0 units	62 units	36 units	99 units	31 units	10 units

10. City housing stock is 72% single family, 18% multi-family, 6% duplex, 4% mobile home. Flathead County - 69% single family, 10% multi-family, 5% duplex, 16% mobile homes. More recently (2008-2011) the housing mix (new units) has shifted slightly with 60% single family, 34% multi-family (Apartment and Townhouse), 2% duplex, and 4% mobile home.

11. Housing units in the city are projected to increase 24% in the next 10 years.

<sup>4</sup> 2010 US Census

<sup>5</sup> 2010 US Census

<sup>6</sup> Prior to 2003 units numbers included the one mile planning jurisdiction.

12. At this time, there are few large, vacant tracts of un-platted residential land left within the city limits of Columbia Falls. Future urban residential growth will require extension of urban services and annexation of adjacent outlying areas.

**Goals:**

1. An adequate supply and mix of housing options (in terms of cost, location, type and design) to meet the needs of present and future residents.
2. Residential development that does not excessively burden the local government and is adequately served by public facilities and services.
3. Solid, stable, well maintained neighborhoods which are safe from the intrusion of incompatible uses.

**Policies:**

1. Provide an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of all residents of the planning jurisdiction including low and moderate-income residents.
2. Suburban Housing:
  - a. Suburban Housing areas, as shown on the growth policy map should provide densities appropriate to the limitations of the particular site, and should not exceed two dwellings per gross acre.
  - b. The suburban residential designation is intended to reduce density and development impacts in sensitive areas and existing rural neighborhoods.
  - c. Single-family houses are the primary housing type.
  - d. These areas should have paved streets and access to services. New subdivisions located in or near Columbia Falls should generally include sidewalks and installation of low intensity street lighting appropriate to the area.
3. Urban Residential:
  - a. Urban residential areas should be encouraged to be developed where adequate services and facilities are available, or extensions can be provided.
  - b. Typical densities are two to eight dwellings per gross acre.
  - c. Single-family houses are the primary housing type. Duplexes, guest houses, accessory apartments, and small dispersed areas of multi-family housing are also anticipated.
  - d. Urban density residential areas should be fully served by urban infrastructure and municipal services, including paved streets, curbs, sidewalks abutting all residential lots, boulevards and public sewer and water.

- e. These areas should have convenient pedestrian and vehicle access to neighborhood business districts, parks, and elementary schools.

#### 4. Multi-family Residential:

- a. Multifamily residential areas, as shown on the growth policy map, have typical densities of eight to twenty dwellings per gross acre, as may be appropriate to the site.
- b. Small high-density residential districts are encouraged to be dispersed throughout the urban area. These districts should be located predominantly near schools, buffering retail and business areas and adjacent to major streets.
- c. Multi-family housing developments should be designed to fit compatibly within larger single-family neighborhoods.
- d. Townhouses are encouraged to be a primary housing type in these areas. Additional common housing types include low-rise apartments, duplexes, manufactured home parks, and upper floors of mixed-use buildings.
- e. In transitional areas zoned for multi-family residential use but developed primarily as single-family houses, conversion of existing houses to offices is encouraged, in order to maintain investment in the existing building stock and ease the land-use transition.
- f. Multifamily Residential areas should be within close proximity to small parks or common open spaces. When parks are not immediately available or are under sized, projects should contribute to the development of neighborhood parks and open space.
- g. High density areas should be fully served by urban infrastructure and services. This includes paved streets, curbs, sidewalks abutting all residential lots, boulevards and public sewer and water.
- h. Centralized refuse collection should be screened and protected from wildlife.
- i. As density increases to 4-plex or larger buildings, increased design standards should be required including:
  - i. The use of street trees along the R/W and live landscaping around the building and parking lots,
  - ii. Façade treatment to break up building mass including such techniques as adding entrance porches, bay windows, wall off-sets, balconies, decks, window treatments, etc.,
  - iii. Pitched roofs and dormer windows to break up long expanses of uninterrupted roof lines.

5. Encourage the development of urban residential neighborhoods as the primary residential land-use pattern in the growth policy area.

6. Give special consideration to functional design to accommodate seniors and disabled, who have various special needs regarding housing, transportation, handicapped access, and services.
7. Provide design standards for manufactured homes and manufactured home parks as an affordable housing option.
8. Allow low-impact home occupations which do not show any visible exterior indication and do not undermine a neighborhood's residential character.
9. All new residential developments should provide adequate off street parking.
10. All residential areas should be served by sidewalks or bike paths. Where new projects abut collector or arterial roads, bike and pedestrian paths and trails should be incorporated in place of standard sidewalks.
11. Encourage the use of flexible design and design standards where terrain is difficult or where infill is necessary.
- 12 .Encourage clustering of density where environmentally sensitive areas are present and beneficial open space or park area can be achieved.
13. Allow reduction in minimum lot sizes where resulting open space serves as a beneficial buffer or park site.
14. Residential lighting that is properly shielded and directed to avoid the spread of fugitive light is encouraged both on residential streets and for multi-family and non-residential uses in residential neighborhoods.
- 15 .Designate new areas for urban scale residential expansion adjacent to the city limits that can be served by municipal services to accommodate anticipated future residential growth.
16. Utilize the tool of a Planned Unit development in:
  - a. Areas where both residential and commercial uses are planned so that the uses are designed in a compatible and harmonious manner.
  - b. Residential and development areas where a variety of lot sizes might result in more innovative design and environmental protection.

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop and implement an affordable housing strategy to effectively provide for the needs of low and moderate income residents. This should include addressing the need for additional rental and subsidized housing opportunities.
2. Develop programs for rehabilitation of deteriorating neighborhoods and housing stock.
3. Review the zoning text and map periodically to remain current with changing technologies.
4. Develop a comprehensive pedestrian trail and sidewalk system in the community to connect residential areas, parks and the commercial core. This

would include the installation of new sidewalks and trails and the replacement of existing deteriorating sidewalks. Install crosswalk improvements where appropriate.

#### **4. LAND USE – COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Commercial activity and a commercial center are vital for a community as they provide employment, tax base and community identity. Columbia Falls serves as a commercial service center for northeast Flathead County including the Canyon and the North Fork. The commercial core of Columbia Falls has shifted from a traditional downtown center along Nucleus Avenue to a more linear development along US Highway 2 within the community. At the same time, the community has felt significant pressure from Kalispell, 15 miles to the south, which serves as a secondary trade center for Northwest Montana and from generally unregulated linear strip development along US Highway 2 between Kalispell and Columbia Falls.

##### **Issues:**

1. Land devoted to commercial development has more than doubled between 1982 and 2002 from 4% of developed land in the community to 9.6%. This has primarily been due to new commercial development along US Highway 2 (9<sup>th</sup> Street).
2. Downtown Columbia Falls (Nucleus Avenue) continues to evolve with new development and interest in rehabilitation of old structures.
3. Significant new commercial development and re-development has occurred along US Highway 2 (9<sup>th</sup> Street) however, this development is typically one lot deep, linear in design and auto oriented characterized by individual accesses, limited landscaping and expansive parking lots.
4. Columbia Falls lacks a broad base of retail services such as department stores and community based retail services.
5. Columbia Falls serves as a gateway city to Glacier National Park situated on the Flathead River yet it is just beginning to capitalize on its location in terms of traveler services, accommodations and amenities.
6. Commercial strips have developed on the east side of the planning jurisdiction (Columbia Heights) and the west side of the planning jurisdiction (Blue Moon/Highway 2 Corridor area).

##### **Goals:**

1. Balanced commercial development providing convenient access to a broad selection of goods and services.
2. Columbia falls as a gateway community to Glacier National Park and the surrounding recreational assets which provide the traveler and residents with a broad array of retail businesses, services and accommodations.
3. A revitalized Nucleus Avenue providing a downtown focus for the community of Columbia Falls.

4. Focused commercial development along US Highway 2 that embraces good signage, access and landscaping serving as an entrance corridor to Columbia Falls.

**Policies:**

1. General

- a. Design and locate development to protect public health and safety; insure adequate provision of services; fit the character of its surroundings; and encourage the most appropriate use of land. Community character shall represent the following values identified by the community in the public input process: scenic, small town ambience, outdoor lifestyle, western town, historic/cultural assets, national park gateway, wildlife, walkable community, winter sports.
- b. Utilize Planned Unit Developments as a tool to ensure that commercial areas provide appropriate buffers to adjacent residential areas, and that all planned uses are compatible.

2. Central Business District:

- a. Recognize Nucleus Avenue as the historical downtown community center of Columbia Falls.
- b. Work to promote redevelopment/revitalization of commercial buildings in the downtown core.
- c. Establish a Tax Increment District within the downtown area to aid in re-investment in the downtown.
- d. Reinforce and take advantage of downtown's strengths, including its higher concentration of people, investment in buildings and infrastructure, intricate mix of land uses, historic and architectural character, pedestrian orientation, and visitor attraction.
- e. Recognize that there are special parking considerations downtown which differ from other areas, encourage innovative parking management, effective regulation of on-street parking, shared parking provisions, parking standards that encourage reuse of upper floors, and provision of public parking lots and structures.
- f. New development should give adequate consideration to downtown's historic character and use.
- g. Support mixed-use projects in this area which blend traditional commercial with office and residential housing opportunities.
- h. Support the concentration of community events, civic functions, and activities in the downtown.

3. Neighborhood Commercial Districts:

- a. Establish neighborhood commercial areas designed to provide convenience goods and services addressing the daily needs of the immediate neighborhood.

- b. Neighborhood commercial districts should generally be three to five acres in size and be spaced one-half to one mile apart. Sites should be configured to enable clustering of neighborhood commercial businesses, encouraging bike and pedestrian access where practicable.
- c. Uses should be designed, set back, landscaped and buffered to fit the surrounding neighborhood.

#### 4. Highway Corridor/Community Entrance:

- a. Emphasize the objective of a pleasing entrance to the city that encourages highway landscaping.
- b. Encourage the use of innovative land use regulations to achieve a pleasing community entrance.
- c. Encourage highway commercial development in the planning jurisdiction to adhere to the following design guidelines:
  - Encourage access by a secondary street or use of shared driveways and interconnected parking lots where secondary street access is unfeasible.
  - Landscape highway frontage and parking lots, to enhance development sites and soften the visual impacts of development.
  - Keep signs simple, to reduce clutter and allow rapid comprehension of highway motorists without undue distraction. Encourage variety and creativity in sign design.
  - Outdoor storage, machinery, utilities, trash dumpsters, service bays, antennas, rooftop equipment, and similar accessory facilities should be hidden or screened from public view to protect aesthetic qualities.
  - Outdoor lighting should be low intensity, directed downward, and shielded to prevent glare.
- d. A complete system of pedestrian and bike paths is important in these areas.
- e. Expand the depth of urban highway commercial districts as mixed-use corridors, in order to provide an alternative to continued linear commercial sprawl, provide flexibility for larger development sites, and expand small business opportunities.
- f. Ensure that new highway commercial districts respect the scale and character of the Columbia Falls community.
- g. Within these corridor areas, as distance from the highway increases, create a gradual transition into the residential neighborhoods by reduced density, increased buffering, and increased sensitivity to compatible design.
- h. Avoid premature encroachment into established, intact residential areas.

## 5. Resort Residential Areas

Encourage compatible mixed use development in the Meadow Lakes Resort that accommodates a variety of residential densities with a limited amount of commercial uses. Allow for short term occupancy in resort residential areas. Utilize the tool of a Planned Unit Development to ensure that uses are compatible and that recreational amenities are well planned.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Review the Columbia Falls sign code to determine if it is meeting the goals of the Growth Policy by encouraging quality design for the city's commercial areas.
2. Review the landscape design standards within the Columbia Falls zoning ordinance to ensure that undesirable aspects of commercial development such as storage areas and parking lots are being adequately shielded and that the commercial entrance ways to the community are appealing.
3. Develop lighting standards for commercial areas that ensure the lighting is directed down and shielded to inhibit light trespassing or impacting neighboring properties, reducing unwanted glare and protecting the night skies.
4. Identify under used commercial buildings and develop a program to either encourage activities to improve/upgrade/revitalize these buildings.
5. Create an Urban Renewal District or Tax Increment Finance District for the commercial and industrial areas.
6. Support the paving of the North Fork Road north to Camas Creek to serve as an eastern entrance to Glacier National Park thus encouraging Glacier National Park traffic down Nucleus and supporting Columbia Falls as a Gateway City to Glacier National Park.
7. Support zoning Nucleus and a Historic District to promote mix use, multifamily, and commercial uses in same structure.

## **5. LAND USE – INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The industrial base within a community serves as the economic engine of the area. A healthy economic base provides vitality for a community and positively affects all aspects of its economy. Flathead County is the largest industrial employer in the State of Montana and Columbia Falls is an employment hub of Flathead County.

### **Issues:**

1. Industrial activity within the Columbia Falls areas is almost entirely focused on resource based activity.
2. Major industrial employers in the Columbia Falls area and Flathead County generally have fluctuated over the past three decades as traditional industries such as forest and wood products and aluminum production are subject to fluctuation due to environmental concerns, rising energy costs and market influences outside of the Flathead.
3. In the past 30 years, the number of lumber mills in Columbia Falls has declined from 3 to 2 with the closing of Superior Lumber and the Aluminum Plant, once the largest industrial employer in the Valley completely shut down in 2009.
4. Current industrial activity includes:<sup>7</sup>
  - Plum Creek Timber and Manufacturing (300 employees)
  - Stoltze Lumber (125 employees) and Biomass
  - Schellinger Construction
  - RBM Lumber
  - Hanson Trucking
  - Western Building Center
  - AWM
  - Western Wood Tech
5. Columbia Falls lies on the main line of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, is bisected by U.S. Highway 2 and lies approximately 6 miles north of Glacier Park International Airport.
6. Approximately 20%<sup>8</sup> of the labor force in Columbia Falls is in basic industry. However, of the 500 acres of industrially developed land within one mile of Columbia Falls, only 80 acres including rail lines is inside the city limits. This strains the tax base of the city as it truly functions more as a bedroom community versus an industrial hub.

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<sup>7</sup> Montana West Economic Development – Leading Employers of the Flathead

<sup>8</sup> US Census Bureau 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates

**Goals:**

1. Encourage job creation.
2. A diversified industrial economy that attracts new industry and business provides local employment opportunities and encourages value added production.

**Policies:**

1. Industrial areas should provide for manufacturing, fabricating, processing, storage, and transportation services.
2. Industrial areas should have immediate access to air, rail, and arterial or collector streets.
3. Community water and sewer access should be required.
4. Industrial developments should be located inside or be immediately adjacent to the city limits where urban services could be extended now, or in the future.
5. Industrial areas should not be located adjacent to residential neighborhoods or light-intensity commercial districts. Extensive buffering and landscaping should be incorporated should this occur.
6. Direct ingress-egress into residential neighborhoods should be prohibited.
7. Columbia Falls needs to enhance, encourage, and retain employment opportunities but it should be done in a manner that demonstrates a clear economic return to the community.

**Recommendations:**

Continue working with such organizations as Montana West Economic Development and the Chamber to promote economic development opportunities in the Columbia Falls area.

## **6. LAND USE – AGRICULTURE/TIMBER/RURAL PRESERVES**

Agricultural and timber lands preservation and maintaining the rural character of some of the urban/rural fringe areas of the community have become increasingly difficult issues because of the decline in commodity prices and increased development pressures. Suburban areas immediately surrounding Columbia Falls have become important for future urban development.

### **Issues:**

1. Agricultural lands that provide a source of food and wood products, export income, scenic open space, and wildlife habitat are at risk because of economic and development pressures.
2. Although not a significant issue in the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction, agriculture in the urban/rural fringes of Flathead County is diminishing due to the conversion of agricultural land to residential subdivisions that can create conflicts between agriculture and expanding urban and suburban uses.
3. Rural lands close to the city are an important part of the city's future urban expansion area and can be vulnerable to untimely low density development that is not supported by urban services and facilities.
4. Conservation easements and similar voluntary mechanisms have become successful methods of conserving agricultural and timber land, but no local government programs currently exist to purchase development rights.
5. Even with the recent decline in per acre cost for rural open lands, high land values are a major impediment to supporting and expanding the farming economy.
6. A significant amount of undeveloped timber land owned by the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant lies immediately north of Aluminum City. In addition, the aluminum plant owns significant agricultural lands immediately east of the Flathead River north of US 2. These lands serve as a protective preserve to buffer the aluminum plant operations. These lands will remain intact and undeveloped as long as the aluminum plant operates and the plant is presently closed pending a new contract for electricity and an increase in the aluminum commodities market. Should the plant continue its current closure some or all of this land will probably be divested. It is realistic to assume that some or all of the lands will be proposed for urban and suburban development.
7. There is a growing concern that agriculture and timber landowners should have options for a return on their property.

### **Goals:**

1. Encourage voluntary conservation of agricultural and timber lands.
2. Maintain lands designated for urban development in agriculture or timber production until urban services and urban demands occur.
3. Support the efforts of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant properties to

maintain an agriculture/timber buffer around the existing aluminum plant site operations.

**Policies:**

1. Development of outlying parcels of land in the planning jurisdiction which are not readily serviced by municipal water and sewer should either be:
2. Discouraged until urban services are available or;
3. Developed using cluster concepts.
4. Cluster developments on urban designated lands should incorporate urban scale design standards or be built to incorporate the future extension of urban scale services.
5. Open space areas associated with cluster developments that are located in close proximity to the city limits should be considered as an urban reserve area so that it can be redeveloped when public services and utilities become available.
6. Discourage the premature or speculative rezoning of agricultural and timber lands from low density agricultural to intermediate density uses.

**Recommendations:**

1. Cooperation between the city and county governmental bodies should be fostered so that redevelopment of the rural areas close to urban services can be easily accomplished.
2. Should the Aluminum Plant change its management or operational strategy and/or permanently close operations, the city and the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant should work closely to determine the most feasible strategy and best use of lands should it choose to divest itself of some or all of these lands for conservation or development. This may involve an amendment process to the Growth Policy map for those lands north of the railroad tracks.

## **7. URBAN DESIGN/HISTORIC AND CULTURAL FACILITIES**

Every community is different. Every community has its own story, its own origins and its own form shaped by its history. The built environment says much about the vitality and future of a community. Communities that respect their past and promote the present build a better future.

### **Issues:**

1. Over the last ten years Columbia Falls and its citizens and business owners have worked hard to revitalize the traditional town center, Nucleus Avenue. Entrepreneurs have constructed a couple new buildings and remodeled others. There are still a number of buildings that are underutilized and lacking in maintenance but things are changing. Recent work by the First Best Place, a Columbia Falls nonprofit organization, has worked to bring activities downtown that support the existing business and encourage investment.
2. New commercial development continues to develop along 9<sup>th</sup> Street (US 2). The City has implemented new design standards in 2007 for large and small buildings in the Commercial and Industrial Zones. In 2008 the City implemented the “Industrial Buffer” provisions that require landscaping to buffer these intensive uses from residential uses. The City has also reviewed and updated the sign regulations several times over the last ten years to provide for more appropriate scale signage within the City. However, as Columbia Falls is the entrance way to Glacier National Park these provisions will be looked at regularly to ensure they continue to make a positive change in the City’s appearance.
3. The Montana Veterans’ Home has several historical buildings dating over 100 years old. Support for the Veterans’ Home has allowed substantial improvements and restorations to the historic service building (old chapel), Old Main, and the supervisors quarters which will help preserve these building into the future. Improvements include asbestos removal, exterior siding, new copula on Old Main, new heating and bathrooms in the old chapel, walking paths and trees in the cemetery. All of these projects have been done to preserve the utilization of the structures.

### **Policies:**

1. Encourage thoughtful upgrades and rehabilitation of historically or culturally significant structures and sites.
2. Support the efforts of private owners and conservation groups to identify, protect, rehabilitate and reuse historic and cultural resources.
3. Continue to encourage the design of new commercial and multi-family development to incorporate pedestrian access, well designed and landscaped off-street parking, integrated signage and the screening of storage areas and refuse collection areas.
4. Encourage mixed commercial and second floor office and residential use

in the downtown core.

5. Continue to encourage the use of parking lot and building lighting that shields and directs the light downward and avoids the spilling of light onto other private property.

**Recommendations:**

1. Identify blighted buildings and areas throughout the community.
2. Continue to develop a program including incentives, regulations or community awareness to encourage rehabilitation of or removal of underutilized buildings.
3. Review and revise the sign codes, particularly in the area of free standing and portable signs to improve design and community image.
4. Promote paving of the North Fork Road with bicycle facilities to Camas Creek, giving Glacier National Park an improved westerly entrance and further establishing Columbia Falls and Nucleus Avenue as the gateway to Glacier National Park.
5. Review landscaping standards to ensure that commercial uses (and where appropriate industrial uses) have parking lots and storage areas fenced and screened.
6. Develop outdoor or exterior lighting standards (dark skies ordinance) for the community that ensure that all outdoor lighting is directed down and shielded to inhibit light trespassing or impacting neighboring properties, reduce unwanted glare and protect the night skies.
7. Encourage the development of a hotel or motel in the City of Columbia Falls.
8. Encourage mixed use development in downtown area.

## **8. TRANSPORTATION**

A transportation system moves people and goods. More than that, it provides a framework for a community to grow and prosper. Efficient movement, access to commerce and dependability are hallmarks for a community. At the same time, incorporating special design features that protect special places and anticipate the positive and negative impacts of transportation features make truly livable communities.

### **Issues:**

1. Columbia Falls is well connected to the outside world via US Highway 2, the BNSF Railroad and Glacier National Park International Airport.
2. While connectedness with the outside community is good, Columbia Falls faces several natural and man-made barriers to free movement:
  - a. US Highway 2 bisects the community east-west restricting movement north-south both in terms of free pedestrian movement and north-south vehicle movement.
  - b. The BNSF Railroad line bisects the community east-west along the northern portion of the community with only two vehicle crossings within the city and only 4 within the entire planning jurisdiction.
  - c. A spur line of the BNSF Railroad extends south towards Kalispell from the mainline bisecting the westerly half of the community only allowing crossings at US 2 (9<sup>th</sup> Street), Talbot, the Truck Route, and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue within the city.
  - d. The Flathead River forms a natural barrier along the entire south side of Columbia Falls. Only one bridge (US 2) crosses the river today. The Red Bridge is closed and is not on a county replacement list to date. There are no other crossings south for 15 miles to Kalispell.
3. In a year 2000 community survey, 43 % of the respondents said streets and 63 % of the respondents said sidewalk and pedestrian trails in the community were not adequate. Since that time, the City has built over 3 miles of bike path/pedestrian trails in the City: 4<sup>th</sup> Ave West from Highway 2 to Talbot Road, Veteran's Drive from Talbot Road to Highway 2, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave East from Highway 2 to 9<sup>th</sup> Ave East. Additionally, with the subdivision growth of the over the past decade, over 40 blocks of sidewalks were added throughout the City.
4. The county will not accept dedication of any roads within new rural subdivisions. Roads are built to county standards, then owned and maintained by the property owners.
5. Excepting development which abuts US 2, existing rural development which rings Columbia Falls is serviced by rural standard roads typified by a narrow travel surface which may or may not be paved, open ditches for

drainage, no sidewalks and at times inadequate R/W. As the rural population grows and as Columbia Falls grows into these areas, there is a significant unmet cost in upgrading these streets to an urban standard.

6. The urban area still lacks pedestrian access (sidewalks & trails). While the City has made strides in constructing sidewalks and trails along Talbot, Third Avenue, Fourth Avenue, River trail from Fourth to South Nucleus and Veterans Drive, the City will continue completing paths and sidewalks that will loop the parks, schools, and business community to provide safe and adequate access throughout the City.

**Policies:**

1. Streets and highways are to be grouped together and defined according to the type and level of service they are intended to provide. Characteristics include the volume of traffic they carry, the speed of traffic and their destination and service area. Within the planning jurisdiction streets are defined below and are visually represented on the Growth Policy Map.
  - a. Arterial: A major road or highway with moderate to fast speeds and high traffic volumes. Arterials provide access to the regional transportation network. They move traffic across the county, between cities and communities and/or from one major part of the Planning Jurisdiction to another. Throughout the Planning Jurisdiction individual private accesses onto arterials serving adjacent parcels should be discouraged. Traffic volumes would typically exceed 5,000 vehicles per day.
  - b. Collectors: A secondary or intermediate street with moderate speeds and low to moderate volumes. Such streets would collect local traffic from neighborhoods and carry it to adjacent neighborhoods or transfer the traffic to the arterial system. Such streets would typically serve a neighborhood or area of 100 or more dwellings and carry 1000 to 5000 vehicles per day.
  - c. Local: Minor streets intended to serve individual sites, buildings or lots. Local streets feed into collectors or provide destination access off of collectors.
2. Coordinate and support the design standards for streets in public works standards, subdivision regulations and other city documents.
3. Sidewalks are necessary on both sides of all local, collector and arterial streets. Sidewalks should be detached from the travel surface and be a minimum of 5 feet wide.
4. In certain situations, such as along collector or arterial streets or where a designated multi-use (bike trail) is proposed, the sidewalk on one side of the street may be substituted for a multi-use trail. Trails should have an all weather (asphalt or concrete) surface with a minimum travel width of 8 feet and preferably 10 feet.
5. Where density and location dictate, all subdivisions within one mile of

the City of Columbia Falls (residential, commercial and industrial) should require that streets are built to an urban standard. This includes paved streets, curb and gutter, sidewalks on both sides, a landscape boulevard and street lighting.

6. Cul-de-sacs are discouraged as they prohibit the connection of neighborhoods, tend to focus traffic versus disperse it and are more difficult to maintain in winter conditions.

7. Utility pedestals should be located outside the boulevard and sidewalks area.

8. Within both residential developments and highway oriented commercial developments, street trees should be incorporated into the street design to improve community and neighborhood aesthetics, to buffer neighborhoods from traffic, to buffer the pedestrian from traffic, and to provide for shaded streets.

9. Alleys should be encouraged especially in townhouse developments to provide improved lot access for vehicles, convenient utility location and convenient solid waste collection. In addition, improved residential design can be accomplished by reducing the proliferation of garage doors along the street fronts.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Continue to work with Flathead County and interested third parties to refurbish Red Bridge for pedestrian access.
2. Promote paving of the North Fork Road, with bicycle facilities to Camas Creek, giving Glacier National Park an improved westerly entrance and further establishing Columbia Falls and Nucleus Avenue as the entrance way to Glacier National Park.
3. Implement the Columbia Falls bike and pedestrian trails map
4. Use developer installed improvements where facilities abut or intercept proposed subdivisions or individual projects.
5. Use local funds leveraged with federal transportation funds to construct such facilities.
6. Upgrade pedestrian facilities when upgrading sections of street.
7. Actively solicit private funds and help from local organizations to

implement the trails systems throughout the community.

8. Encourage jointly funded projects between the city and county.

## **9. PARKS AND RECREATION**

Parks, recreational areas and open space are important components of a community and contribute greatly to the physical, mental and emotional health of the population. The residents of the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction have access to a vast area of some of the most scenic open space in the nation including Glacier National Park, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas and national forest lands. At the same time the Columbia Falls area is urbanizing and there is an increasing need to provide for the recreational needs of the residents of the area in close proximity to where they live.

### **Issues:**

1. The most recent Columbia Falls community surveys most often reported the need for increased bike and pedestrian paths, improved public rest room facilities, a community recreation center, a skateboard park, ice skating rinks and picnic areas. The following findings were reported.
  - a. 63% voiced support for more and better bike and pedestrian paths.
  - b. 55% supported improved public restrooms at public parks.
  - c. 48% indicated preschool recreational facilities were inadequate.
  - d. 43% indicated elementary recreational facilities were inadequate.
  - e. 58% indicated high school recreational facilities were inadequate.
  - f. 64% indicated young adult recreational facilities were inadequate.
  - g. 62% indicated middle aged adults and senior citizens recreational facilities were inadequate.
2. While need for additional park facilities was ranked high, only 21% supported increasing taxes to fund new parks.
3. Except for the addition of River's Edge Park in 2007, consisting of 27.75 acres, all of the parks within the planning jurisdiction are 6 acres or less in size qualifying them as neighborhood parks. Except for River's Edge Park, there are no community or regional parks.
4. The Columbia Falls Junior High was built on Talbot/Veteran's Drive in 2000 and includes extensive outdoor recreation including basketball courts, volleyball courts and in 2011, a new outdoor running track. The City has updated Horine Park to include additional play features as the neighborhood has grown. Several Talbot area subdivisions have included private, homeowner association parks within their approved plat.
5. Columbia Falls is a Tree City USA member. The City plants as many trees as possible with local and forestry grant funding, usually averaging 5 – 10 new trees each year. Due to a special federal grant, the City has planted over 240 trees since the program began in 2007.

### **Goals:**

1. Continue the bike and pedestrian network that connects the schools, parks and major commercial areas with the residential neighborhoods.

2. Well planned neighborhood parks strategically located to address the needs of new and growing neighborhoods.
3. Explore opportunities to create an enclosed pool facility in Columbia Falls.

#### STANDARDS

TOT LOT	May be privately owned and maintained, or owned and maintained by the City $\frac{1}{4}$ - 1 acre in size, serving the immediate needs of a specific development designed for intensive use by children.
NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	A recreational area serving those living within walking or short driving distance. It usually serves an area with a radius of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, encompassing a maximum of 2,000 people and having a minimum size of one to five acres. Pedestrian access to the surrounding area is important.
COMMUNITY PARK	A recreational area serving the City of Columbia Falls ( $\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius). Minimum size should be 15 acres serving a maximum population of 4,000 - 6,000 people.
DISTRICT PARK	A recreational area serving the needs of the entire Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction.
REGIONAL PARK	A recreational area serving the entire county and the surrounding areas.

#### **Policies:**

1. Provide a balanced system of parks and open spaces throughout the community.
2. Provide public access to all dedicated public parks.
3. Maximize parkland dedication and monies via the subdivision process.
4. Designate key future neighborhood parkland sites in those areas proposed for future residential development.
5. Accept cash-in-lieu of land dedication as part of the subdivision process unless proposed land dedication is necessary for the future development of parks, trails and recreation facilities.
6. Continue to earmark cash in lieu of parkland funds to develop and expand parks and trail systems for use in close proximity to where funds originated.
7. Provide public access to Flathead River as a priority. Give special consideration to dedication of public access to waterfront areas, public parks or passive recreation areas, and public-access waterfront trails in new subdivisions adjacent to Flathead River and to other streams in order to provide suitable parkland for future users and prevent public waters from being landlocked by new lot development.
8. Continue the integrated system of bike and pedestrian trails and greenways connecting neighborhoods, commercial areas, schools, water bodies, recreational amenities, and rural trails. Trails should be designed

as linear parks that provide for walking, bicycling, exercise, and where appropriate cross-country skiing.

9. As subdivisions and multi-family projects are developed adjacent to proposed trail sites, require these projects to assist in developing their share or portion of such trails.
10. All new parks shall be designed to meet American Disabilities Act standards and existing parks should be upgraded to meet ADA standards as needed.
11. Protect and utilize natural areas through the conservation of environmentally sensitive or scenic areas.
12. Promote coordination between the city, school district, county, state, U.S. Forest Service, Montana Veterans Administration and private organizations regarding park and recreation activities and planning to avoid duplication of efforts and to promote synergistic efforts.
13. Whenever possible, city or county parks should adjoin or be planned in conjunction with the school district. Sharing could include the use of school lands and facilities after school hours by the public. In return, maintenance agreements could be negotiated with city and county departments.
14. Develop parks to provide active and passive recreational environments for families, groups, individuals and the disabled of all ages.
15. All multi-family developments (apartment, condominium or townhouse) having twelve or more dwellings for permanent non-elderly residents should incorporate privately owned and maintained playgrounds or tot lots if the development is not readily served by a neighborhood park.
16. Citizen involvement is encouraged at every level of park selection, design and development.
17. Utilize the Bonneville Power Administration's transmission easements to facilitate the creation of paths.
18. Promote the development of a Dog Park within the Columbia Falls Park System.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue to develop neighborhood parks in the Hilltop Homes/Talbot neighborhood as needed.
2. Continue to require proposed subdivisions to provide adequate recreational facilities, including tot lots, neighborhood parks and paths and sidewalks based on the size and configuration of the subdivision.
3. Investigate establishing a dog park within the Columbia Falls Park system.

## **10. PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

Public services such as police and fire protection are generally tax supported and maintained by the city or county government. Sewer and water facilities and solid waste pickup are typically supported by user fees. Such public investment plays a role in the development process of the entire community. In many cases the rate and location of developments may depend, to a certain extent, on the location, design, construction and timing of public facilities and services.

Within the Planning Jurisdiction, two factors limit efficient provision of public facilities and services. First, in the rural areas, the geographical area is vast, and the lack of density makes the provision of services uneconomical. Secondly, throughout the Planning Jurisdiction, topography and natural and man-made features can be barriers to efficient service.

### **A. POLICE PROTECTION**

#### **Issues:**

1. Within the city limits the Columbia Falls Police Department has primary responsibility; outside the city limits the Flathead County Sheriff's Department has primary responsibility.
2. The Columbia Falls Police Department has a Chief, 8 full-time officers, one office assistant, and maintains one holding cell where persons can be detained until transferred to the Flathead County Detention Center. They maintain an officer to population ratio of 1 officer to 500 residents which is an accepted state standard. The Police Department facility has undergone a complete remodel in 2012 of offices and squad room to provide updated facilities as well as electrical and communication services to serve the digital age of records and communications. Safety was also improved by separating the booking areas from the general public interactions. In addition to the updated police department, Columbia Falls is part of the new consolidated 911 Center located in Kalispell which combined the 911 facilities of the three City Police Departments and the County Sheriff Office. The 911 Center handles all emergency, including police, fire and ambulance and after-hours administrative calls for service.
3. Pursuant to an interlocal agreement between Columbia Falls and the County law enforcement departments, either department will provide temporary, backup or "first on the scene" assistance upon request.
4. The Sheriff anticipates slow emergency response times and minimal routine patrolling in outlying areas, due to understaffing and dispersed population growth. Response time in the rural portion of the Planning Jurisdiction is limited because of the vastness of the area and the limited size and patrol capabilities of the County Sheriff's Department. As population increases in the rural area, crime may increase at least proportionately and the issue of adequate rural police protection will become even more critical.

**Goal:**

1. A responsive, well trained and maintained police protection and crime prevention program throughout the Planning Jurisdiction meeting the needs of seasonal and year-round residents.

**Policies:**

1. The city needs to maintain an officer to population ratio of one officer to 500 residents.
2. Neighborhood Watch Programs are encouraged throughout the city and developments in rural areas.
3. The Columbia Falls Police Department and Flathead County Sheriff's Office should review all commercial site plans and residential, commercial, and industrial subdivisions for police access, public safety, and crime prevention.

**B. FIRE PROTECTION:**

**Issues:**

1. The Columbia Falls Volunteer Fire Department provides fire protection to the City and a majority of the planning jurisdiction north and west of the Flathead River. There is a main fire station in the city and a satellite station on US Highway 2 one-half mile south of the Highway 40 intersection.
2. The city has a full time fire chief and a 27 member all-volunteer fire department with a maximum enrollment of 30 members. When the city reaches a population of 5,000 it will be required to have a paid fire department staff unless the City Council, by resolution, declares the city a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class City for fire protection. This threshold will be reached possibly by the year 2015 and for sure by 2020 if the trends in population growth continue.
3. The portion of the planning jurisdiction east and south of the Flathead River is served by the Badrock Volunteer Fire Department with a new station on Highway 206. The Columbia Falls Fire Department has a mutual aid agreement with all neighboring Fire Department.
4. Recognize that Railroad and Highway 2 traffic increases the risk of emergencies involving hazardous materials. Columbia Falls has access to the trained hazmat team out of Kalispell for response to hazardous materials response.
6. The I.S.O. rating within the city is a 5 and a 5 outside of the city limits.

7. The most recent Columbia Falls area opinion poll indicated a 97% satisfaction rating with the City Fire Department.

**Goal:**

1. A fire protection program serving the needs of the entire Planning Jurisdiction emphasizing prevention, access, response time and well-trained and equipped personnel.

**Policies:**

1. In the rural portions of the planning jurisdiction, apply and enforce the Fire Protection Guidelines for Wildland Residential Interface Development adopted by Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, including defensible space, road access, water supply, building materials, and building density and spacing.
2. All extensions of the Columbia Falls City water system should maintain fire flow capacities and hydrant locations to comply with the Uniform Fire Code.
3. All new rural developments of five lots or more (or additions to existing developments which total five lots or more) should provide hydrants or a system of recharging fire tankers acceptable to the local fire district. Where these are not feasible or acceptable, a cash payment equivalent to the cost of a tanker recharge facility should be paid to the District to assist the District in acquiring tanker and response equipment.
4. Loop roads are encouraged over cul-de-sacs in order to provide secondary access, particularly in areas at high risk from wildfire.

**Recommendations:**

1. The City of Columbia Falls will be required to maintain a staffed fire department with the advent of the city becoming a Class II city (a population of 5,000 recorded at a decennial census). This could occur in 2015 at current growth rate and annexation activity. It is recommended that the City Council approve a resolution to stay a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class City for fire protection as provided for in MCA 7-1-4112.

**C. WATER SERVICES**

**Issues:**

1. The City abandoned the Cedar Creek open reservoir north of Columbia Falls in 1995 and now exclusively uses ground water.
2. The City maintains a 2 million gallon storage tank at Cedar Creek constructed in 1995 and now has the storage capacity to serve a city of 8,200 people.

3. The City maintains two deep wells that are capable of pumping 2.52 million gallons per day which are operating at a theoretical capacity based on average daily demand of 27%.<sup>9</sup>
4. A wellhead protection program has been implemented in the immediate area of the storage tank and city wells.
5. The City implemented a back flow prevention program to maintain its high water quality.
6. Because of its high water quality, the City does not have to treat or chlorinate its water supply.

**Goal:**

1. Continue to provide safe, potable, palatable water supply for the present and future residents and business owners of the community of Columbia Falls.
2. Continue to provide adequate pressure and flow to provide adequate fire suppression services within the city and for developing properties outside the city limits.

**Policies:**

1. The city should only extend new water service to properties inside the city or properties outside the city that are willing to annex to the city now or in the future via the processes that are allowed through the Montana Code Annotated.
2. Dead end lines should be avoided.
3. Water mains should be looped wherever feasible to insure maximum flows and uninterrupted service.
4. Water main extensions should be sized to accommodate not only present but future anticipated needs of the area.
5. Maintain Uniform Fire Code fire flow capacity in all new developments or subdivisions within the city.
6. Water systems used by developments on the fringe of the city should be designed to be compatible with the city's system such that at a future time they could be incorporated into the city should the city grow and/or annexation is requested or required in the future.
7. Private wells within the city should be avoided
8. The city wellhead protection program should be maintained and administered for the long term protection of the city's water supply.

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<sup>9</sup> City of Columbia Falls Water and Wastewater Utility Plan, March 2006

9. The City completed a Facility Study of water and wastewater systems in 2006 in order to identify constraints and capacity issues within these systems and plan for upgrades in the future.
10. Continue the “green space” program that promotes lawn irrigation by adjusting sewer rates to winter averages during the summer months.

**Recommendation:**

1. Maintain and update the Columbia Falls Water and Wastewater Plan and incorporate the plan’s recommendations into the city’s capital improvements plan.

**D. SEWER**

**Issues:**

1. The city operates an extended aeration wastewater treatment plant. The treatment plant was upgraded in 2011 and included a new pretreatment facility, bioreactor, UV disinfection and non-potable water supply system.
2. The city treatment plant can process .625 million gallons per day (mgd), it presently operates at .40 mgd and has a theoretical capacity of 7,500 residents or the ability to accommodate present growth rates out to the year 2020 without any expansion or modification.<sup>10</sup>
3. In 2012 there were still approximately 60 properties served by individual septic systems within the city, some by recent annexation, some by historical use. They are slowly connecting to the system at approximately 5 per year.
4. The city serves the Meadow Lake Resort Development lying one mile north of the city by private contract. The development and its 227 current users do not pay a hookup fee but they do pay 125% of the current monthly treatment rate plus they have granted waivers of annexation to the city.
5. The remainder of the areas outside the City of Columbia Falls have no access to public sewer treatment and use the individual septic tank and drain field as the primary sewage disposal system. This has caused a situation where the city is bordered on several sides by private septic systems inhibiting the orderly spread of municipal sewer.

**Goals:**

1. Provide effective sewage treatment and disposal which does not compromise the environment.

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<sup>10</sup> City of Columbia Falls Water and Wastewater Utility Plan, March 2006

### **Policies:**

1. Direct growth to areas served by municipal sewer, in order to protect water quality and avoid reliance on septic systems, which face severe site limitations in the vast majority of the planning jurisdiction.
2. Avoid development in areas of high groundwater until public sewer is available.
3. Require adequate treatment of industrial waste and avoid storing or locating industrial waste in areas of high groundwater or on soils with geological limitations without taking adequate precautions to avoid groundwater pollution.
4. Sewer should only be extended outside the city limits with the condition of immediate annexation or via the processes outlined in the Montana Code Annotated.
5. If areas or developments outside the city are to be served by city sewer lines, lines should be sized to fit the service area (not just the development) as totally developed. Fees shall be based on both the impact to the collection system, impact on the treatment facility and a fair capital replacement cost.
6. New developments close or adjacent to the City of Columbia Falls which propose septic systems, should submit a contingency plan for hooking into the municipal sewer system.
7. Encourage extensions of sewer mains to areas currently served by on-site septic systems along the Flathead River.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Maintain and update the Columbia Falls Water and Wastewater Plan and incorporate the plan's recommendations into the city's capital improvements plan.

## **E. SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL**

### **Issues:**

1. The City of Columbia Falls does not provide solid waste collection.
2. A private firm, Evergreen Disposal provides contract service to all residents and businesses in the city and the rural planning jurisdiction.
3. Flathead County administers the County Landfill Site 6 miles south of Whitefish on US 93. Based on current and projected solid waste flows,

Flathead County estimates that it has capacity to operate the landfill through 2055<sup>11</sup>.

4. Flathead County administers a “green box” site (solid waste collection site) on the northwest side of Columbia Falls near the corner of Best Way and Meadow Lake Drive. Residents of Flathead County can deposit their waste at no charge here for collection.

**Goal:**

1. A solid waste reduction, collection and disposal system that is dependable, cost efficient, easily accessible and environmentally sound.

**Policies:**

1. All subdivisions and moderate-sized to large developments should be reviewed for suitable access by refuse collection vehicles and for suitable location of refuse pickup sites.
2. All new subdivisions should be required to show that services of a licensed refuse hauler are available.
4. Hazardous commercial waste shall be handled by the generator in compliance with state and federal regulations.
5. Land-filling should only take place within licensed facilities. Dumping of solid waste elsewhere by any private or public party is prohibited.

**Recommendations:**

1. As the city grows, the city should re-evaluate, from time to time, the suitability of the private hauler services provided to the residents and the advisability of creating its own solid waste collection program.
2. Encourage more recycling within the City and the County.

**11. LOCAL GOVERNMENT COORDINATION**

Administration and implementation of the growth policy document is the responsibility of the City of Columbia Falls. Columbia Falls has a council/manager form of government with a six member council and the mayor who votes on all matters. A full-time city manager administers the day to day business of the City. Flathead County administers and implements the Flathead County Growth Policy which covers the areas outside of the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction. Flathead County has a commissioner form of government with three full time county commissioners who employ an administrative assistant to assist in the day to day operation of the county.

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<sup>11</sup> Strategic Report for Flathead County Landfill, 2009

### **Issues:**

1. Cooperative planning between the City and County has been ongoing for 40 years.
2. Cooperation between the city and county is critical to reinforcing an orderly development pattern in the growth policy boundary, coordinating public facilities and services, and addressing the numerous issues that cross over city-county boundaries.
3. Often there is limited public involvement in the planning and development review process.

### **Goals:**

Foster city-county cooperation, particularly in managing growth and coordinating provision of public facilities and services. Promoting cooperation between Columbia Falls, utility service providers and Flathead businesses.

1. The Interlocal Agreement signed between the City and the County should be maintained to lay out the framework for the following areas:
  - Urban and rural development standards.
  - Subdivision plat review processes.
  - Annexation policies including transfer of county roads to the city.
  - Extension of municipal services including sewer and water.
  - Public safety and emergency services and facilities.
2. Coordination of geographic information systems, building codes and health department resources.
3. That the city and county identify ways to share equipment and other resources to increase the efficiency of local government operations.
4. That the City meet periodically with the County, school district, public utility and service providers to share and coordinate long-term plans for capital expenditures, future development plans and utility extensions.
5. Ways should be sought to provide avenues for greater public participation in the development review process.

### **Policies:**

1. Use this document as a guide for development and growth within the growth policy boundary.
2. Zoning regulations should conform to the provisions of this document.
3. Coordinate development codes in the city and outlying areas to promote the orderly expansion of the city.

4. The Growth Policy will be reviewed every five years and be revised if necessary. Amendments outside these comprehensive updates should be viewed cautiously and be based primarily on unanticipated changes.
5. Comprehensive updates of the Growth Policy should be considered when there is a major change in circumstances such as a significant increase or decrease in population, changes in economic or environmental conditions or significant changes in public infrastructure and services.
6. Written plans stating how the public will be informed regarding development projects can ensure the integrity of the public review process.

**Recommendations:**

1. Maintain a cooperative relationship between the elected officials, government agencies, service and utility providers that results in consistent development standards, efficient use of public infrastructure and resources, and quality development.

**12. GROWTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

**A. UPDATING AND AMENDING THE GROWTH POLICY**

The development of a Growth Policy is an ongoing process. Periodic review and revision is necessary to keep abreast of changes in circumstances and the thinking of the community, which are continuously buffeted by economic cycles, major capital investments, innovation, institutional and regulatory changes, and residential turnover. Review and revision of the Growth Policy is also needed to add special direction and detail as specific needs arise, such as preparation of a capital improvements plan.

Effectiveness of the Growth Policy requires a balance between periodic revisions to keep current with changing conditions and avoiding continuous revision that would erode the long-term vision of the Growth Policy. Preparation of the Growth Policy or a significant update involves both a comprehensive view of the jurisdiction and a lengthy process of information gathering, public participation, and policy analysis, which is not feasibly repeated on a short-term basis. In turn, the 2020 Growth Policy is the basis of many long-term decisions regarding capital investments, zoning, and protection of the quality of life in the area. Growth Policy amendments in a political context affecting a specific location in isolation are vulnerable to being inconsistent with the overall Growth Policy, not encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout the jurisdiction, or benefiting one or a few property owners at the expense of others.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. The City needs to establish an ongoing program of review and analysis of the Growth Policy at least on a five year basis and revising the policy if necessary.
- 2. As needed, the city should prepare special elements to the Growth Policy to address specific needs of the Planning Jurisdiction where more direct or special guidance is needed or to further refine and develop existing goals and policies. Examples include Neighborhood Plans, a Downtown Redevelopment Plan, a Community Drainage Plan, etc.
- 3. To amend the Growth Policy Map outside the five-year update process, the following criteria should be met:
  - a. Extraordinary change in circumstances or errors in preparation of the Growth Policy warrant the map amendment;
  - b. The map amendment would substantially conform with the Growth Policy overall;
  - c. The map amendment would encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the Planning Jurisdiction;

d. The amendment would not benefit one or a few property owners to the significant disadvantage of other property owners in the Planning Jurisdiction.

## **B. NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS**

Neighborhood Plans may be prepared as tools to coordinate and clarify the development for a specific neighborhood or a key area of the planning jurisdiction. It may also be a tool used by a developer to address large development projects that have impacts beyond its project boundaries. A Neighborhood Plan focuses on an area in order to provide clear and detailed direction. A Neighborhood Plan is developed within the overall framework of the Columbia Falls City-County Growth Policy and is typically adopted as a sub-element of the Growth Policy. While the City-County Growth Policy is very broad in its analysis and guidance for the community, a Neighborhood Plan serves to refine this overall concept by expanding on the goals and policies and providing guidance at the neighborhood or project level. The City of Columbia Falls has successfully used this process in the past to address unique neighborhood planning issues.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Neighborhood Plan embodies the public policy for the area it addresses. Any land use ordinances or regulations, such as zoning or subdivision review, should be guided by and give consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the neighborhood plan when making a conformance review with Growth Policy. It must be understood, however, that the plan is conceptual in nature and not an engineering or construction document.

It is acknowledged that there is a difference between a Neighborhood Plan refining the broad community goals of a neighborhood or special planning area versus a specific Developer's Neighborhood Plan which typically would be used to assist a developer address a significant neighborhood scale development project.

1. Adoption of a Developers Neighborhood Plan must be in accordance with 76-1-601 through 76-1-604 M.C.A. Application materials for a developer's neighborhood plan amendment should include the following:
  - a. A draft plan stating significant issues, goals, and policies associated with proposed development.
  - b. The plan should clearly describe the proposed development, address feasibility of the development; phasing; a convincing showing of need; neighborhood compatibility; transportation impacts; environmental impacts; site hazards; adequate provision of local services; demonstrate the encouragement of the most appropriate use of land throughout the jurisdiction and conclude by demonstrating overall conformance with the Growth Policy.
  - c. A site plan showing land uses and densities assigned to specific locations; general circulation and parking plan; general utilities plan; general

landscaping plan; lands and facilities committed for recreation or public services; water bodies and wetlands; 100-year floodplain; topographical contours; significant physical features; prime agricultural soils; significant habitat; and significant cultural or historical resources.

- d. A vicinity map showing surrounding land use patterns; streets (arterial, collector, and local); water bodies; and other significant physical features.
- e. A letter of application signed by the property owner(s), a legal description of the site, a list of the names and addresses of all property owners within 150 feet of the site, and any application review fees.

It is understood that if the particular development project is abandoned, the land use designation shall revert back to its prior classification and the Developers Neighborhood Plan shall sunset. Abandonment shall be deemed to have occurred when no substantial improvements or substantial progress has been made on the development for a period of three years and the developers are no longer pursuing the project.

### **C. ZONING**

Zoning is one of many legal tools used to implement the development policies of the Growth Policy. Historically, zoning has been implemented for the City plus a negotiated extraterritorial boundary beyond the city limits. Via an inter-local agreement signed in January, 2005, and amended in 2012, between the City and the County, the City of Columbia Falls has taken responsibility for zoning of all lands within the Planning Jurisdiction. Several areas in the planning jurisdiction are currently under county zoning or are unzoned. Over time the City of Columbia Falls will convert existing county zoning districts within the planning jurisdiction over to city zoning and apply new zoning to the unzoned areas.

Zoning must be guided by and give consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the Growth Policy.<sup>i</sup> Zoning regulates three major areas. First it regulates the separation of incompatible land uses, where applicable, by establishing various districts of compatible uses, e.g. residential, commercial or industrial. Secondly, zoning limits the density of development appropriate to a particular location to ensure orderly development by restrictions on lot size, dwellings per acre and lot coverage. Finally, zoning establishes various property development standards, including maximum height of buildings to insure adequate fire protection and to avoid blocking of views or sunlight; how a structure is located on a parcel of land, including front, rear and side yard setbacks; and the regulation of signage, parking, landscaping and floodplain development.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Adopt a comprehensive land use development code for the unzoned parts of the Planning Jurisdiction based on the Growth Policy.

2. Review each existing county zoning district and undertake re-zoning of each district replacing the county zoning with comparable city zoning regulations.
3. Review and revise zoning construction standards to facilitate creative and flexible design.

#### **D. CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

A conservation easement is a development right granted by a landowner to a qualified non-profit organization or a government agency. The landowner maintains title to the land and can continue to use the land for any purpose except those spelled out in the granted easement. Typically, a landowner would be interested in preserving wildlife habitat, prime farmland, historical sites or other critical areas from development. In exchange for transferring by easement some or all development rights for the land, the owner would receive a corresponding income tax credit or payment for the lost development potential.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The City and County should promote and encourage the use of Conservation Easements as the preferred method of preserving those areas designated as critical, fragile, or sensitive in the Growth Policy.

#### **E. SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS<sup>ii</sup>**

In contrast to zoning which regulates how existing lots may be used and developed, subdivision regulations govern the division of raw land into building lots. Standards are set for street design; storm drainage; placement of utility lines; site design, including lot and block layout; parkland and public use dedications; emergency vehicle use and access; and the legal recording of a division of land.

The subdivision regulations should be patterned after policies and standards recommended in the Growth Policy. For example, standards and policies for streets, pedestrian ways, parkland dedication, and emergency vehicle access as found in the Growth Policy should be incorporated into the subdivision regulations.

The City of Columbia Falls administers subdivision regulations for all lands within the city limits and by inter-local agreement with Flathead County effective January, 2005 and revised in 2012 all lands within the Planning Jurisdiction.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The city should continue to work to streamline the subdivision review process and development standards.

The procedure for public hearings when required for a subdivision, as provided for in the Planning Board bylaws should be as follows:

1. Public hearing is opened by Planning Board President.
2. Verification of the public notice for hearing by the President.
3. Report by the staff.
4. Presentation by the applicant or representatives.
5. Witnesses speaking either in favor, in opposition or offering general comment or questions.

The Board shall make findings and forward a recommendation to the governing body.

In reviewing and approving subdivisions, the Planning Board and governing bodies should address and make findings for the following criteria:

1. The Effects on Agriculture and Agricultural Water User Facilities. Agriculture is defined as the practice of cultivating the ground, raising crops, rearing animals or the growing of and harvesting trees. Agricultural water user facilities are defined as any part of an irrigation system used to produce an agricultural product on property used for agricultural purposes.
2. Local Services. Local Services is defined as any and all services or facilities that local government entities are authorized to provide.
3. The Natural Environment. The Natural Environment is defined as the physical conditions, which exist within a given area including land, air, water, mineral, flora, fauna, noise and objects of historic or aesthetic consideration.
4. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. Wildlife is defined as living things, which are neither human, domesticated, or plant. Wildlife habitat is defined as the lands and water supporting wildlife.
5. Public Health and Safety which is defined as a condition of optimal well-being, free from danger, risk or injury for a community at large, or for all people, not merely for the welfare of a specific individual or small class of persons.

To accomplish this, the standards within the local subdivision regulations, should continue to be reviewed and revised based on the Growth Policy goals, policies and recommendations. In particular:

1. The Agriculture and Agricultural Water User Facilities criteria standards within the subdivision regulations should be guided in their development by Chapter 6 Agriculture, as contained in the Growth Policy.
2. Local Services criteria standards within the subdivision regulations should be guided in their development by Chapter 8 Transportation, Chapter 9 Parks, and Chapter 10 Sewer, Water, Police, Fire and Solid Waste Management as contained in the Growth Policy.

3. Natural Environment criteria standards within the subdivision regulations should be guided in their development by Chapter 1 Natural Resources as contained in the Growth Policy.
4. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat criteria standards within the subdivision regulations should be guided in their development by Chapter 1 Natural Resource as contained in the Growth Policy.
5. Public Health and Safety criteria standards within the subdivision regulations should be guided in their development by Chapter 10 Police and Fire Protection as contained in the Growth Policy.

## **F. BUILDING CODES**

Building codes apply to new and modified construction and set minimum standards for plumbing, electrical wiring, mechanical equipment, construction materials and techniques. The International Building Code covers fire, life, and structural safety aspects of buildings and structures. The Building Code also becomes the major enforcement mechanism for the zoning code because building permits cannot be issued for structures not in compliance with zoning.

The City of Columbia Falls has adopted the International Building Code and the Code of American Building Officials and contracts with the City of Whitefish for building code inspection and administration. The City has building code jurisdiction over all lands inside the city.

Flathead County does not administer a building code program for the rural areas outside the city. Montana has adopted the International Building Code. All new construction in the county requires both a State Electrical and State Plumbing Permit. Residential structures of five or more units and all commercial and industrial structures must also apply for a State Building Permit. In both instances though, actual site inspections are sporadic due to the limited number of inspectors and large geographical areas. It is apparent that the present system has three shortcomings. One to four unit residential structures, comprising the overwhelming majority of new construction in the county, receive no inspection. In instances where permits are required, actual inspections are sporadic. Since it is run as a State Inspection Program, there is no coordination with local zoning.

## **G. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLAN AND IMPACT FEES**

A capital improvements plan helps a city or county decide what public facilities (capital improvements) to provide where, when and at what cost. Capital improvements are generally considered to be major one-time expenditures for public facilities such as construction of a new railroad crossing, an expansion to the sewer treatment plant or acquisition of a fire truck. A traditional capital improvements plan is established for a five-year period. The city or county analyzes, prioritizes, and projects the capital improvements proposed for this time period. Realistic costs for these improvements are established. These needs and cost projections are then incorporated into the regular budget process.

Currently the city prepares a formal Capital Improvements Plan or program. The advantages of preparing a program are many. Advanced programming of needed facilities will help in avoiding costly mistakes. The fiscal analysis process necessary to prepare a program forces the city or county into sound financial management practice and will help in making annual budget decisions. Finally, identification of anticipated future construction may encourage the selection of needed land well in advance of actual construction, lowering acquisition costs.

Growing communities have found that revenue-generating capabilities have not kept pace with infrastructure needs. Coordinated with capital improvements plans, development service fee programs have become a common method of financing off-site capital improvements. An example is the sewer plant expansion fee currently charged by the City for new sewer hook-ups. Other service impact fee programs have been proposed locally to make new developments pay their fair share for needed off-site improvements, rather than unfairly burdening existing taxpayers, and to avoid congestion and inadequacy of existing capital facilities by ensuring adequate provision of new improvements concurrent with the onset of development. Improvements for which service impact fees have been considered or used locally include sewer, water, storm sewer, roads, parks and fire protection.

In 2006 the City completed a Utility Plan for water and wastewater services. The Plans identify capacities and projected capacities along with recommendations for addressing future growth. As the Utility Plan was conducted at a time of unprecedented growth in the region, projections were very aggressive and since the publication of the plan, the slow population growth of the past five years has not yet produced the impacts anticipated.

The City of Columbia Falls has evaluated impact fees and established an impact fee committee to review the prospects of initiating impact fees. To date the Committee is not recommending the City move ahead with impact fees. However it should be noted that the City has a long established Plant Investment Fee for new sewer and water hook-up with the funds collected going to improvements that result from growth.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The city should continue to utilize a site design review committee for new development other than single-family housing, addressing adequate provision of capital improvements.

#### **H. FEDERAL/STATE GRANT PROGRAMS**

Acquisition of needed public facilities and utilities as identified in the Growth Policy can be assisted financially through state and federal grant and loan programs. Eligible activities under various programs include sewer and water facilities, streets, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, land acquisition for public facilities, park acquisition and development, police and fire equipment, rehabilitation of private and rental housing units, and loans to private businesses for new location or expansion of existing facilities. Grants vary in the amount of local

contribution needed. Some programs require that a majority of the benefit go to lower income individuals, that a certain number of jobs are created or that a particular health or pollution threat is present.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Keep abreast of various state and federal programs and their applicability.

**I. URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Urban Development Programs address a broad array of economic development needs typically in cities, such as downtown redevelopment, economic development, job training, etc. Communities typically develop an urban renewal plan which outlines development issues and develops strategies to overcome these issues. Tools available include state and federal grants and the creation of tax increment districts.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The city should continue to pursue the creation of an urban development plan for the downtown Nucleus core area and other business/industrial areas.

**J. AGRICULTURAL AND TIMBER LANDS PROGRAMS**

An Agricultural and Timber Lands Program is an important tool for jurisdictions having a large agricultural or timber base. It recognizes that agriculture/timber is a viable and important component of the local economy. Typically, such programs identify the productive agricultural and timber producing lands and develop methods to curb development in those areas. The intent of the program is to preserve the productive farmlands and timber resources thus helping to ensure an adequate land base for the local agricultural or timber industry. Some programs go further by providing for some form of compensatory relief to land owners for keeping their lands in agricultural production. A variety of mechanisms could be used in an agricultural/timber conservation program, including designation of agricultural/timber districts with accompanying land use protections, incentives to cluster residential development, transfer of development rights (TDR), purchase of development rights, right-to-farm and right-to-log laws, development restrictions for control of noxious weeds, and consistent public policy to encourage long-term commitments to agricultural/timber operations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Develop acceptable land use programs, which will protect the agricultural and timber land base in the county.

## **K. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION**

Intergovernmental cooperation between the City of Columbia Falls and Flathead County should be encouraged. Such cooperation and efforts are desired to achieve improved efficiency, better facilities and economical operation and maintenance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Maintain and improve cooperation in the following areas:

1. Law enforcement;
2. Animal Control;
3. School Resource Officer;
4. Park maintenance and development;
5. Libraries and recreational programs; including the agreement in place with Flathead County Parks and Recreation Department providing K-6 recreation programs in Columbia Falls;
6. Conservation of agricultural and timber lands;
7. Floodplain development;
8. Installation, maintenance and upgrading of streets, sewer and water services, and drainage;
9. Annexation policies including the transfer of county roads to the city
10. Coordination of urban and rural development.
11. 911 Call Center
12. In order to better coordinate and address the fringe area impacts associated with development, an Interlocal Agreement between Columbia Falls and Flathead County should be maintained that describes the relationships and responsibilities for each party relative to development on the fringes of the city.

The following policies should continue to be incorporated in such an agreement:

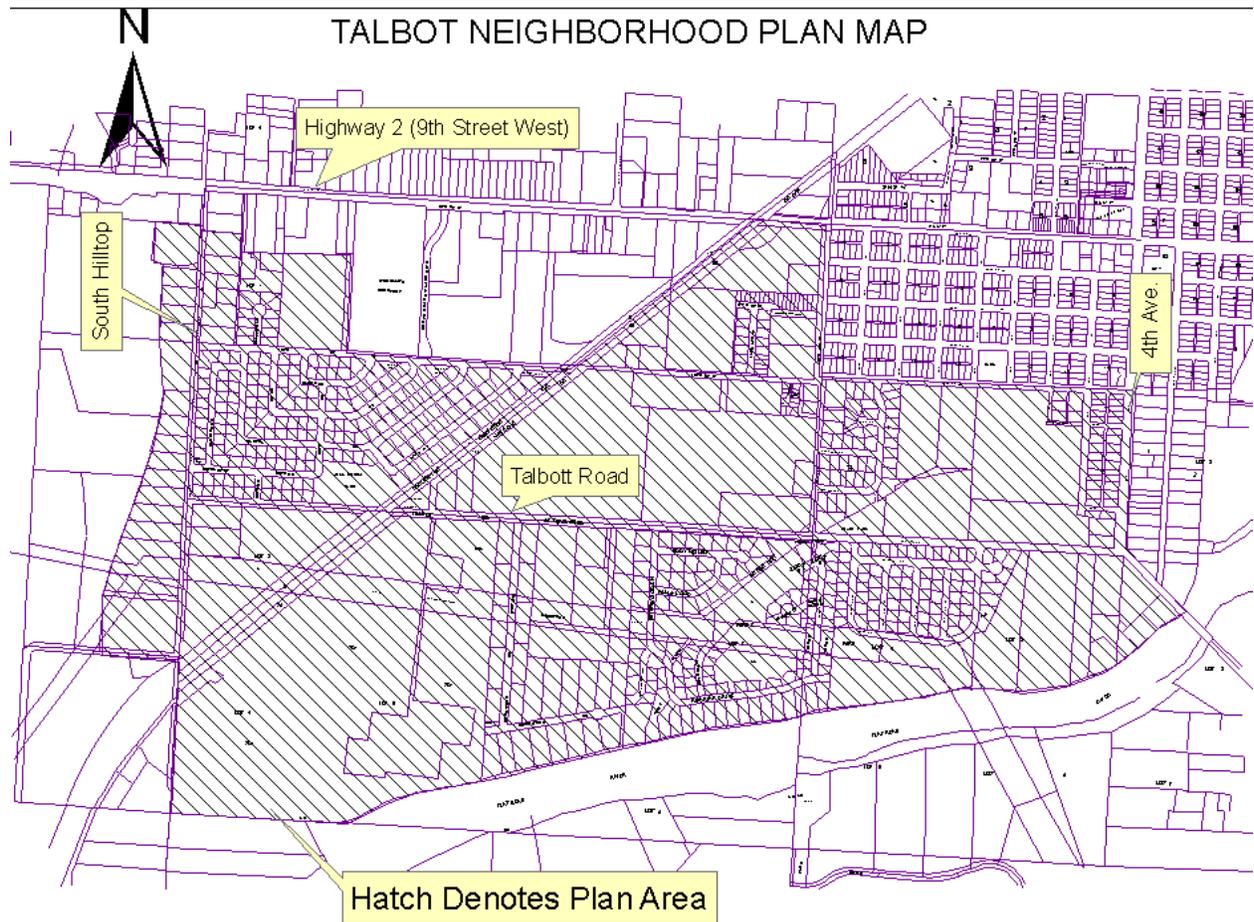
1. Maintenance of the City-County Planning Board
2. The administration of urban development standards for all subdivision activity within the negotiated jurisdiction boundary of the city.
3. Extension of municipal services including sewer and water.
4. Public safety and emergency services and facilities.
5. Coordination of geographic information systems

The Columbia Falls City Council and the Flathead County Commissioners should continue to meet on a regular basis (5th Monday) to provide a forum to discuss issues of joint concern.

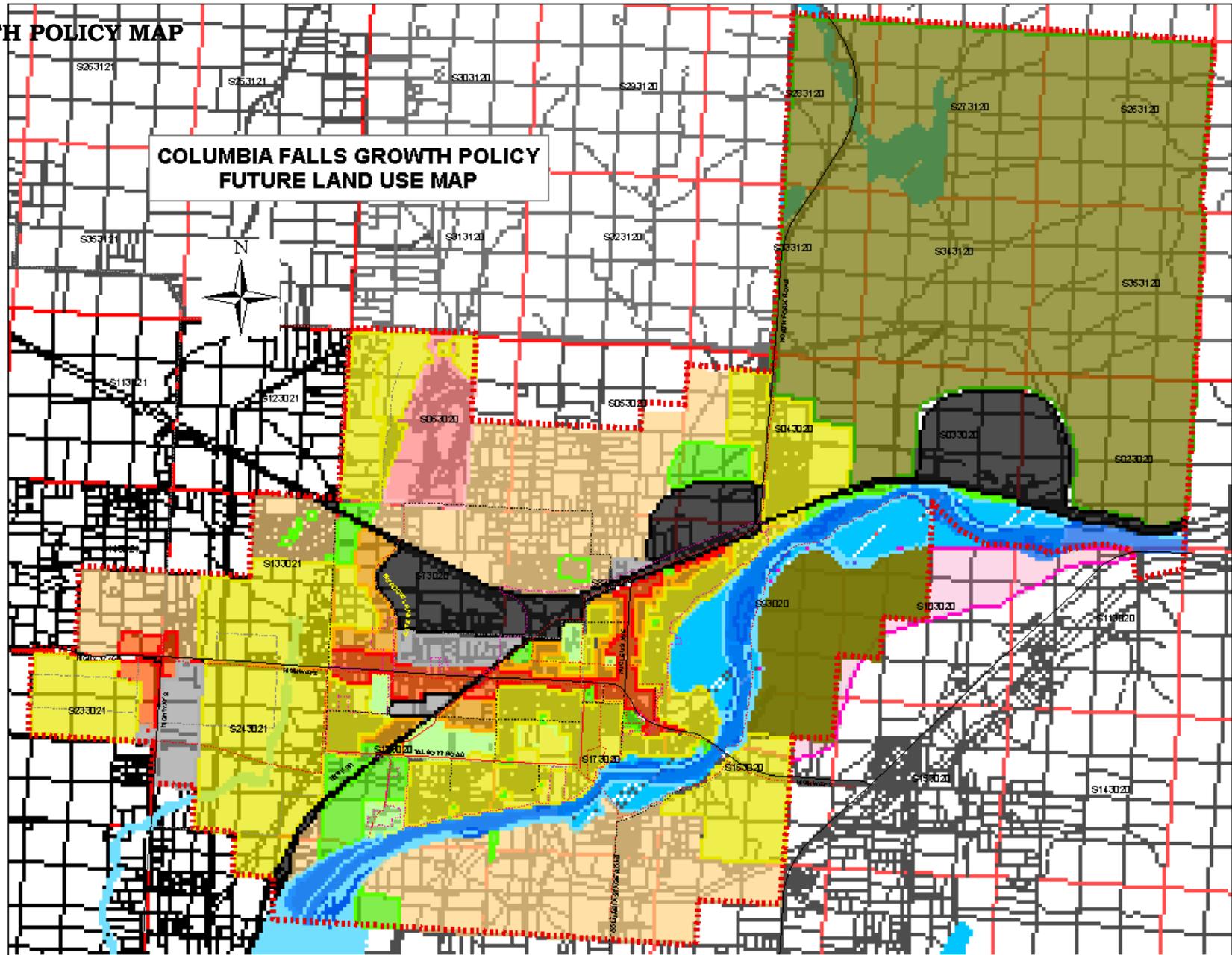
## APPENDIX A NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

### THE TALBOT NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

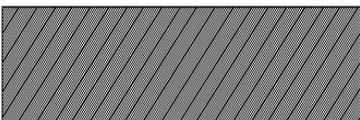
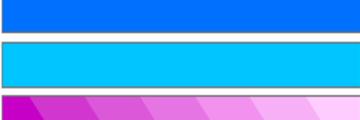
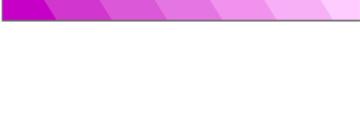
The Talbot Neighborhood Plan is adopted by reference as a neighborhood plan in its entirety as an integral part of the Columbia Falls City-County Growth Policy. The Talbot Neighborhood Plan was adopted on April 4, 1996. The plan provides more specific guidance for the area generally bounded on the south by the Flathead River, on the west by South Hilltop Homes, on the north by 13<sup>th</sup> Street West and on the east by 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue West.



# GROWTH POLICY MAP



## GROWTH POLICY MAP LEGEND

	Growth Policy Boundary
	Major Arterial
	Minor Arterial
	Conceptual Arterial
	Conceptual Collector
	Existing Bicycle / Pedestrian Trail
	Proposed Bicycle / Pedestrian Trail
	Commercial General highway and neighborhood retail sales services and mixed office use.
	Resort Residential Within the confines of an overall development plan, provides recreation opportunities (principally to residents and quests), commercial uses (associated directly with the recreation, and a mixture of housing types and densities.
	Heavy Industry Manufacturing processing, storage and assembly of goods where noise, odor, dust and associated impacts extend beyond the confines of a building or screened area.
	Light Industry Wholesale and industrial uses where noise, odor and associated impacts are confined to a building or screened area.
	Multifamily Residential 8 or more units/acre. High density residential including townhouse and apartment units. Served by urban services. May be a buffer or transitional area between low density and non-residential uses.
	Urban Residential Between 2 and 8 unit/acre. Primarily single family residential with limited quantities of multifamily units. Fully serviced by urban services.
	Suburban Residential 2 units or less/acre. Primarily single family residential in a quasi-rural setting. Some urban services available.
	Suburban Agriculture A rural area predominantly used for corporate and public lands, estate housing and protective buffers for industry. Outside the immediate needs of City development and having limited urban services. Residential uses closely associated with highly developed access and low fire hazard.
	Public Facilities Schools, government offices or facilities and cemeteries.
	Park And Open Space City and County parks, homeowner parks and green areas, recreational access points.
	Open Water
	Flood Plain
	High Ground Water

## **APPENDIX C: Implementation Timetable Description**

The steps in the implementation timetable are all related to advancing specific goals and objectives. The goals and objectives establish the level of involvement the City will undertake. The action plan is a matrix that lists the task and identifies staffing, costs considerations, and timeframe parameters for each task. Following is a description of those parameters.

### **1. Staffing**

*In-house* - Will be completed with existing staff.

*Contract* - Contract with outside firm to complete work.

*Partner* - Partner with other state/federal agency, non-profit, or other organization to complete work

### **2. Cost**

*High* - Requires allocation of new funds that are not in the existing budget.

*Medium* - Can be accomplished with existing budgeted funds.

*Low* - Zero or minimal costs.

### **3. Time Frame/Priority**

*Near Term* - Immediate need. To be addressed within one year.

*Mid Term* - Defined need. May phase in implementation within 1 to 2 years.

*Long Term* - Requires program development that necessitates a longer timeframe 3+ years

*Ongoing* - Ongoing activity.

*As Needed* - Monitor and take action when need arises

Note: the Planning Board will give input as to the Time Frame/Priority for each item

## APPENDIX C: Implementation Timetable

### 1. Update Development Regulations & Procedures

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
<p>1. Revise Subdivision regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update codes to include provisions for cluster developments and incorporate provisions for environmentally sensitive areas</li> <li>• Include provisions for adequate facilities or concurrency for streets, sewer and water improvements for new developments</li> <li>• Coordinate and streamline development processes</li> <li>• Aquifer Protection and Wellhead protection</li> <li>• Require fiscal impact studies for major developments to determine impacts on public facilities such as sewage treatment and water plant</li> <li>• Require traffic impact studies for major developments that includes strategies for financing necessary improvements</li> <li>• Incorporate street design, water and sewer design standards into development codes.</li> </ul>	In-house & Contract	Medium	Near-Term
<p>2. Rezoning in County Planning area to conform with City Growth Policy Plan &amp; City Zoning Districts</p>	Contract	Low to Medium	Near-Term
<p>3. Revise Zoning Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise ordinances</li> <li>• Update codes to include provisions for mixed use development in the downtown.</li> <li>• Coordinate and streamline development processes</li> <li>• Adopt urban design and development standards for new developments to fit the character of its surroundings</li> </ul>	In-House and/or Contract	Medium to High	Near – Term #1 priority #1/2 priority

### 2. Build Information for Planning

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
3. Update GIS and maps to indicate environmentally sensitive areas as noted in the Growth Policy Plan	In-House	Medium	On-going

**3. Promote the development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure to meet the needs of the citizens of Columbia Falls**

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Update Capital Improvement Program (CIP)	In-house	Medium to High	Under Way
2. Develop plan for paving of roads and alleys in city limits	Coordinate with Capital Improvement Plan		
3. Review and Update Extension of Services Plan and annexation policy for city. Create development agreement negotiation process to provide for future annexation for non-contiguous parcels	In-House	Medium	Near Term
4. Implement the bike and pedestrian trail plan	In-house & Partner	Medium	On-going

**4. Work with County, State and Federal agencies to strengthen or create initiatives and programs to meet the planning needs of the area.**

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
Work with FEMA and DEQ to implement Flood Insurance program	Partner	Low	On-going
Work with Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to incorporate aesthetic design elements along highway corridors to promote gateway entrances	Partner	May be some cost sharing	On-going
Investigate resources from the State of Montana Main Street Program for programs for Central Business District	Partner	Medium	Coordinate with Downtown Plan
Coordinate with other agencies and organizations to promote economic development	Partner	Low	On-going
Coordinate with government and non-profits to promote conservation easements	Partner	Low	On-going

**5. Special Planning Initiatives**

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
Downtown Plan to address issues identified in the Growth Policy and investigate the possibility of a TIF	Contract	High	Long Term

District			
Conduct housing needs assessment and develop housing plan. Investigate CDBG and other funds to promote housing rehab and affordable assistance.	Contract	Medium	Long Term
Partner with other governmental entities and non-profits to conduct a special study for redevelopment and reuse of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant site	TBD	High	As needed
Conduct a historic and cultural resource survey and develop a program to promote preservation and rehabilitation	Contract	Medium	Long Term
Develop agricultural lands use preservation program	Contract	High	Long Term
Create park land plan to designate new neighborhood park sites, create a dog park and implement park policies	TBD	Medium	Near Term
Neighborhood and Zoning Plans for areas in expanded extraterritorial jurisdiction due to annexations	TBD		As Needed

**<sup>11</sup> 76-1-605. Use of adopted growth policy.**

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), after adoption of a growth policy, the governing body within the area covered by the growth policy pursuant to 76-1-601 must be guided by and give consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the growth policy in the:
- (a) authorization, construction, alteration, or abandonment of public ways, public places, public structures, or public utilities;
  - (b) authorization, acceptance, or construction of water mains, sewers, connections, facilities, or utilities; and
  - (c) adoption of zoning ordinances or resolutions.
- (2) (a) A growth policy is not a regulatory document and does not confer any authority to regulate that is not otherwise specifically authorized by law or regulations adopted pursuant to the law.  
(b) A governing body may not withhold, deny, or impose conditions on any land use approval or other authority to act based solely on compliance with a growth policy adopted pursuant to this chapter.

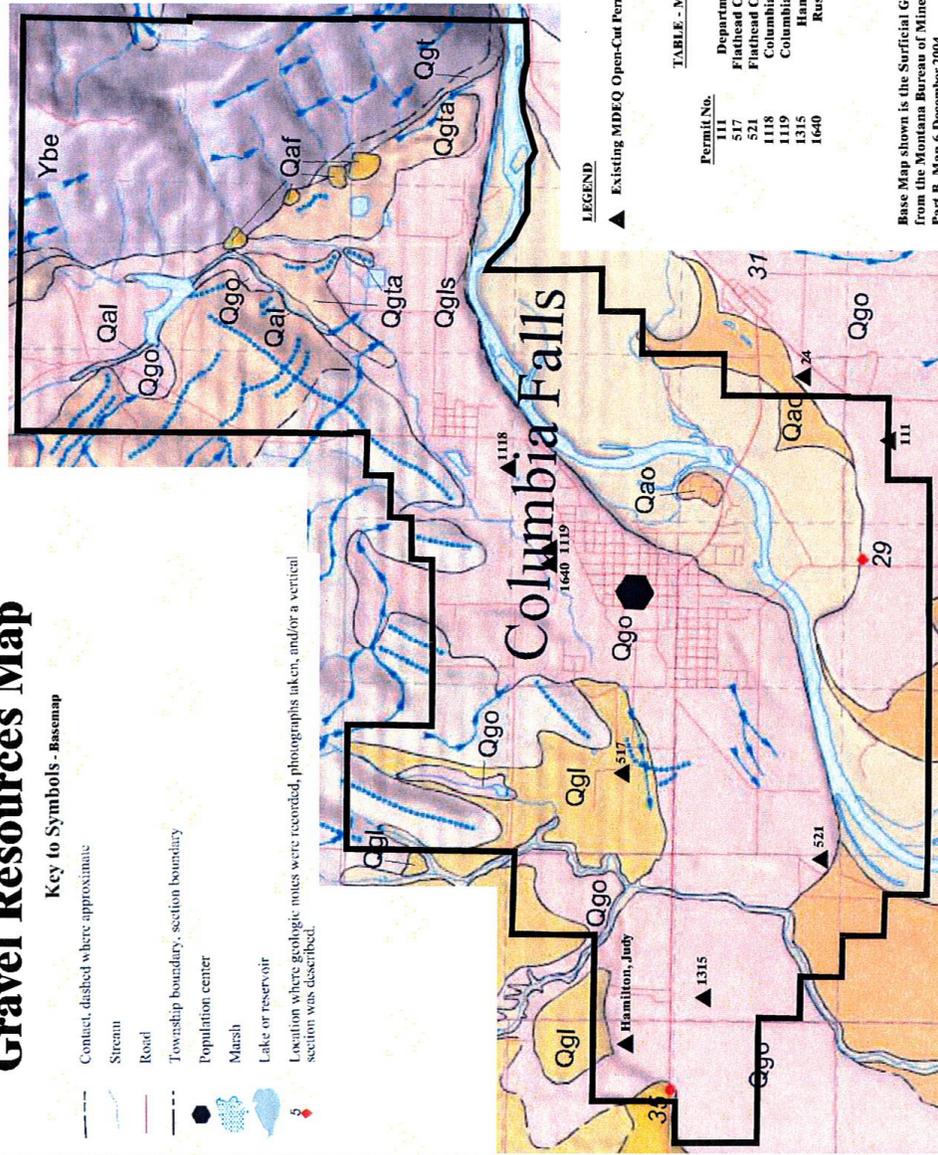
**<sup>11</sup> 76-1-606. Effect of growth policy on subdivision regulations.**

When a growth policy has been approved, the subdivision regulations adopted pursuant to chapter 3 of this title must be made in accordance with the growth policy.

# Gravel Resources Map

## Key to Symbols - Basemap

- Contact, dashed where approximate
- Stream
- Road
- Township boundary, section boundary
- Population center
- Marsh
- Lake or reservoir
- Location where geologic notes were recorded, photographs taken, and/or a vertical section was described.



### LEGEND

- ▲ Existing MDEQ Open-Cut Permits

TABLE - MDEQ OPEN CUT PERMITS

Permit No.	Operator	Mine Status
111	Department of Transportation	Active
517	Flathead County Road Department	Active
521	Flathead County Road Department	Active
1118	Columbia Falls Industrial Park	Active
1119	Columbia Falls Industrial Park	Active
1315	Hamilton, Howard D.	Active
1640	Russell, Kimberly J.	Inactive

Base Map shown is the Surficial Geologic Map of the Upper Flathead River valley Area from the Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology Ground-Water Assessment Atlas No. 2, Part B, Map 6 December 2004