

# City of Great Falls

## Growth Policy Update 2013

2025 **IMAGINE**  
**GREAT FALLS**



Planning & Community Development Department



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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## Table of Contents

### Executive Summary

Introduction	2
Background	3
The Planning Process	5
Regional Context	6
The History of Growth	7
Authority for Growth Policy	7
Characteristics	8
Residential Growth	10
Neighborhoods	11
Existing Land Use	13
Density	16
Fifty Year Growth	18
Demographic	19

### Social

Introduction	29
Goals and Principles	29
Police	31
Fire	33
Cascade City-County Health Department	35
Wellness	37
Parks and Recreation	38
Arts, Culture, Library and Education	44
Non-Profits	46
Housing	47
Strategic Future Issues	58

### Environmental

Introduction	59
Goals and Principles	59
Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan	61
Wildlife	61
Trails	62
Flooding	62
Water Quality	63
Upper and Lower River Road	64
Air Quality	65
Trees	65
Brownfields	65
ACM Smelter and Refinery	66
Environmental-Friendly	67
Strategic Future Issues	68

Introduction	69
Goals and Principles	69

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Regional Role	71
Strengths and Opportunities	73
The Military	73
Other Strengths and Opportunities	75
Employment	77
Income	80
Businesses	82
Home Occupations	83
Tax Increment Finance Districts	84
Tax Abatements	84
Strategic Future Issues	86

## Physical

Introduction	87
Goals and Principles	87
Natural Characteristics	88
Sand and Gravel	88
Urban Characteristics	89
Infrastructure	89
Assessments	91
Utilities	92
Water	92
Wastewater	93
Drainage	94
Sanitation	95
Development Standards	96
Floodplain Management	96
Subdivision	96
Zoning	97
Compatibility	100
Traditional Neighborhood Design	100
Downtown	103
Multimodal	106
Growth Trends	106
Annexation	106
Annexation Subdivision and Infrastructure Costs	107
Residential Development Trends – City and County	108
Development Pattern – City and County	108
Infrastructure Challenges	109
Infrastructure Solutions	110
Development Constraints	111
City and County Interface	112
Population Projection	113
Potential Growth Areas	114
Strategic Future Issues	115
Key Implementation Policies	116

<b>Section</b>	<b>Policies</b>	<b>128</b>
----------------	-----------------	------------

**1.0 Social Fabric 2025 Visions and Goals**

SOC1.1	Maintain the City’s high public safety and health standards	131
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SOC1.2	Employ innovative strategies to promote, enhance and utilize the City's parks	132
SOC1.3	Develop and maintain the City's community facilities and cultural resources	133
SOC1.4	Encourage a diverse, safe and affordable supply of housing in Great Falls	134
SOC1.5	Support the health priorities identified in the Community Health Improvement Plan	137
SOC1.6	Work cooperatively with the community at-large and the City's neighborhoods	138
SOC1.7	Bolster the capacity of non-profits in the City	139
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Natural Environment 2025 Visions and Goals</b>	<b>140</b>
ENV2.1	Expand efforts to identify and remediate brownfields in the City	142
ENV2.2	Continue to maintain, protect and enhance the environmental values and the natural attributes of the Missouri River System	143
ENV2.3	Enhance the built environment by promoting infill and redevelopment in the City	144
ENV2.4	Maintain a clean, healthy, vibrant, connected and safe City now and into the future	145
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Economic 2025 Visions and Goals</b>	<b>146</b>
ECO3.1	Support, cooperate, expand and adjust accordingly to the current and future mission and role of the military in Great Falls	152
ECO3.2	Develop a strategic response to the impacts and opportunities offered by oil and gas development in the region	153
ECO3.3	Continue efforts to support and develop the capacity of the future workforce in Great Falls and those in need of retooling	154
ECO3.4	Continue efforts to expand, retain and attract new businesses in Great Falls	155
ECO3.5	Continue efforts to support and develop small businesses in Great Falls	156
ECO3.6	Promote Great Falls as a destination location and expand the City's assets and amenities	157
ECO3.7	Support a balanced economic development approach to enhance and diversify the City's economic development capabilities	158
<b>4.0</b>	<b>2025 Vision and Goals for the Physical Realm</b>	<b>159</b>
PHY4.1	Encourage a balanced mix of land uses through-out the City	162
PHY4.2	Implement the City's land use codes to protect the health, safety and welfare of its citizens	164
PHY4.3	Optimize the efficiency and use of the City's public facilities and utilities	166
PHY4.4	Increase mobility and the access of citizens to transportation alternatives throughout the City.	167
PHY4.5	Continue the work of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission in the identification, evaluation, and preservation of historic districts and individual properties in Great Falls and Cascade County	169
PHY4.6	Plan, manage and coordinate the City's emergency response consistent with state and local requirements	170
PHY4.7	Implement this Growth Policy Update by balancing the strategies and policies contained herein	171

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## List of Exhibits

Exhibit 1: City and County Population By Decade 1870-2010	6
Exhibit 2: Population Projection	114

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Existing Land Use	14
Figure 2: Households and Families	19
Figure 3: Household Size	20
Figure 4: Age Distribution in Great Falls	20
Figure 5: Percent Under 18 Years of Age	21
Figure 6: Percent Over 65 Years of Age	21
Figure 7: Racial Composition	22
Figure 8: High School Graduates by Percentage	22
Figure 9: Bachelor's Degrees by Percentage	23
Figure 10: Education	23
Figure 11: K-6 Student Enrollment	24
Figure 12: Median Income by Sex	24
Figure 13: Income Sources	25
Figure 14: Poverty Rates in Great Falls	25
Figure 15: Median Income Levels	26
Figure 16: Percent Increase in Food Stamps Recipients Cascade County	26
Figure 17: Percent in Poverty	27
Figure 18: Types of Housing by Percent	47
Figure 19: Housing Tenure	48
Figure 20: Housing Cost Burden by Type	48
Figure 21: Home Ownership Rate	49
Figure 22: Building Permits 2004-2011	49
Figure 23: Housing Units Built by Decade	50
Figure 24: Veterans by Percentage	75
Figure 25: Occupations by Type	79
Figure 26: Income Distribution Great Falls	80
Figure 27: Comparison of City and National Benchmarks	81

## List of Tables

Table 1: Population per Square Mile	5
Table 2: Residential Buildings Units in Great Falls 1880-2012	10
Table 3: Existing Land Use	13
Table 4: Additional Park Assets (other than neighborhood parks shown on Map 9)	39
Table 5: Housing Status (Homeless) Survey Results 1997-2013	56
Table 6: Military in Great Falls	73
Table 7: Malmstrom Utility Usage	73
Table 8: Military and Education	74
Table 9: City of Great Falls Gross Lodging Tax Revenue	77
Table 10: Type of Worker	78
Table 11: Top Civilian Employers in Great Falls	79
Table 12: Tax Increment Finance Districts	84
Table 13: Zoning by Category and Area	99
Table 14: Annexations 2003-2012	107

## List of Maps

Map 1: Residential Development by Year Built	10
Map 2: Neighborhood Councils	12
Map 3: Existing Land Use	15
Map 4: 2010 Density Levels	16
Map 5: 50 Year Growth	18

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Map 6: Police Zones and Incident Types	31
Map 7: City Fire Districts	33
Map 8: Health and Social Services	35
Map 9: Parks (Neighborhood, Gibson and Open Space)	38
Map 10: Education and Culture	44
Map 11: Residential Condition/Desirability/Utility	51
Map 12: Citizen Reported Code Violation Locates	52
Map 13: Flood Plain Zones	62
Map 14: Potential Brownfield Sites	65
Map 15: Economic Development Districts	71
Map 16: Business by Number of Employees	82
Map 17: Home Occupations	83
Map 18: Tax Increment Finance Districts	85
Map 19: Infrastructure	95
Map 20: Zoning	100
Map 21: Downtown and Historic	103
Map 22: Transportation	105
Map 23: Annexation	108
Map 24: Residential Development Last Decade	110
Map 25: Development Constraints	112
Map 26: City County Interface	113
Map 27: Potential Growth Areas	115
Map 28: Enclaves	119
Map 29: Vacant - Residential	119
Map 30: Vacant - Commercial	120

## Introduction

Great Falls is great!! And Great Falls is on the move. With the *Downtown Master Plan* adopted and this Growth Policy in motion, the City has a renewed opportunity to strategically chart its future course. The Growth Policy is a requirement of Montana State Law and, in effect, serves as the City's comprehensive plan for the future. This Growth Policy Update strengthens and highlights existing initiatives while creating the pathways for others.

The City's population has grown 3% since 2000. According to population projections reported by the Montana Department of Commerce, the City is projected to steadily grow through the 2025 planning horizon and beyond. This growth can be attributed, in part, to the City's role as a regional trade and medical hub for north central Montana.

The City's Growth Policy is utilized for guidance in land use, service delivery, policy making and decision-making. The Growth Policy also serves as the City's "to do" list for the future. Many of the activities identified in this plan are underway or ongoing. Not all of these items may be achieved during the planning timeframe. Some may be visions, aspirations, or subject to change. Nonetheless, collectively these proposed items embody the thoughts, wisdom and ideas of participants.

Great Falls, like all cities, is impacted by changes at the Federal and State level, technologies and demographics. Therefore, it was important that this planning process review changing trends, conditions and issues. One such trend relates to oil and gas development in Montana. The City is experiencing direct and indirect impacts as a result of regional oil and gas development. These impacts need to be understood and monitored. In addition, there are an array of new tools, resources, data and solutions that abound today. Finally, this planning effort is timely and in that it occurs at a time when many residents are regaining their economic footing from the turbulent upheaval of the recent recession and the fiscally slow times of recent years.

The City of Great Falls is entering a potentially transformative period filled with many new choices. This report is premised, therefore, on the overwhelming need and desire by the citizens of Great Falls to keep pace with the drivers of change and envision new, different, and balanced solutions for the next planning horizon. If this challenge is met, Great Falls can continue to grow and develop in a manner that maintains the City's small town charm and feel, promotes increased prosperity and pride, and fosters a healthy and vibrant community for all to share.

## Background

### The Planning Process

The *Imagine Great Falls* planning effort is based on the integrated synergies of four major dimensions of community life. These four areas are referred to as Social, Environmental, Economic and Physical. These multi-faceted components, and the concepts within each, encourage holistic thinking and promote a comprehensive view of understanding the dynamics at work. Therefore, public input was developed along the following areas:

*Social:* Housing, Police, Fire, Parks, Health and Wellness and non-profit collaborators

*Environmental:* Air, water and land, and mineral resources such as sand and gravel

*Economic:* Economic diversification, including energy impacts, and the status of the Military in Great Falls

*Physical:* Land use, infrastructure and transportation, as well as, “where should Great Falls grow in the future?”

The Open House event introduced the *Imagine Great Falls* planning effort to the public, and was the first opportunity for citizens to sign up for working groups. The Department of Planning and Community Development facilitated the working groups. All meetings were open and any member of the community could participate at any time. Collectively, citizens donated approximately 450 volunteer hours to the working group effort. In addition, numerous other outreach efforts were made throughout the duration of the planning process using multiple techniques. These techniques are described in the following.

#### *Open House Kick-off*

On August 6, 2012, the City of Great Falls held an Open House to kick-off the public participation phase of the *Imagine Great Falls* planning effort. Eighty citizens attended the open house event. Departmental representatives also were present with displays and information. The event was interactive, offering a number of participation exercises to the public.

#### *Survey*

A 25 question survey was made available on the City’s webpage from the date of the Open House to December 12, 2012. The survey was also available at the Open House and was made part of the 40 staff presentations made to different groups throughout the City. The City received 625 responses.

#### *Spending Exercise*

The City conducted a “money” exercise to allow members of the community to choose their spending priorities. Each participant received a \$100 (in play money) to spend on what they value most in the community. The exercise was designed to allow residents to experience the tough spending decisions that City must routinely make. The funds were to be allocated amongst five general funded objectives. These were:

*Public Works-* Road maintenance, sidewalks, lighting and signal improvements

*Police* - Police stations, more officers on the “beat”

*Parks* - Park facilities and maintenance, including the River’s Edge Trail

*Community Facilities* - Major assets such as repairs to the Civic Center or the Natatorium

## *Fire - New Fire Station to meet and improve response standards*

### *SWOT analysis*

Staff used a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis to generate discussion about the community's needs. Feedback was obtained in terms of identifying the City's Strengths, and Opportunities, and conversely, what do people feel are the City's Weaknesses or Threats. Staff identified certain themes as a result of the SWOT analysis. The themes were identified for the Working Groups to consider as part of their work. Also, the results of the SWOT analysis were posted on the City's website.

### *Community presentations*

Staff made over 40 different appearances before groups, clubs and committees to encourage people to participate, receive input, and share information about the process. As a result, staff augmented the number of additional surveys, SWOT results, and spending exercises conducted.

### *Facebook*

The Department of Planning and Community Development utilized Facebook for the first time in this project. The Facebook page became an additional window for the process and a means of sharing information.

### *Website*

The City maintained an up-to-date website for the *Imagine Great Falls* planning process. In addition, the City issued press releases, and posted all results from the working group meetings. In essence, the entire process was catalogued on the City's website in an effort to be fully transparent.

### *Keypad Polling*

The second Open House offered an opportunity for the community to engage in keypad polling. Keypad polling allows those attending to engage in direct input on relevant issues. Those results were also recorded for the public participation portion of this process.



### *Summary*

Together these efforts formed a core set of ideas and visions from which to launch the Growth Policy Update. Information regarding survey and working group results, the SWOT analysis, community presentations, keypad polling and interactive results can be found on the City's website online at <http://www.greatfallsmt.net/planning/growth-policy-public-participation>.

## Regional Context

The City of Great Falls is located in Cascade County, in the north-central region of Montana. Cascade County is bordered on the west by the Rocky Mountains, to the southeast by the Little Belt and Highwood Mountains, and by the Hi-line area to the north. This vicinity of Montana, with its grasslands and mesas, is often referred to as the transitional area between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. Great Falls is the largest City in this eleven county region of Montana, ever increasingly serving as a regional hub for medical, retail, and transportation for this region.

Geographically, the City of Great Falls is nestled in the confluence of the Sun and Missouri Rivers, where the “great falls of the Missouri” were first chronicled in the journals of Lewis and Clark. It was this location that inspired Paris Gibson in 1882 to design and lay-out an “ideal” City for commerce, industry and family life. Gibson’s original design is the foundation for much of the City’s growth, development pattern, and amenities; however, the City also is influenced by external trends that are identified in this update.

Today the City of Great Falls is the urban center of Cascade County and the north-central Montana region, representing about 72% of the County’s population. The City of Great Falls shares many of the economic and demographic characteristics of Cascade County, yet the City’s urban characteristics create distinct differences.

Cascade County contains about 2,698 square miles while the City contains about 22 square miles. Overall, the City of Great Falls population density is 2,685 persons per square mile, whereas the County’s density is about 30 persons per square mile. This density differential is shown in Table 1. Major employment sectors in the City are Benefis Health Care and the Great Falls Clinic, while the County’s employment base tends to be more agricultural-based with the major exception of Malmstrom Air Force Base.

Population Per Square Mile	
City of Great Falls	2,685
Cascade County	30.1
State of Montana	6.8

Table 1

Malmstrom Air Force Base is located in the County, but is adjacent to the City’s eastern municipal boundary. Malmstrom’s economic and social impacts and ties are inextricably part of the City as well as the County. This urban – rural contrast, juxtaposed with City and County’s many shared assets and economic ties, is important to consider when evaluating much of the data available for this Growth Policy Update.

## History of Growth

Great Falls and Cascade County have shared a somewhat comparable growth pattern throughout the years. In 2010 the United States Census reported that the City's population was 58,505. The City represents about 72% of Cascade County's estimated 82,000 residents. As Exhibit One illustrates, the City's highest population was 60,091 in 1970, and if current growth rates continue, the City is set to surpass the previous highest population. This possibility is, in part, because the City has experienced a steady growth rate since 2000, actually growing 3.2% from that time.

Exhibit 1 depicts the City and County population growth throughout the years. The City experienced population slowdowns and declines during the 1910s, 1930s and 1990s. Past population upswings can be attributed to the natural resource industrialization and the accelerated development of Malmstrom Air Force Base. Likewise, declines can be attributed to externalities related to resource fluctuation and depletion and changes in Federal spending for the military presence in the area.

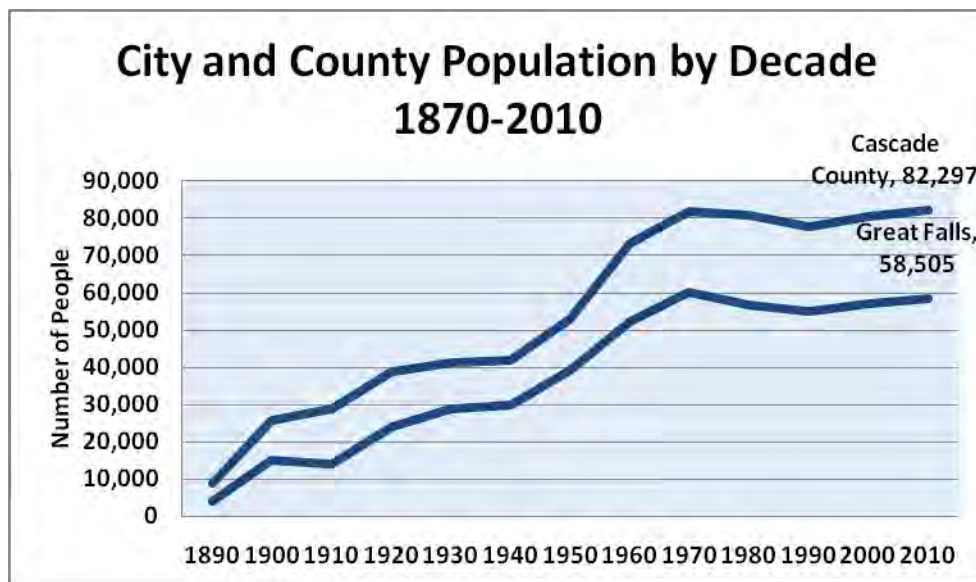


Exhibit 1

Recent growth trends hold promise insofar as the establishment of a positive, stable and consistent growth rate for the City. A stable and positive growth rate is very important to the City's future. The Great Falls area economy was one of two urban areas in Montana that did not experience a decline during the last recession. It is the maintenance and furtherance of this trend that the *Imagine Great Falls* planning is based upon. To realize this potential, many in the community assert that it is imperative that the City continue to diversify and transform its economic base from its original drivers to one that encompasses a multi-faceted, modern day approach towards economic development. Areas of potential expansion include strategically preparing for regional oil and gas development (and their accompanying support, assembly and manufacturing industries), regional tourism, healthcare, value-added agricultural processing, information age opportunities, and new service industries to accommodate prospective growth.



## **Authority for the Growth Policy**

Long range planning is intended to provide guidance to a local government for an established planning horizon. Long range planning has been referred to as comprehensive planning, general planning or master planning. All of these type plans, when adopted by a local government, establish policies and a framework to guide the social, environmental, economic, and physical make-up of a defined jurisdiction.

Long range planning has been a historic and valued component of the City's planning efforts since 1971. In the 1999 Legislative session, Senate Bill 97 replaced the term Comprehensive Plan with Growth Policy. The term Growth Policy, therefore, was given the same legal and rational basis for regulation, public investment and other governmental actions as existed with comprehensive planning. In 1999 the City-County Comprehensive plan was amended, creating the foundational vision for the City's first Growth Policy. In 2003 minor revisions were made to implement the requirements of the 1999 law. In 2005, further amendments were made to reflect the dissolution of the City-County joint planning area setting the stage for this update. Fluctuations in the City's population have created challenges in the past as did changes to the City and County planning structure in 2005.

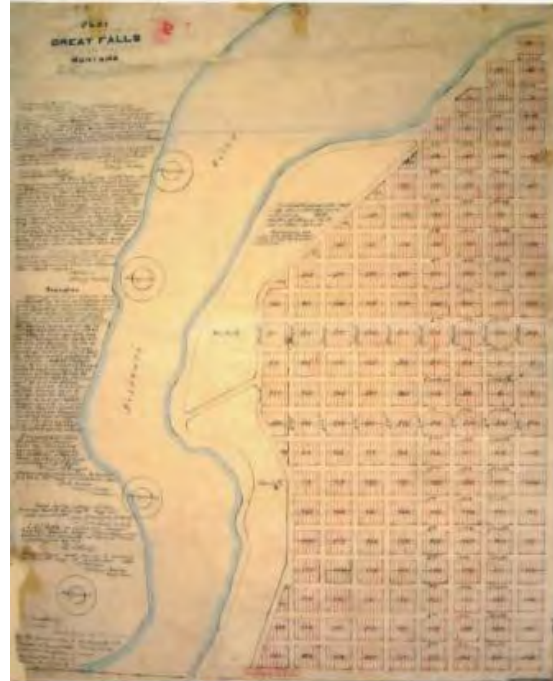
On December 20, 2011, the Great Falls City Commission passed Resolution 9951 directing the Planning Advisory Board to begin the process of updating the City's Growth Policy. According to 76-1-601 Montana Code Annotated (MCA), the following elements are required: land use, population, housing needs, economic conditions, public facilities, natural resources, and sand and gravel resources. This plan also includes a health and wellness component. Together, these elements establish a roadmap for a better future, one that work for a better Great Falls.

## Characteristics

### *City Design*

Today's City reveals, in many ways, the story of Great Falls. Paris Gibson was the founder of Great Falls and foresaw its potential. He is responsible for many of the special qualities that shaped the City. These attributes endure today.

Unlike the boom and bust mining towns of the day, the City of Great Falls was carefully platted in 1883. Streets and avenues were laid out on north to south and east to west axes. Central Avenue was designed to be 90 feet across, while all other streets and avenues were 80 feet across. Alleys were designed to be twenty feet across bisected blocks, each of which was divided into 14 lots measuring 50 by 150 feet apiece. Within a few years, Gibson and other settlers built an attractive, well-planned community with broad tree lined streets and 800 acres of park land.



At the time the City of Great Falls was founded in 1884, water was delivered by horse and wagon to front porch water barrels. Four years later, the City was incorporated in 1888. It was then that Ira Myers conceived the idea of a public water system, but an attempt to raise the \$35,000 for the construction of a water plant and distribution system failed. In 1889 the governing body of the City granted a 20-year franchise to the Great Falls Water Company, which was successful in selling \$150,000 in bonds for the construction of the project. The original system consisted of one steam driven pump capable of 2 million gallons per day and 9 miles of pipe. In 1898 a special City election passed a \$375,000 bond issuance, with which the City purchased the water system from the Great Falls Water Company.

As if by some grand pre-destined design, opportunities for growth followed these improvements. The Montana Central Railroad reached Great Falls from the north in 1887. The Montana Smelting and Refining Company started operations near Giant Springs, and in 1890, the Boston and Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company began operations of its new reduction works, adding a refinery in 1892. The Boston and Great Falls Electric Light and Power Company organized in 1890 for lighting and street railway car purposes. As a result of these improvements, and the job opportunities that came with them, more settlers came to Great Falls. They became miners, loggers, farmers, and ranchers and worked on efforts to develop hydroelectric power.

Like many early industrial cities, industrial uses, including milling, generally followed the rivers, railroads, and bridges in a linear fashion, but within close proximity to early residential neighborhoods. These uses formed because business owners had access to transportation, warehouses and power. These industrial uses extended from the rail and spur lines and power sources. Commercial uses formed around and near to the train depots and onto Central Avenue. This growth created the basis for the City's downtown business district, and the extension of streetcar lines, with steam-powered trams. The Lower South side was developed as a modest working class area, while development in the Lower North Side was intended as a premier neighborhood creating many unique historic structures that form the basis for recognition as a National Historic District. Institutions such as schools, a post office, and churches followed the City's early residents.

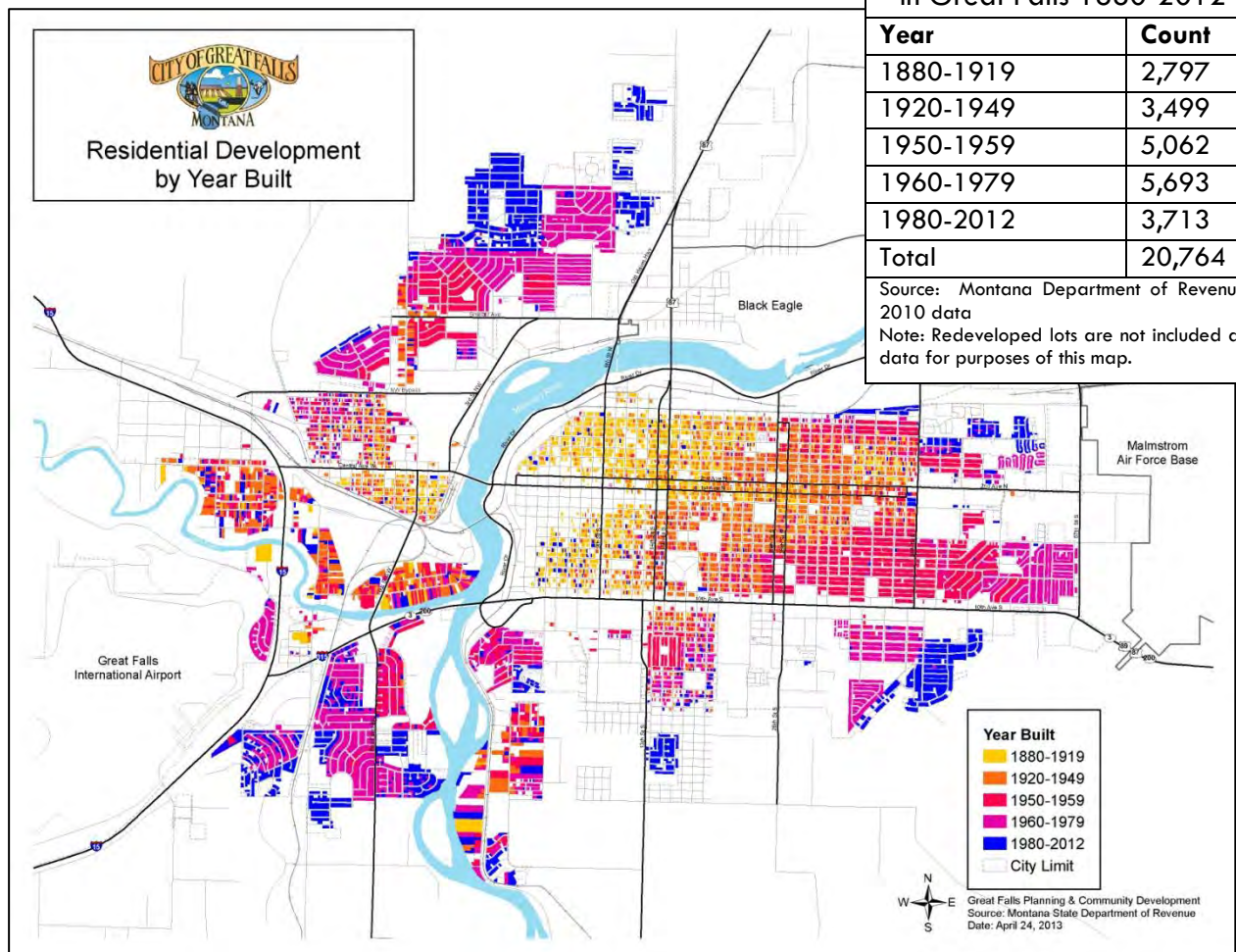
Over time, with the advent of the automobile, commercial areas stretched and extended along corridors. This includes Central Avenue West, 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Northwest. Residential areas expanded in a piecemeal fashion, migrating to newer areas of the City, beyond the City's core. New subdivisions included larger lots for more spacious homes. Industries transitioned and some moved outward, as did many commercial uses, offering opportunities for redevelopment and reuse. Highway connections, access and opportunities for expansion furthered this development pattern creating much of what we experience today.

## Residential Growth

The Montana Department of Revenue 2010 data depicts the following residential structure counts for the City of Great Falls. As Table 2 illustrates, early records show approximately 2,800 residences constructed from 1880 to 1919. From 1920 up through the end of World War II, about 3,500 units were constructed. The 1950s were a boom period for residential construction, with over 5,000 units built in the City. This strong pace of residential development continued in the 1960s and 1970s, when over 5,000 units were built once again. In the last thirty years, residential development has continued at a slower pace, adding about 3,700 individual units. This growth in single family residences coincides with the overall geographic spread of the City. This growth pattern can be seen on the Map 1, below.

Year	Count
1880-1919	2,797
1920-1949	3,499
1950-1959	5,062
1960-1979	5,693
1980-2012	3,713
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,764</b>

Source: Montana Department of Revenue 2010 data  
Note: Redeveloped lots are not included as data for purposes of this map.



Map 1

## Neighborhoods

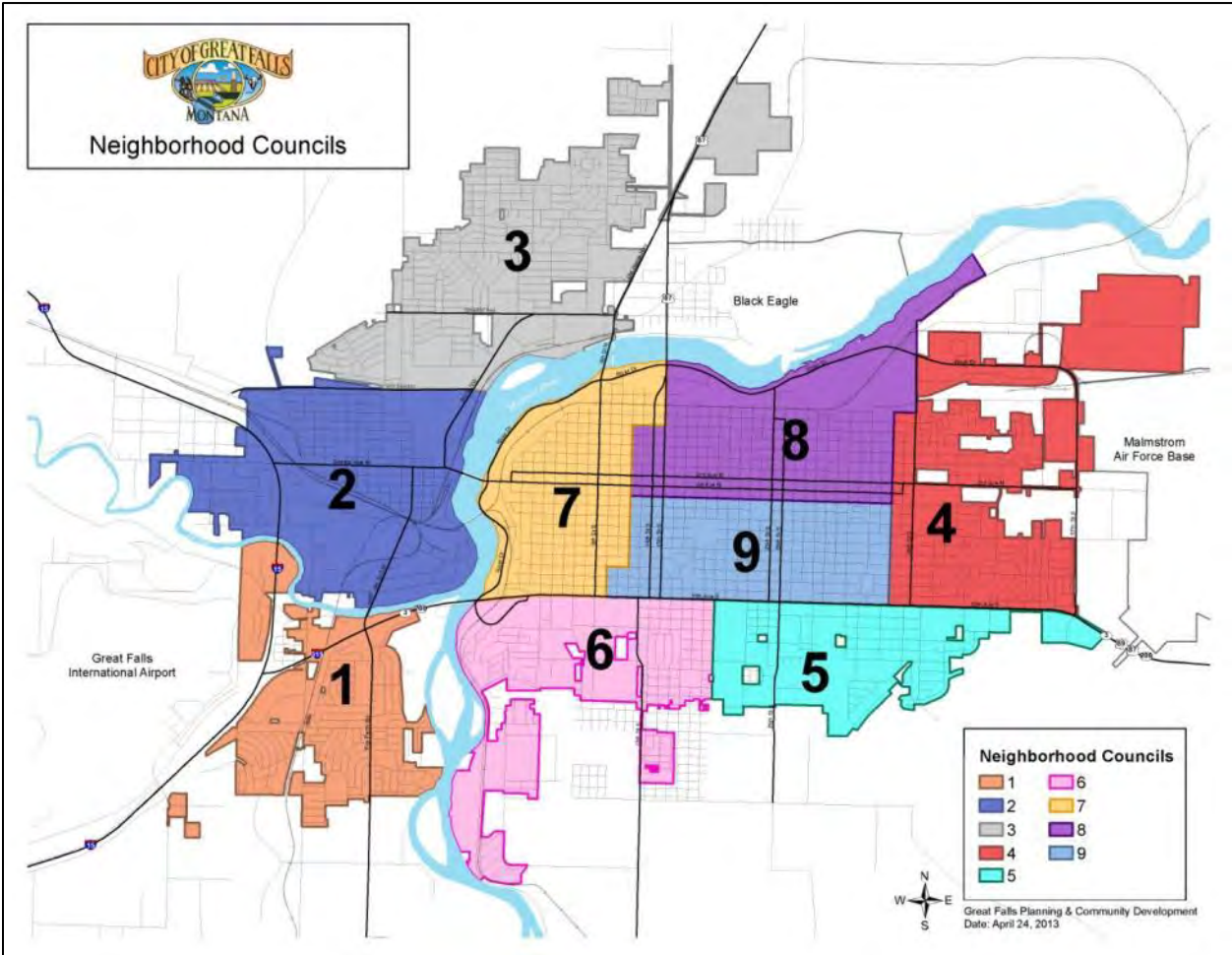
The initial design of the City is further embellished by a rich assortment of neighborhoods. Many of these older neighborhoods include traditional design elements such as alleys, well defined streets and a mix of land uses and spaces. The City's neighborhoods, and its residents, create a varied quilt of uniqueness throughout the City. Almost all of the City's neighborhoods are within easy access to downtown, parks, schools, and activity centers. The City's neighborhoods also benefit from their location within defined areas of representation referred to as "Neighborhood Council Districts."

These defined areas of representation were established by Ordinance 2727 in 1997, pursuant to the Charter of the City of Great Falls. These areas are depicted on Map 2. There are nine separate Council districts throughout Great Falls. Their purpose is to provide a means for the citizens of Great Falls to actively participate in local government through a formal organization working at the neighborhood level. The Neighborhood Councils provide advice and counsel to the City Commission on a variety of neighborhood issues. Applicants for formal land use changes are strongly encouraged to meet with the Neighborhood Council and work with them on their projects.

Each Council is comprised of five resident members, elected at the City's general election. Neighborhood Councils function as an organizing tool for neighborhoods in the City. Neighborhood Council 4, located on the east end, held an open house of its own to invite input related to the Growth Policy Update. This step, in many communities, is a precursor to neighborhood planning. Neighborhood planning is allowed in Montana per 76-1-601 MAC, and therefore, this option may create problem-solving opportunities for the City in the future. Neighborhood Council representatives serve two-year elected terms, in conjunction with the City general election.



Some citizens commented, as part of the outreach process, that the Neighborhood Councils should have more of a role in terms of issue identification and problem-solving. In some communities, neighborhood expertise is routinely used to help establish sidewalk priorities, Safe Routes to Schools, park partnerships and to support public safety efforts.



Map 2

## Existing Land Use

The City's land use is predominantly urban whereas the City's peripheral area bordering into Cascade County transitions into agricultural, pasture and range lands with pockets of rural residential and transitional urban development.

Within the City's urban area a number of conventional land uses are found. These are referred to as residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, open space and vacant. A number of Activity Centers are located within the intensely developed urban areas of the City.

Activity Centers are areas of concentrated land use and pedestrian activity and high trip rates, and therefore, may be candidates for transit. According to the *Great Falls Transportation Plan*, Benefis Hospital, which has an east and west campus, the Great Falls Clinic, the University of Great Falls and shopping and retail outlets like Holiday Village Mall, Great Falls Market Place, Northwest Bypass Shopping, Target, Wal-Mart and Albertsons can be considered Activity Centers.

The City is composed of seven broad land use categories, in addition to the identified Activity Centers. These broad areas are depicted as part of Table 3, Figure 1 and Map 3.

Existing Land Use				
Classification	Uses	Area (S.F)	Acres	Percent
Residential	Single, multifamily, mobile home, retirement	188,073,549	4,318	39%
Commercial	Retail, shopping center, Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE), Hotel/Motel, Commercial with residential, child care	43,755,608	1,004	9%
Industrial	Light and heavy	55,595,748	1,276	11%
Institutional	Government, education, church, semi public	92,086,710	2,114	19%
Open land	Green space	31,843,402	731	7%
Transportation	Public, private parking, ROW, Rail Road and utilities	3,951,905	91	Less than 1%
Vacant	Commercial and residential	66,808,392	1,534	14%
Total		482,115,315 S.F	11,068 acres	

Table 3

Residential is the largest existing land use in the City, comprising 4,318 acres or 39% of the City. The majority of residential is characterized as single family detached residential. Other residential uses are multifamily, mobile home and retirement dwellings.

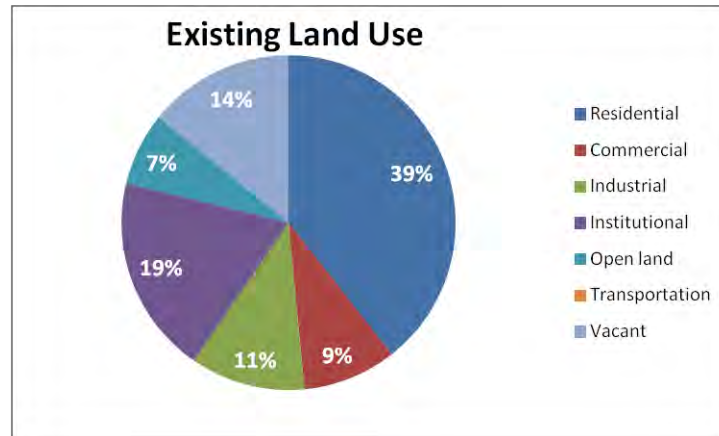


Figure 1

The next major land use is Institutional. Institutional uses include government, education, churches and those semi-public uses such as medical. Nineteen percent of the City can be described as having Institutional land use.

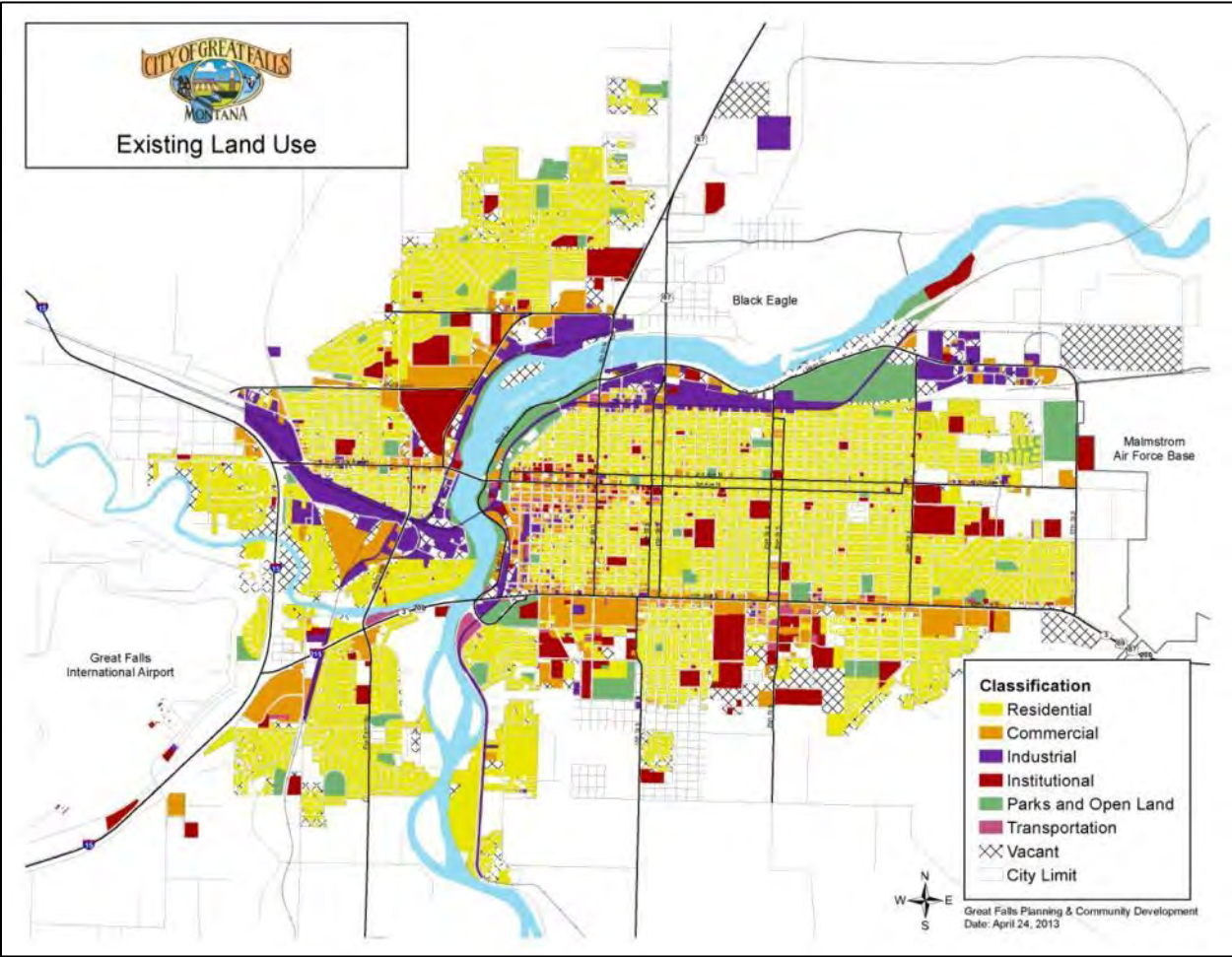
The City has a number of vacant and underutilized properties. When the commercial vacant lots are considered with the residential vacant lots, the amount of vacant land in the City totals 14% of the City or almost 67,000,000 square feet. Some of these lots are vacant by intent, being held as buffers by adjacent property owners.

Industrial acreage is about 11 percent of the City's area. Industrial acreage includes light and heavy industrial.

Open land and green space also make up the City's geographic area as does a small portion of transportation right-of-way.



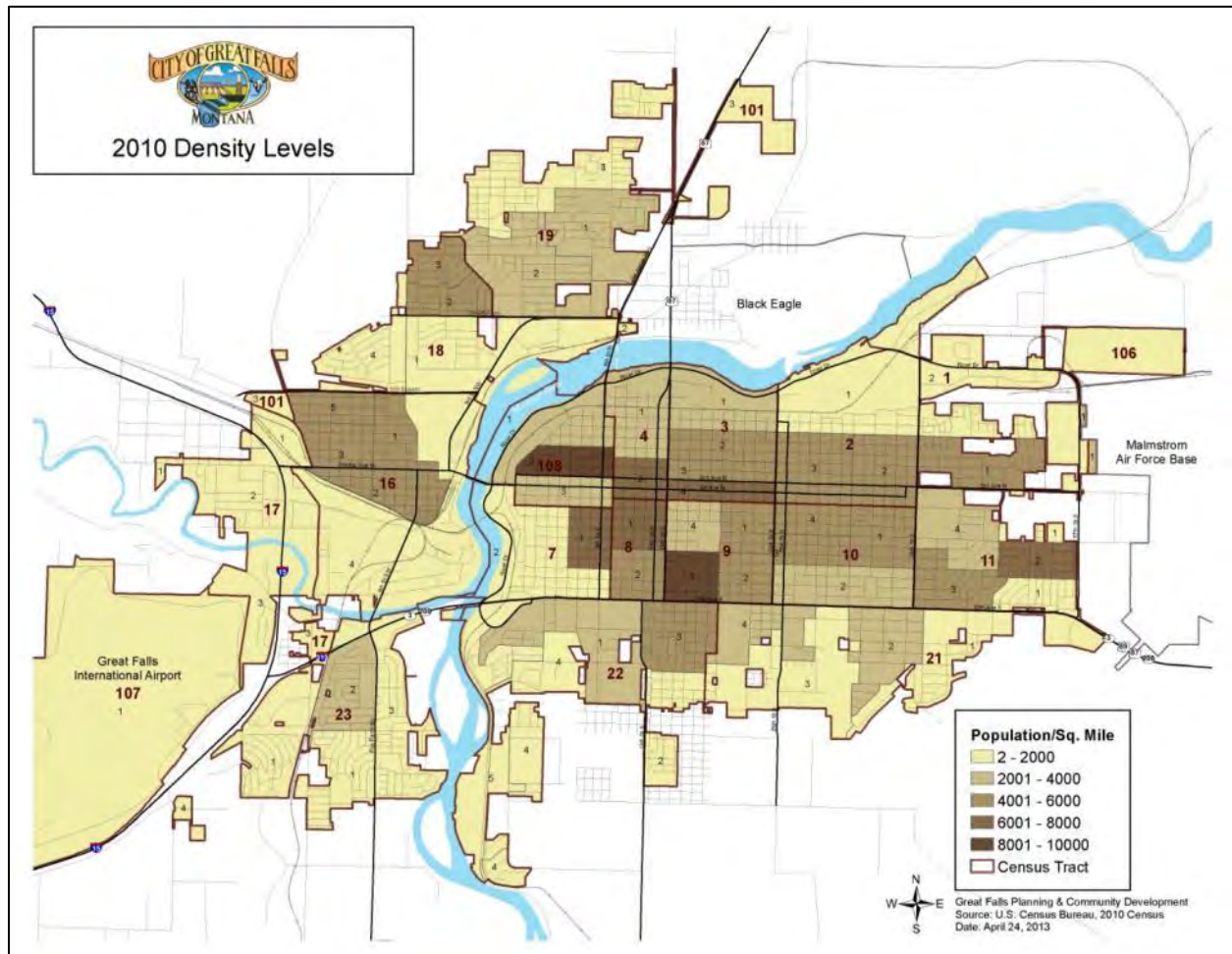
Map 3 depicts existing land uses in the City by location.



Map 3

## Density

The City of Great Falls is built on a historic urban core, which is the original grid that Paris Gibson envisioned for the City. Accordingly, the central core area, referred to as the Original City, includes downtown and the Central Business District. As can be seen on the Map 4, the core has the highest density in the City. The residential portion of this area, outside the downtown, largely contains R-3 zoning, consisting of 7,500 square foot, or 50' by 150' lots. If one looks at this map, it becomes evident that the extended portions of the City are less dense than the traditional core area of the City.



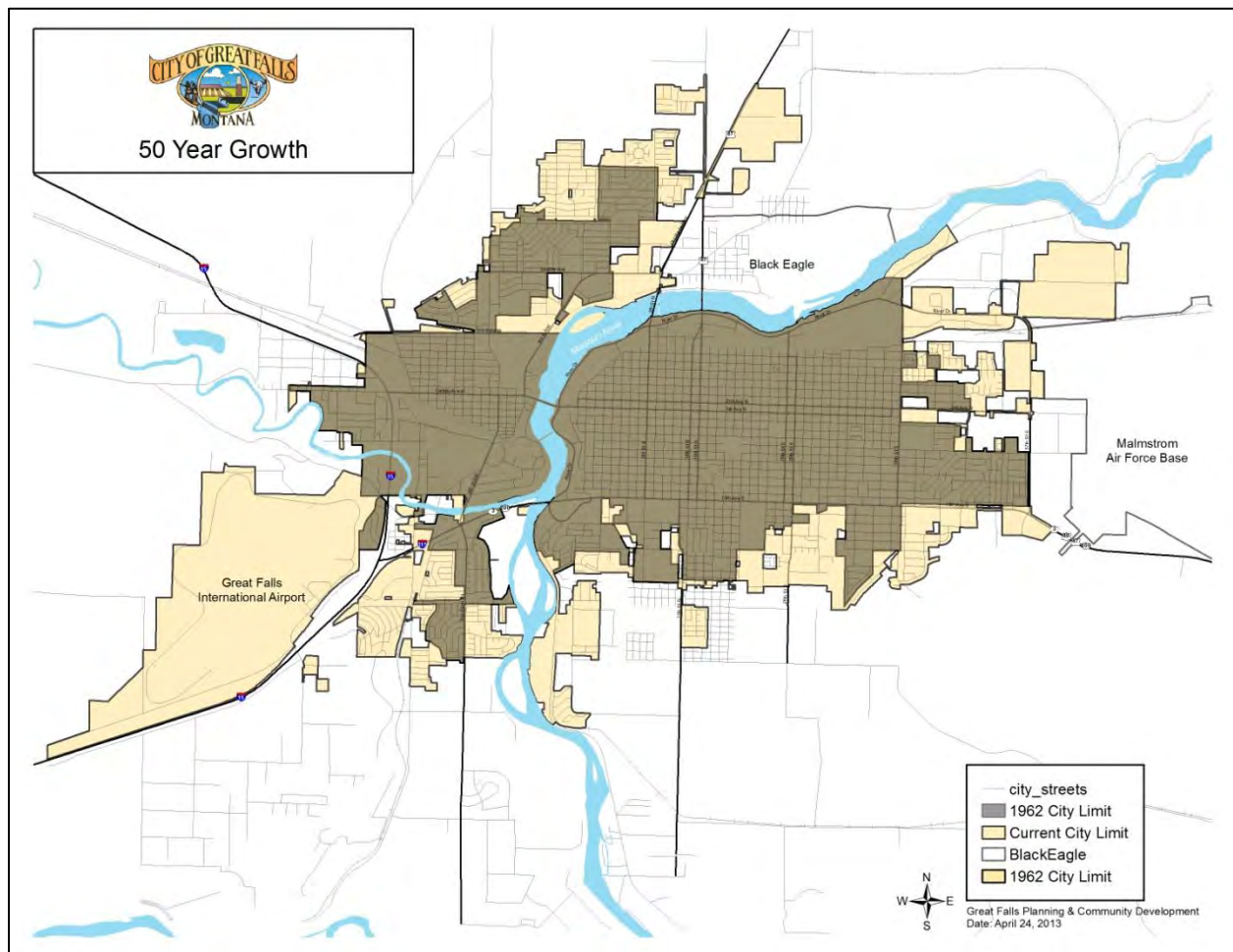
Map 4

Most communities built in America since World War II have followed a similar suburban development pattern. These communities were designed around the idea that cars would be the primary mode of transportation and that where we live should be physically separated from the places we work, play and go to school. Transportation, planning and some banking policies have all encouraged suburban development by creating financial tools so that first time home buyers could acquire homes. Some of these tools resulted in the creation of mass produced housing. Housing development oftentimes spread as a result of new roads, including the interstate highway system.

Over time, average lot sizes have become larger, as have the typical size of homes, reducing the number of homes and people per acre. This trend impacts local service delivery in the City, since service providers must travel further to accommodate fewer people. New and developing areas oftentimes take many years to have a full complement of retail, civic and businesses nearby. Initially, early residents in these areas may be more auto-dependent. It is the City's policy is to encourage a mix of uses throughout the City, where appropriate. Over time new and different land uses generally occur, creating more of a balance.

The layout, design and pattern of land use in a community can influence health. The City of Great Falls is fortunate to have a core system of sidewalks, trails, streets, and alleys. This design offers a high level of connectivity when compared to many urban areas. The City's physical design, including the density found in its core area and mix of uses in the central city, are natural assets in promoting a healthy city. Studies show that when residents take advantage of these opportunities to increase their everyday activity, it reduces the risks of obesity, diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Studies also show that providing adequate access to safe parks can result in an increase in physical activity.

The City has expanded its boundaries geographically, approximately 66%, or approximately 14,000 acres, during the last fifty years. Map 5 depicts the geographic spread of the City. Map 5 reflects the outward spread and perimeter growth of the City. Much of this trend is similar to typical suburban trends nationwide. Other characteristics of modern day standards include curb and gutter streets, uniform setbacks and building coverage limitations, longer blocks and, oftentimes, more curvilinear streets. In addition, drainage and open space requirements can act to further lower density and spread development. These subdivision requirements are generally considered more land intensive and do have the effect, at times, of reducing the type of residential density that was able to be achieved earlier in the City. This trend has implications for local service delivery which will be discussed further in this Growth Policy Update.



Map 5

## Demographic Overview

### Population

Demographics influence the type of housing and neighborhoods that people seek during various stages in their lives. National, state and local trends include changing family patterns, smaller households, inter-generational households and more single households. Generally population increases can be found, in part, at both ends of the age continuum. These trends have implications for the relationship between people and the built environment.

When specific family characteristics are explored, it is reported by the American Community Survey (ACS) 2009-2011 that the City's approximately 59,000 residents resided in an estimated 25,000 households. Families make up 62% of the households in Great Falls, Montana, including both married couple families (46%) and other families (16%).

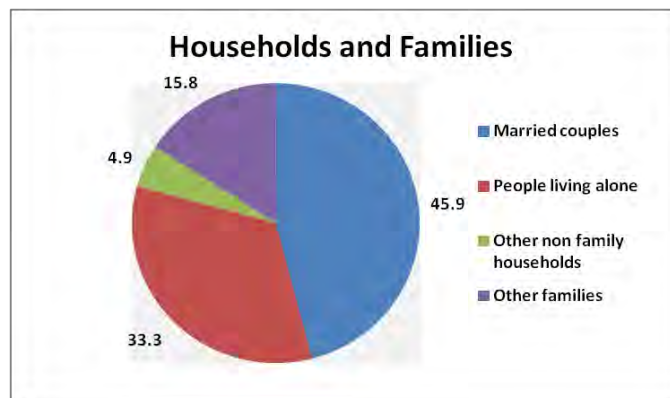


Figure 2

Of the “other” family category, 7% are female householder families with no husband present with children less than 18 years of age. Non-family households make up 38% of all households in Great Falls. Most of the non-family households are people living alone, but some are composed of people living in households in which no one is related to the householder. Among persons 15 years and older, 53% of males and 47% of females are currently married.

According to the 2010 census, the average owner occupied dwelling had 2.4 persons residing in it and the average renter 2.02. Generally renters have smaller households than single family dwellers. The average household consisted of 2.3 people. This household size is smaller than the United States average which is about 2.6 people.



Figure 3

According to the ACS, the median age in the City of Great Falls is 40.1 years. An estimated 22% of the population is reported as under 18 years and an estimated 17% of the local population is reported as 65 years and older.

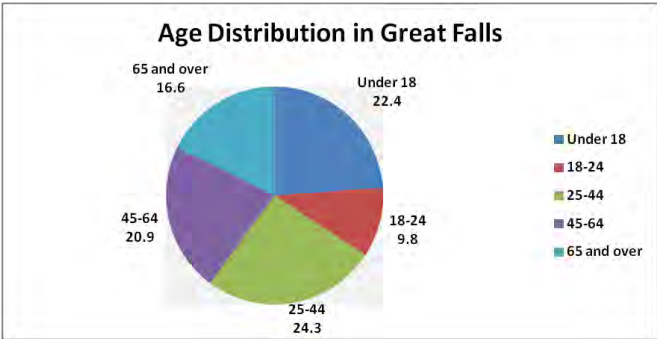


Figure 4

When compared to State and National rates, it appears that Great Falls has about the same percentage of those less than 18 years of age as the State of Montana has. These percentages are slightly under that for the United States as a whole.

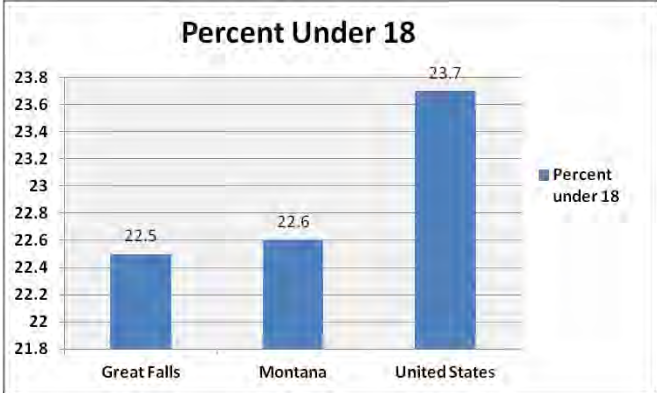


Figure 5

The number of persons aged 65 and above increased from 8,898 in 2000 to 9,696 in 2010. When compared to State and National rates, it appears that Great Falls has a higher percentage of those over 65 years of age than the State of Montana or the United States. This higher percentage has implications for services and retirement living.

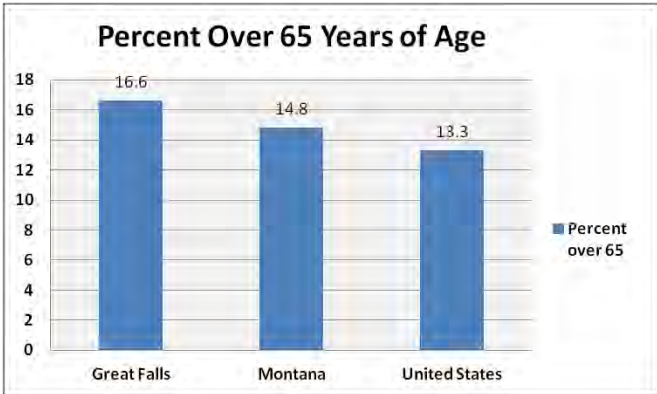


Figure 6

For people reporting one race alone, 92% were white, 1% were black or African American, 6% were American Indian, 1% were Asian, and 3% were Hispanic. Overall, the City of Great Falls has a total estimated minority population of 11%, with the largest percentage being Native American at 6.7%. These numbers are not all mutually exclusive.

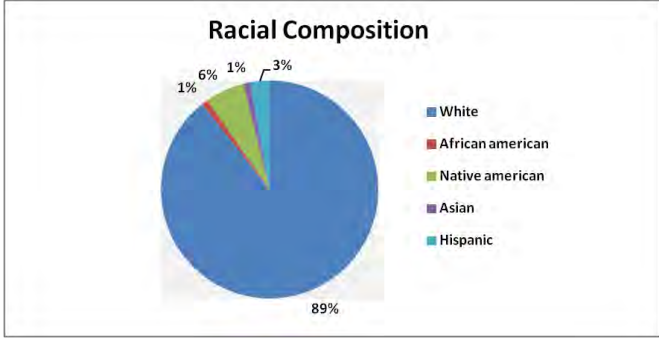


Figure 7

**Education**

The total estimated school enrollment in Great Falls was 13,000 in 2009-2011. Nursery and kindergarten enrollment was 1,800 and elementary or high school enrollment was 8,400. College or graduate school enrollment was 3,300. Current trends indicate that grade school enrollment is increasing in Great Falls. The percentage of high school graduates living in Great Falls is similar to that of Montana and above that of the United States.

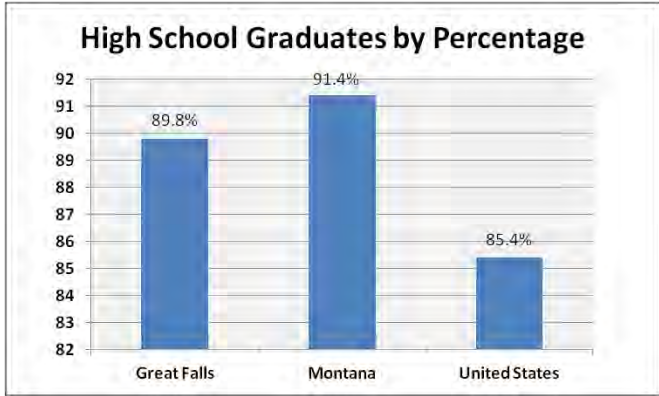


Figure 8

The percentage of people with Bachelor’s degrees living in Great Falls is less than that of Montana and less than that of the United States.



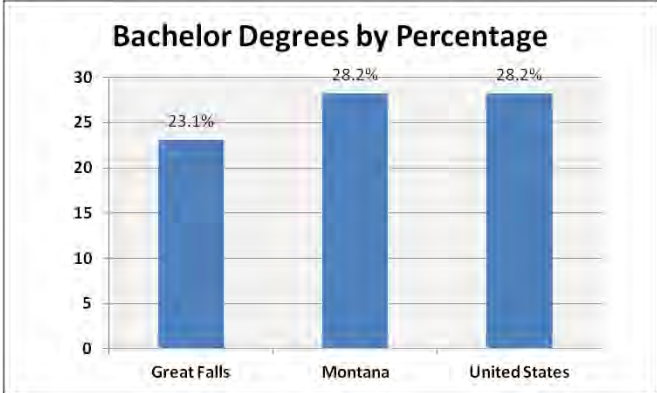


Figure 9

When overall levels of education completion are reported in Great Falls, responses in the ACS 2009-2011 estimate show that 29% of people 25 years and over had at least graduated from high school, 16% had a bachelor’s degree or higher and almost 7% had a graduate degree. Ten percent were dropouts; they were not enrolled in school and had not graduated from high school. Again almost 90% of the local population has finished high school or beyond.

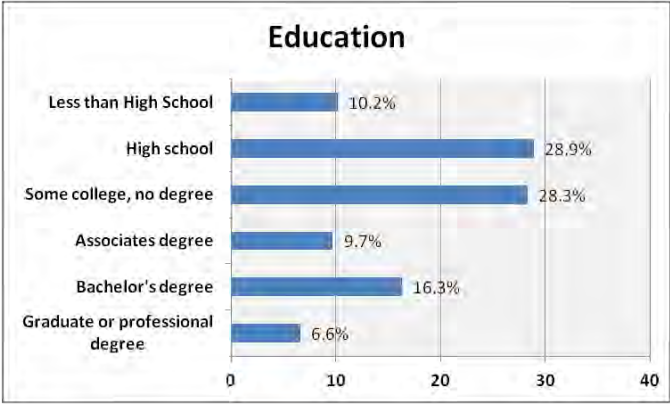


Figure 10

Based on the last five years, grade school enrollment is increasing within the Great Falls Public School system. This trend has implications for the school system and the City. Figure 17 illustrates this trend, ranging from 5,361 students enrolled at the grade school level in 2007-2008 to 5,623 students in 2012-2013.

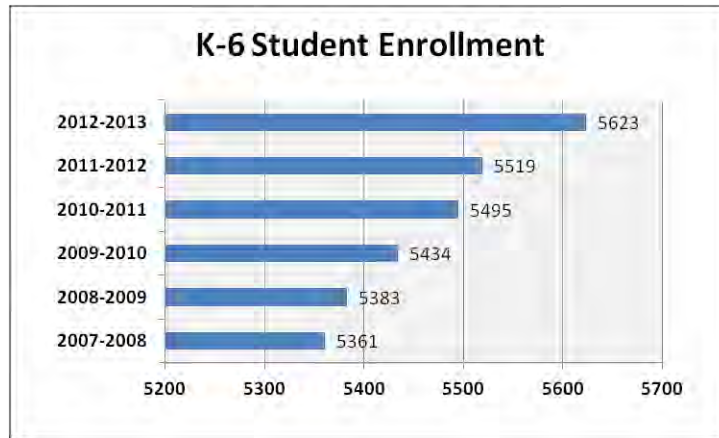


Figure 11

**Income**

The overall median income of households in Great Falls was estimated at \$42,105 in 2009-2011. When information was reported by sex, there appeared to be a median income differential in favor of males. The City’s median income is less than the State average. Since median income in the State has fluctuated the last ten years (with the recession) it is difficult to draw meaningful long term comparisons at this time.

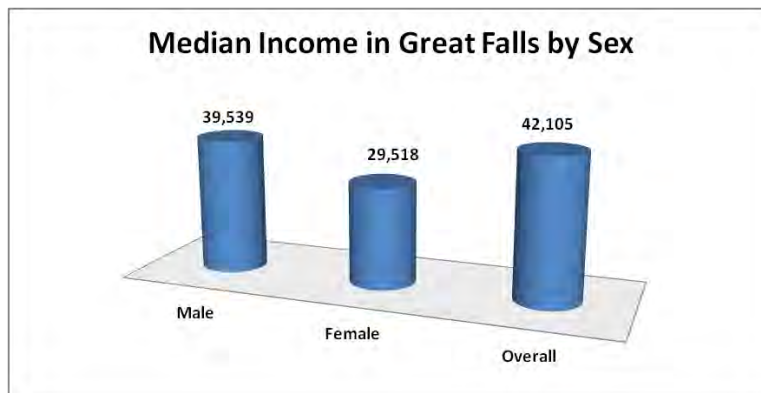


Figure 12

According to the 2009-2011 ACS estimates, 75% of households reported their income source as earnings, 23% reported their source of income as from retirement, and 33% reported their source of income as Social Security related. The average income from Social Security was \$16,521. These income sources were not mutually exclusive.

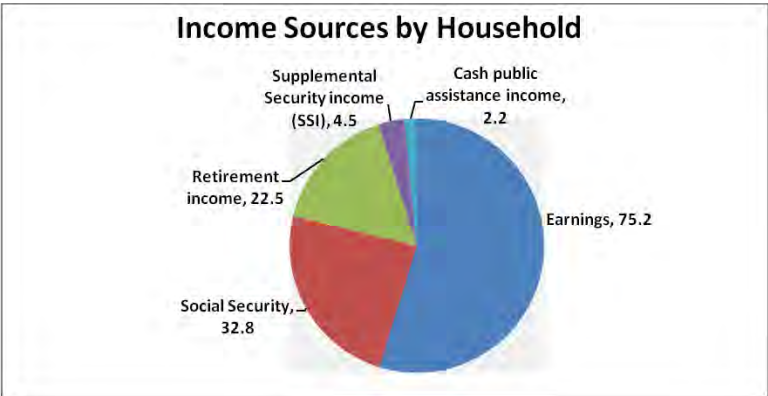


Figure 13

Among the general population, the ACS 2009-2011 report estimated that 85% had health insurance coverage whereas 15% reported they did not have health insurance coverage. For those under 18 years of age, 7% had no health insurance coverage. In Great Falls, among the civilian non institutionalized population in 2009-2011, 16% reported a disability.

In the 2009-2011 ACS estimates, 15% of the population was at or below poverty level by income. Twenty-six percent of related children under eighteen years of age were below the poverty level, compared with 7% of people 65 years old and older. Twelve percent of all families and 35% of families with a female householder and no husband present had incomes below the poverty level.

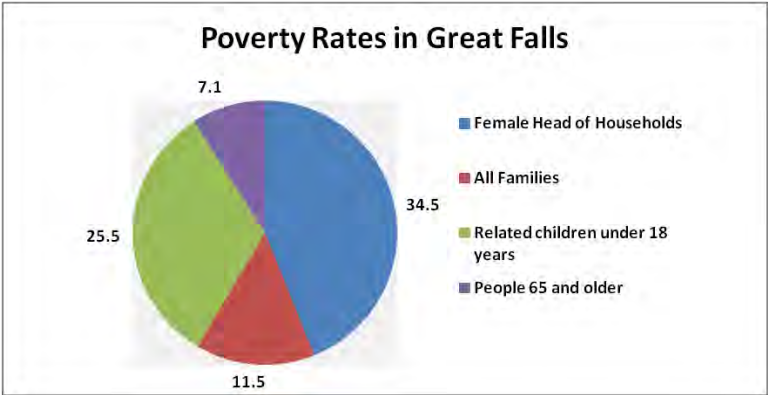


Figure 14

When the City’s median household income is compared to that of the State and the City, it appears that the City’s median income is below that of the State and that of the United States. Median household income has increased in the City from \$32,436 in 2000 to \$40,768 in 2010 to \$42,768 in the most recent ACS estimate.

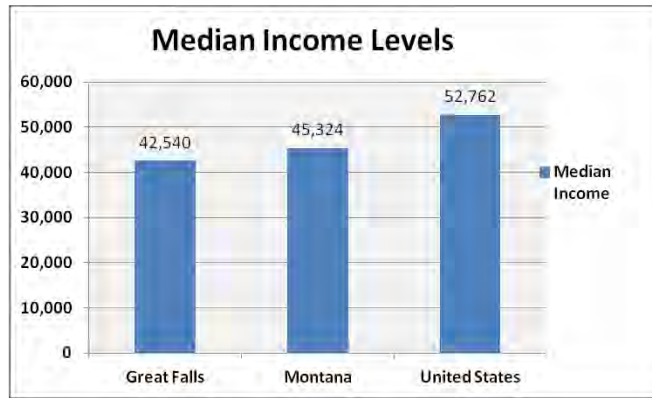


Figure 15

According to the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, the total number of food stamp recipients in Cascade County in 2013 was 10,796 or 13.7%. This represents a slow and steady increase since 2008. In 2013, 6,472 adults and 4,324 children received food stamps, as well as 790 elderly residents. In 2012, the number of disabled residents receiving food stamps was 1,161. Overall the percentage of residents in Cascade County and Great Falls receiving food stamps has been increasing since 2008 as can be seen on Figure 16.

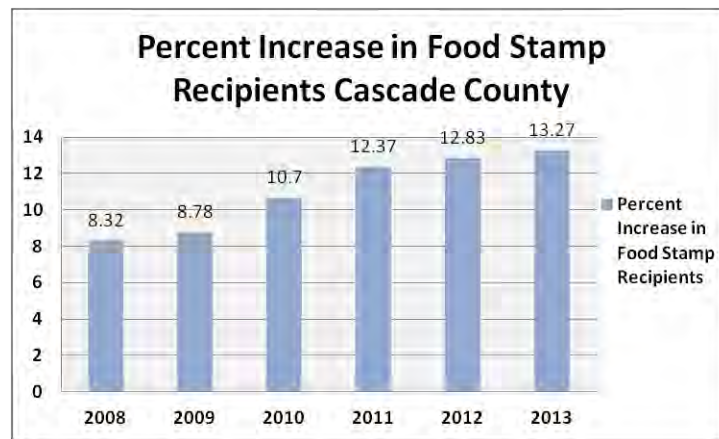


Figure 16

According to recent reports, in 2012 Great Falls Public Schools had the highest reported percentage of elementary students (of all the AA school districts in Montana) that qualified for free and reduced lunches.

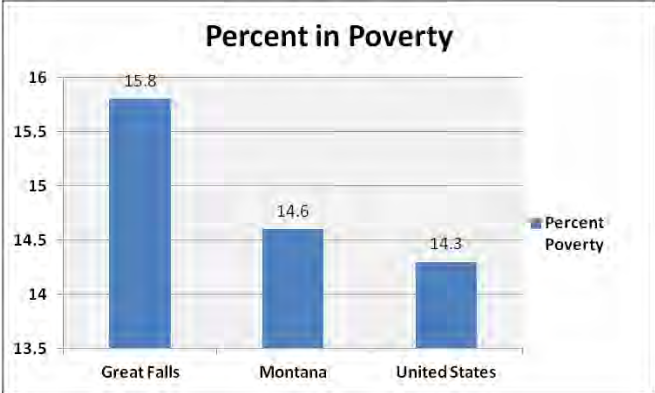


Figure 17

When the City’s poverty rate is compared to that of the State of Montana and the national rate, it can be seen by Figure 17 that Great Falls has a higher rate of poverty at this time. This status should be carefully monitored.

## SOCIAL

### Introduction

The Social element includes population, health and wellness, housing, and local community services such as police, fire, and parks, as well as the contribution of non-profits. This element is intended to address the broad holistic well-being of the City's residents at large. The Social element recognizes that the biggest asset the City has is its people and their well-being. The character, friendliness and neighborliness of the City's residents repeatedly came up as a highly valued asset during the outreach activities for the Growth Policy Update.

The Social Working Group recognized the interrelationship of these components and acknowledged their importance in addressing many basic issues such as a diverse and affordable housing supply, public safety and emergency services, public health, recreation and outdoor activities, arts, cultural, libraries and education. Given the pressing needs of these demands, communication and collaboration and capacity building are of paramount importance, as is leveraging resources, volunteers and working with individuals at the neighborhood level. There are numerous social indicators that one can look to for an estimation of standing. Some of these indicators are included in this Section to provide some sort of context and comparison.

The City continues to address its social and housing issues through the administration of the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG). The CDBG program allocates dollars for eligible activities within a designated area of the City. Overall the median income for Great Falls in 2011 adjusted dollars was \$42,105 below the State's median of \$44,392 and well below the Federal median of \$51,484. However, median income has increased in the City from \$32,436 in 2000. Currently, poverty levels are reported to be higher than the State, including levels for youth under 18. Access to healthcare and insurance is uneven in the City.

Although the public participation phase included, in large part, support for the City's public education system there may be a problem with the City's drop-out rate. According to the Montana Office of Public Instruction in its annual drop-out rate and graduation report, Montana's high school drop-out rate has decreased from 5.1% in 2009 to 4.1% in 2012; however, the City of Great Falls' drop-out rate increased from 5.2% in 2011 to 7.0% in 2012.

Housing availability is tight be it rentals, affordable housing, or workforce housing. The City is actively trying to encourage more residential development of all types. Homelessness is a problem, and it appears from recent surveys that the numbers in Great Falls may be on the rise.

All of these issues are complex and can be inter-related in part. The City will continue to work with its residents, institutions, the private sector and non-profits toward improving these conditions.

## Goals and Principles

- To uphold safe, secure and adequate public health, police and fire safety standards in the City.
- To support diverse and affordable recreation, educational, and cultural opportunities in the City.
- To strive toward an equitable distribution of parks, services and public facilities.
- To enhance opportunities for all residents to participate fully in the City.
- To encourage a safe, adequate and diverse supply of housing and fair housing opportunities in the City.
- To promote a wide and diverse supply of housing of all members of the community.
- To foster cohesive, attractive, safe and sustainable neighborhoods throughout the City.
- To strengthen the “sense of community” in Great Falls by respecting others.
- To be open to new, innovative solutions and problem solving in the City.
- To recognize the many societal inter-relationships that contributes to an individual’s well being and advancement.

## Police

The City's Police Department consists of five bureaus. These are the Patrol, Detective, Support, Records and Communications Bureaus. The Patrol Services Bureau consists of day to day patrol operations referred to as the backbone of the police department. Patrol officers are the front line for community services and traffic enforcement. The Investigative Services Bureau encompasses the Detective Division, Property and Evidence and the department's crime lab. This Bureau provides specialized services, general case investigations, sex crime and registration, drugs, street crimes, school resource detectives and the Safe Street Task Force. The Support Services Bureau includes community oriented policing, education, crime prevention, training and process servicing. In addition, the police manage animal control and dispatch, and central communication to all departments. The Communications Bureau handles 911 calls and dispatch personnel.

In 2011 the Great Falls Police Department had a staff of 126, of which 85 were police officers. The Montana average for staffing per 1000 residents is 1.91. The City of Great Falls the ratio is at 1.44 officers per 1000 residents.

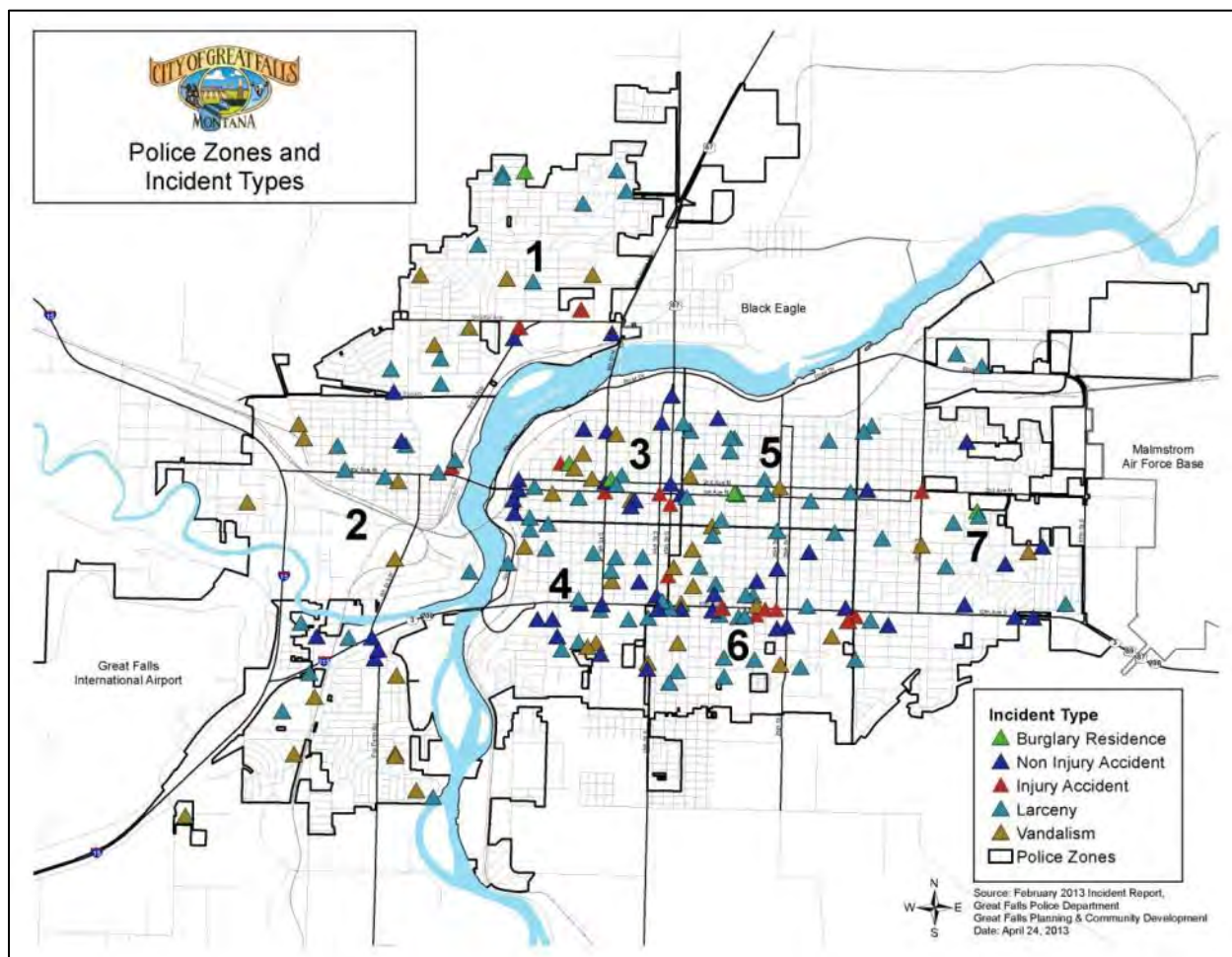
The Police Department works with the community on such issues as Neighborhood Watch, volunteerism, the Police Academy, community policing and reports to the Neighborhood Councils. Recently the Police Department has hired a volunteer coordinator to further engage volunteerism. This step also will better position the department to pursue public grants and private fundraising. The Police Department's mission statement is "We are the Community and they are us. Show Compassion for those we serve. Have the Courage to do what is necessary and what is right." The Police Department also sponsors a Citizens' Academy program and works with high school students.



The Department also has undertaken an innovative and prioritized approach to crime prevention referred to as Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety or DDACTS. DDACTS integrates location-based crime and traffic crash data. By mapping and analyzing these outcomes, the Department is able to establish more effective and efficient methods to deploy law enforcement and other resources. This approach is based on the theory that an increased police office presence and the enforcement of traffic violations will minimize or eliminate the criminal element. Police can strategically saturate a DDACTS area, making contact with citizens, check out suspicious activity, and work known problem areas, as well as conduct traffic enforcement. The results have been promising to date, and are somewhat similar to "hot-spotting." Hot-spotting is a GIS problem solving technique being used in health, crime prevention, and other social areas to identify and prioritize resources and need.

An example of data from the DDACTS report is shown below on Map 6. The data is from the February 2013 report and shows, by Police Zone, that there were 5 burglary responses, 61 non-injury accidents, 17 injury accidents, 98 larcenies and 42 reports of vandalism for this month.





Map 6

The Police Department also is impacted by expanding geographic boundaries, the City’s irregular boundaries, unfunded State mandates and the impacts of regional growth such as those from oil and gas development. As a result, the Police Department is increasingly using innovative methods such as DDACTS and community outreach to maintain their level of service.

## Fire

The City of Great Falls provides fire and Emergency Management Service (EMS) services to 16 County Contracted Fire Districts. The City receives payment through a series of agreements for these contracted services. The City of Great Falls has 65 uniformed firefighters with 60 assigned to four shifts (15 per shift).

Also the City has one emergency management planner and one administrative support person. The City has four frontline apparatus in four fire stations. Three engine companies and one ladder company are staffed 24 hours a day seven days a week. The other apparatus options are reserves and not staffed. They are brought into service when one of the frontline apparatus needs repair or when firefighters are called for large incidents.



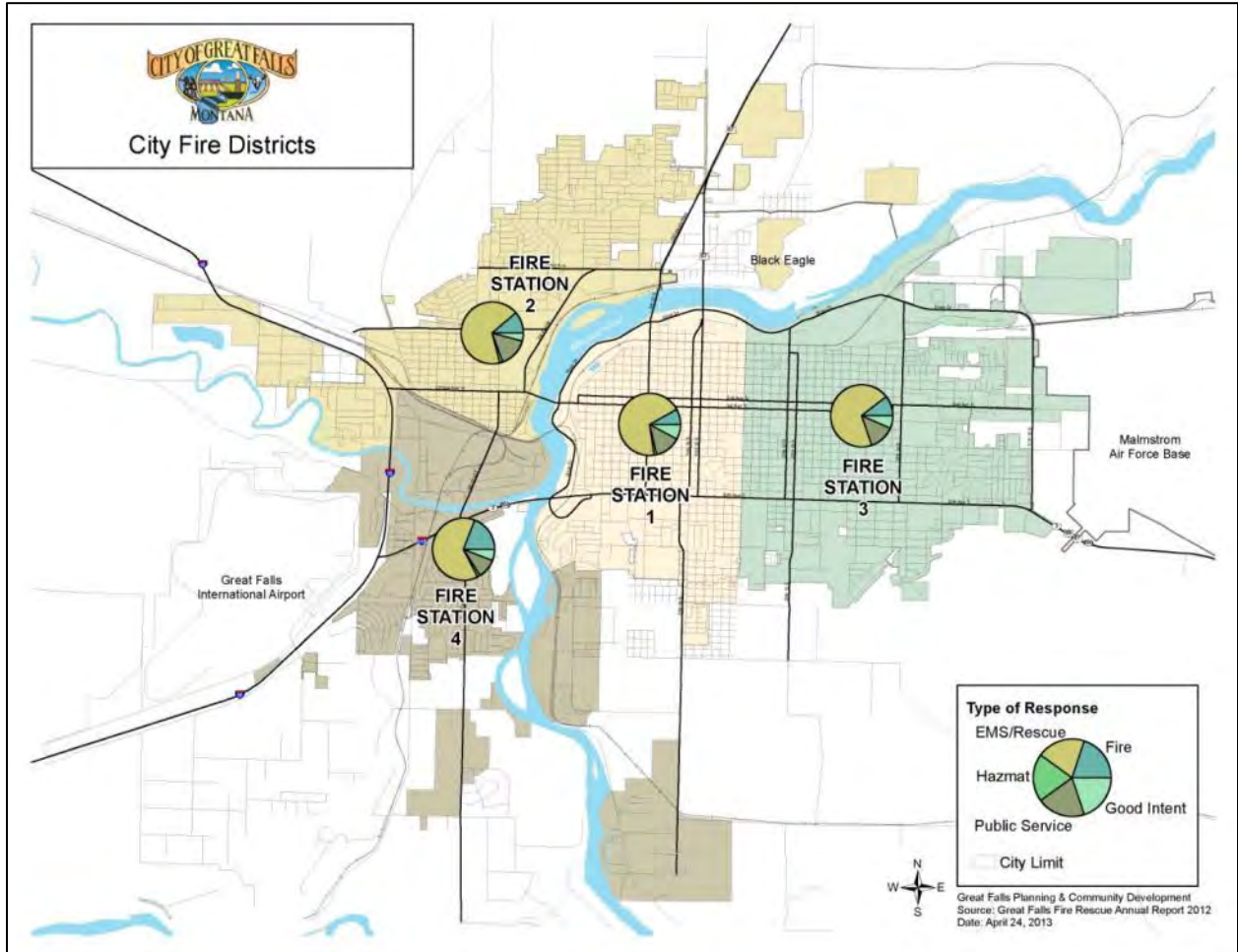
The Insurance Service Office (ISO), an independent entity, recently downgraded the City's Public Protection Classification (PPC) from 3 to 4. The City's PPC has worsened, due to staffing levels. In the short term, the City is seeking grant or potential staffing flexibility to address concerns. These ratings can influence what a homeowner pays for insurance, especially in locations that are more challenging to serve.

The Department also conducts safety inspections of each business in Great Falls, maintains fire hydrants, maintains equipment and buildings and offers educational

outreach, extinguisher classes and tours of the fire stations.

In addition to impacts created by the geographic spread of the City, the existence of 34 county enclaves that are located within the City limits further challenges the Department at this time. This update to the City's Growth Policy is emphasizing infill and redevelopment to lessen the potential impacts of geographic expansion on public services until a plan is developed to address long term fire services. This becomes need becomes even more important if one considers that the last fire station built in Great Falls was in 1969.

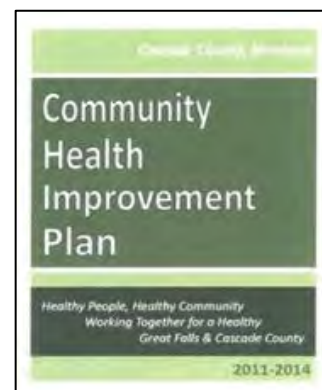
In the future, the Fire Department anticipates being impacted by increased environmental regulatory measures and expanded roles to contain and possibly cleanup HAZMAT accidents as well as an increase in the number of non-emergent calls related to social support needs. Map 7, shown in the following, depicts the City's fire districts and the type of responses reported for 2012.



Map 7

### Cascade City-County Health Department

The Cascade City-County Health Department is a public health agency that addresses environmental health, prevention, family health, and healthcare services. Examples of critical functions include implementing State laws and regulations, immunizations and disease prevention, family health services and operating a not-for-profit Federally Qualified Health Center. The Department's vision statement is "healthy people in a healthy community." The Department's mission is to prevent disease and illness, promote healthy choices and deliver quality healthcare. In collaboration with the larger public health system, the Department develops a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) to address priority issues every 3 to 5 years.

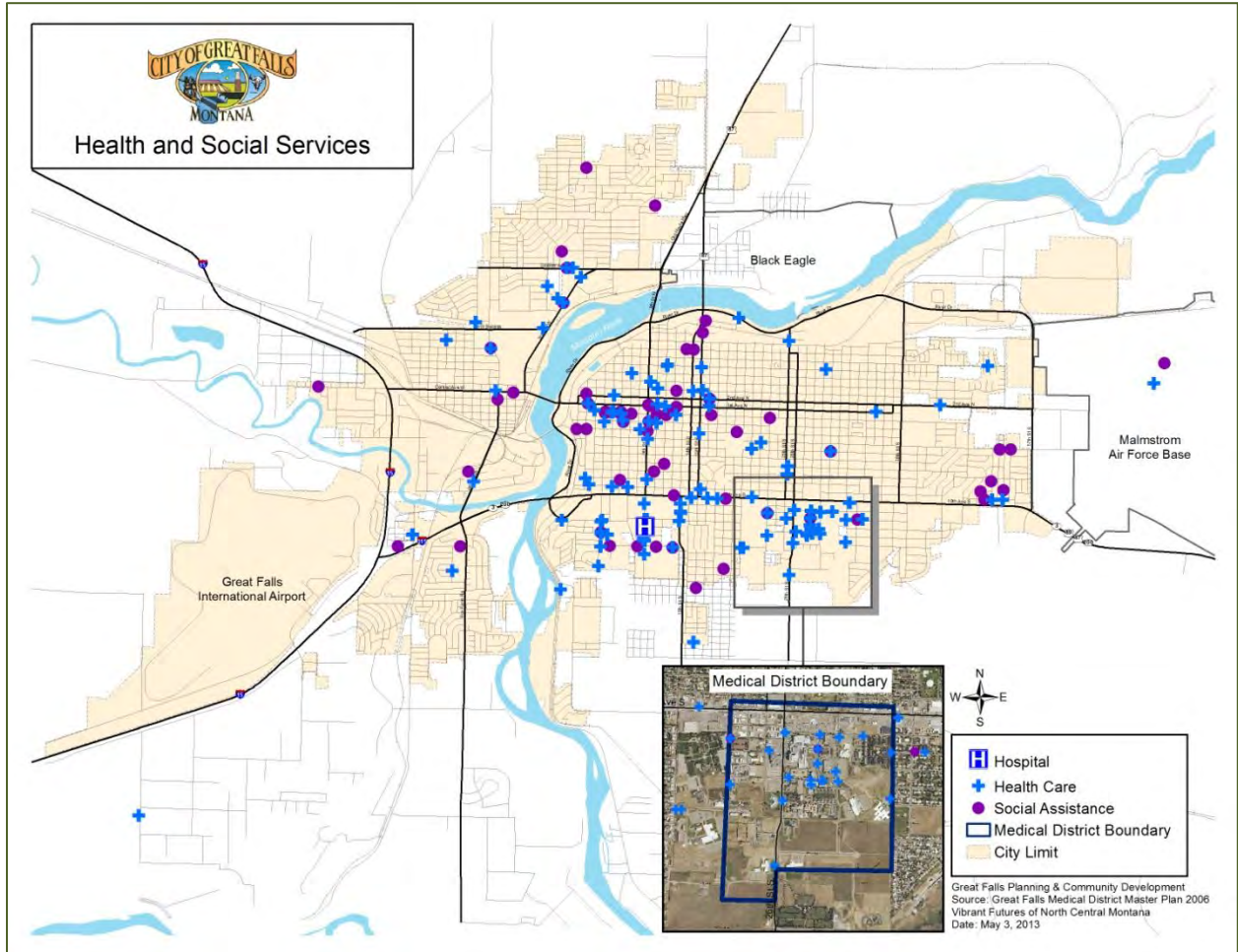


The Department has a challenging and complex array of public health needs. Similar to national and state trends, Cascade County has chronic health issues. The County's leading causes of death are cancers, heart disease and chronic lower respiratory disease. Estimates are that 15% of Cascade County residents under the age of 65 do not have health insurance and only about 69% of pregnant women are receiving adequate prenatal care.

Lifestyle issues also exist here. It is estimated that about 80% of residents do not consume adequate servings of fruits or vegetables. According to the Cascade City County Health Department, about 40% of the City's residents are overweight, and about 24% are obese. Recent reports indicate that the number of students eligible for free or reduced school lunches in Cascade County has increased in recent years.

Health access issues also have been identified in Great Falls. Eight central-city related census tracts qualified as Medically Underserved Population Areas in the 2010 census. These areas have shortages of that may include too few primary care physicians, high infant mortality, high poverty, and or high elderly population.

The City is fortunate to have regional healthcare providers in Benefis Health System, as well as Central Montana Hospital, serving the local community. City-wide there are 81 licensed social assistance providers and 174 health care providers. The latter total includes dentists, opticians and the universe of those who are licensed to meet a medical need. This regional and community role contributes toward local community wellness. Map 8 shows the City's medical provider infrastructure city-wide.



Map 8

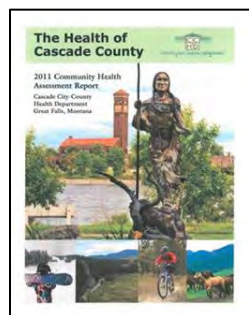
## Wellness

Growing evidence supports the role of neighborhood design in promoting a healthy community. These findings include access to parks, playgrounds, fresh fruit and vegetables. This trend in public health is intended to encourage built environments in which residents have more opportunities to be physically active and connected and have access to wholesome foods. It links the traditional concepts of planning (such as land use, transportation, community facilities and parks and open space) with health themes such as physical activity, healthy food access, mental health, air and water quality. This holistic approach makes healthy lifestyle choices more available and accessible to all and is very consistent with the history and origins of land use planning in this country. The City's parks, community gardens, and traditional grid are all ingredients of a community that is well designed in this regard.

Public and Environmental Health pays off, as well as contributes to public safety. For every one dollar spent on prevention, \$5.6 dollars are saved in health care spending. The City's codes can influence healthy outcomes. A review or audit would identify additional ways and best practices toward furthering a healthy community. The City should pursue grant opportunities in this regard.

The City-County Health Department already is working toward these type objectives. In November of 2011, the department applied for the ACHIEVE grant and developed a CHART Team. CHART stands for Community Health Action Response Team. Following the release of the 2011 Community Health Assessment (CHA), representatives from 25 local agencies, including a county commissioner, the Great Falls Transit District, Great Falls Public Schools, Benefis Health System, the Deputy City Manager and a planner for the City of Great Falls, convened to evaluate the data presented in the CHA and create a CHIP Community Health Improvement Planning (CHIP) process.

These representatives identified three priority health issues and set goals, objectives and strategies for each issue. The three priority areas are: 1) to increase access to medical, dental and mental health care, 2) to reduce substance abuse and 3) to reduce the number of Cascade County residents who are overweight or obese.



Some of the objectives and strategies identified to reduce the prevalence of residents classified as overweight or obese included: 1) Create a built environment throughout Cascade County and the City of Great Falls that promotes walking, biking and other physical activity; 2) Joint Use Agreements (JUA) between the City, County and private fitness facilities to provide easier access for all Cascade County residents; and 3) developing and implementing community activities in neighborhood parks and recreational areas.

In addition, the *Get Fit Great Falls* (GFGF) coalition is supporting these efforts, as well as developing a strategic work plan, to create a living environment where physical activity can become a part of everyday life in Great Falls.

## Park and Recreation

The City's Park and Recreation Department has 57 parks (900 acres), 49 of which are developed (840 acres). Overall the Department is responsible for maintaining and improving more than 75 properties and 1,200 acres of developed land, including pocket parks, the two golf courses, and the Recreation Center, roadway medians and sharing the responsibility for maintaining the River's Edge Trail. The Department also oversees the 45,000 trees on public land. These activities are guided by the City's *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan*. The City's Park and Recreation Department also offers active, organized and structured recreational programs for adults and children including basketball, softball, soccer, golf, skating, swimming and volleyball, as well as special events.

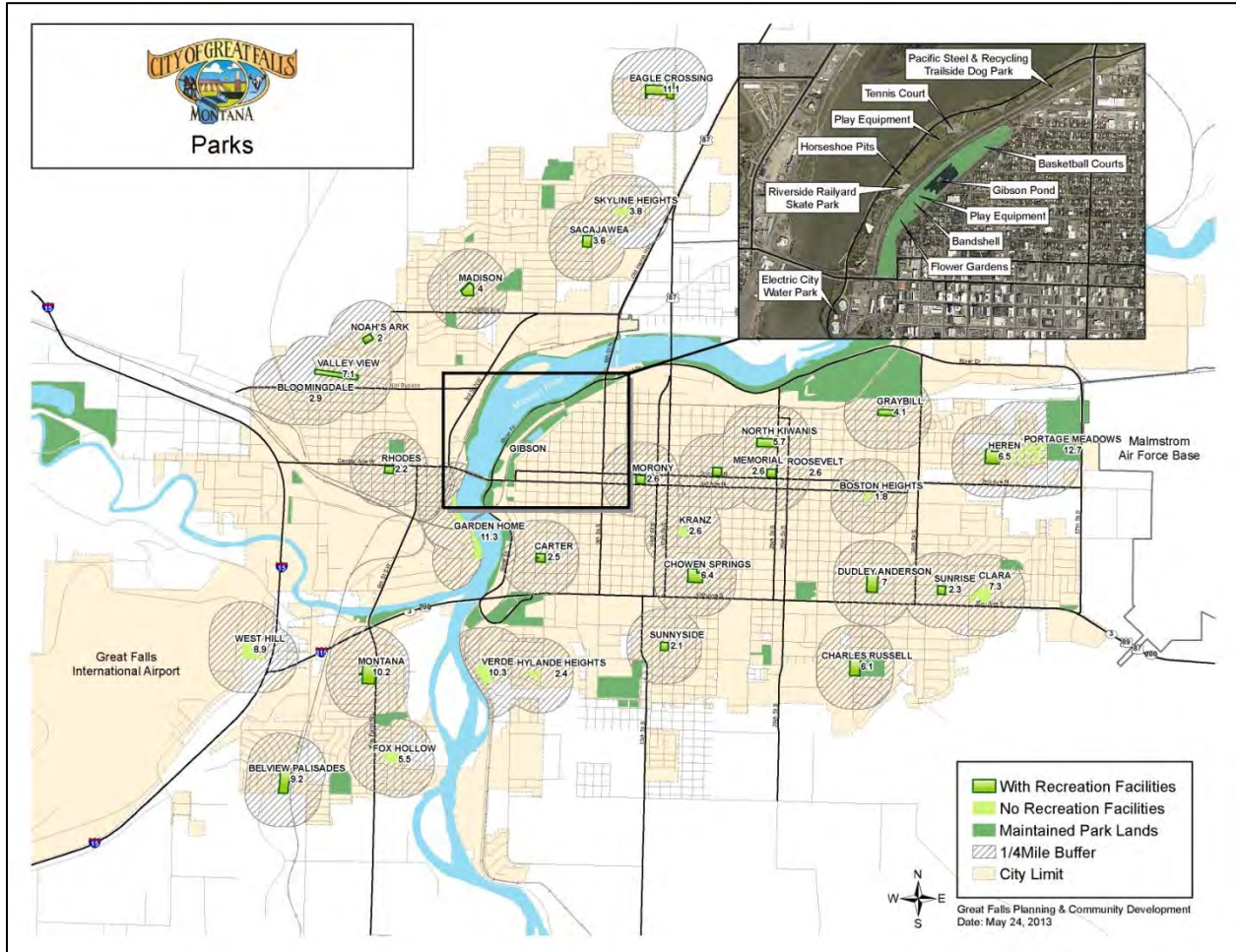
City parks, trails and natural assets were recognized and highly touted during the public outreach process. Parks can also make a positive contribution to the desirability of a neighborhood, through the amenities, aesthetics and the community-building opportunities they create. In addition, local parks can add value to homes nearby. A recent study showed that in the United States homes near parks sold for \$2,262 dollars more than homes without access to parks nearby. Parks and open space also enhance the environmental ambiance of the City.

Other recreational amenities exist in the City such as those provided by the Great Falls Public School system, Malmstrom Air Force Base, Centene Stadium, the University of Great Falls and the State of Montana and private entities. The City oftentimes partners, and has cooperative arrangements, with these other recreational providers and together they contribute to the needs of the community in this regard.

Ideally speaking, parks should be accessible, or park opportunities should be equitably distributed, throughout the City. According to the *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan*, Great Falls has an excess of neighborhood parks as opposed to community-scale parks. In addition, the report notes that many parks are not fully equipped, or could benefit from support facilities, and that maintenance is a major challenge due to the large number of smaller parks. Further, it mentions that not all park land may be useable in the long-term. Decisions regarding one of the most valued assets should be consistent with public input from those affected and the best management practice for the resource. The public input process for this planning effort indicated that parks are also important to people for open space, and that the people of this community valued open space.

Studies have shown that a majority of people will walk up to a quarter of a mile or five minutes to a destination. The City of Great Falls is fortunate in that it has a number of neighborhoods where the local parks meet this standard, even if some of these parks could benefit from more improvements. Map 9 depicts the location of Neighborhood Parks, Gibson Park, and Open Space. Natural open space is undeveloped land left in a natural or landscaped condition that serves a different need in the community. Table 4, Additional Park Assets, depicts Community, Linear and Special Use Parks.

Lack of physical activity is a central risk factor for obesity, as well as heart disease, cancer and stroke. The Park and Recreation Department creates active and passive recreational opportunities for the public at large to engage in healthy and beneficial activities.



Map 9

Table 4 depicts Special use, Community and Linear Parks in the City. Together these respective parks create a positive quality of life in the City. More information about these resources can be found in the Definitions Section.



<b>ADDITIONAL PARK ASSETS</b>				
(In addition to the Neighborhood Parks and Open Space shown on Map 9)				
<b>Park Name</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Facilities</b>
Anaconda Hills Golf Course	117	Golf	Special use	yes
Broadwater Bay	5	Developed	Special use	yes
Centene Stadium	9	Developed	Special use	yes
Charles Russell Park	2	Developed	Special use	yes
Pacific Steel & Recycling Trailside Dog Park	2	Developed	Special use	yes
Eagle Falls Golf Course	251	Golf	Special use	yes
Elks Riverside	19	Developed	Linear	yes
Gallatin-Jaycee	13	Developed	Community	yes
Gibson	22	Developed	Large urban	yes
Grande Vista	17	Developed	Community	yes
Lions	12	Developed	Community	yes
Meadowlark	9	Developed	Community	yes
Montana Veteran's Memorial	10	Developed	Special use	yes
Mitchell Pool	4	Developed	Special use	yes
Multi Sports Complex	31	Developed	Special use	yes
Oddfellows	5	Developed	Linear	no
Pinski	2	Developed	Community	yes
River's Edge Trail	6	Developed	Special use	yes
Riverview Little League	19	Developed	Special use	yes
Siebel Soccer Park	42	Developed	Special use	
Skyline Optimist	10	Developed	Community	no
Tourist	3	Developed	Linear	no
Unnamed	9	Developed	Linear	no
Wadsworth	103	Undeveloped	Special use	yes
Warden	22	Developed	Community	yes
West Bank	19	Developed	Linear	yes
West Kiwanis	8	Developed	Community	yes
Whittier	1	Developed	Community	no

Table 4

### Definitions

*Mini-Parks*, tot lots and children's playgrounds are all small single purpose play lots designed primarily for small children usage. Because of their size, the facilities are usually limited to a small open grass area, a children's playground and a picnic area.

*Neighborhood Parks* are a combination playground and park designed primarily for non-supervised, non-organized recreation activities. There are generally smaller in size (about 3-7 acres) and serve an area of approximately one half mile radius, or 3,000 to 5,000 people. Since these parks are located within walking and bicycling distance of most users, the activities they offer become a daily past time for the neighborhood children.

*Community Parks* are planned primarily to provide active and structured recreation opportunities for young people and adults. In general, community park facilities are designed for organized activities and sports, although individual and family activities are also encouraged. Community Parks usually have sports fields or similar facilities as the central focus of the park. The service area for a community park is roughly a 1-2 mile radius.

*Linear Parks* are areas that generally follow a stream corridor, ravine, or some other elongated feature such as a railroad right of way.

*Specialized Parks* are those parks serving a central focus that may serve the City at large. Soccer, softball fields, and golf courses are some examples of specialized parks.

To conclude, the *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan* states that while the City has a large number of park sites, it has an average amount of parkland when compared to other cities because most of the parks in Great Falls are smaller than average. The report goes on further to state that except for some of the riverfront parks such as Elks Riverside Park and Gibson Park, many developed sites could benefit from more recreation facilities. This 1995 plan is dated, however, and the Park and Recreation Department would like to see this assessment updated. This is especially important given the need to find a long-term solution to address park maintenance costs.



**New Development**

Although the City has a notable number of neighborhood parks (as cited in the *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan*), the City must consider the effects of new development on its overall park system. To do this, the City has a *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan*, which allows the City to utilize the park dedication requirements stated in 76-3-621 MCA. The City also has “cash-in-lieu-of-parkland,” option whereby those that develop property can donate funds instead of dedicated parkland based on a state and local formula.

The fair market value of “cash-in-lieu-of-parkland” is determined by a formula based on the number of acres and the size of the proposed lots. For lots that are ½ acre or less, the formula states that 11% of the total square footage of the development multiplied by the appraisal fee must be donated in lieu of parkland. This standard is set forth in 76-3-621 MCA. Below is an example of a fair market value of cash- in-lieu-of-parkland. This example below is based upon a 15.5 acre small-lot development proposed for annexation.

**Example**

15.5 acres x 43,560 ft per acre = 675,180 SF.

675,180 SF x 11% (note 1) = 74,270 SF x \$0.35 (note 2) = \$25,995

Note 1 – 11% is the standard for lots less than ½ acre per 76-3-621 MCA

Note 2 - In April of 2008 undeveloped park land outside of the City limits, with no utilities, was appraised for \$.35 per SF. Property within the City requires an individual appraisal.

### Planned Park Improvements

West Bank Park is an existing, under-utilized park within the *Missouri River Urban Corridor* planning area, next to the River's Edge Trail. The linear park is 36 acres in size, and is predominantly in passive use at this time.

The City has a long term vision for West Bank Park in the form of a *Master Plan*, based on the concept balancing open space with compatible uses that will increase the overall value of the park system. The goal is to enhance West Bank's role in the City's park system and to make West Bank Park a destination park.

The *Master Plan for West Bank Park* calls for connectivity to adjacent residential neighborhoods while maximizing the opportunities afforded by redevelopment in the area. Some of the elements recommended in the Master Plan include a new amphitheatre, improved trails, improved site amenities, a natural playground for children and a beach volleyball court for young adults.

The *Plan* calls for three distinct areas within the park. These areas can generally be described as:

**Northern Area** – The concept for the north is to create a passive recreation area that is suitable for wildlife viewing and nature. The northern area includes Sacajawea Island, a nesting ground for a number of bird species.



**Mid-Section** – The mid-section of the Park is designed as a transition area. This area is intended for pedestrians and bicyclists. The intent of this portion of the park is to emphasize the River's Edge Trail through interpretative information and other appropriate signage.

**Southern Area** – The southern section of the park is planned to be the most active portion of the site since this has the best access for every day users. One of the key elements of the southern section will be an improved amphitheatre with sandstone boulders. A natural playground for children is also planned for this area, as well as a boat ramp for non-motorized access onto the Missouri River.

Major design elements planned for the next five years include road and parking improvements, earthwork and grading, trails and associated amenities such as pedestrian benches and trash receptacles, amphitheatre, shelter, park lighting, River Edge treatments, landscaping and irrigation and sand volleyball. Also a railroad underpass connection is a future design element in the plan.

### Arts, Culture, Library, Education

The City has some vital cultural assets within its boundaries. The City's Mansfield Performing Arts Center brings numerous plays, shows and concerts to the City. The City also is proud to have its own symphony and some local theatre. The City of Great Falls also is home to the C.M Russell Museum, the Children's Museum, the History Museum, the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, Montana Railroad Museum and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretative Center.

The Great Falls Public Library holds 159,767 books, 6,871 ebooks, 56 state licensed data bases, and 234 subscriptions in addition to having a bookmobile. The Library has numerous events for adults, young adults and children. Since the library is a key educational and community asset, it is important that it be supported and enhanced as part of the City's Growth Policy.



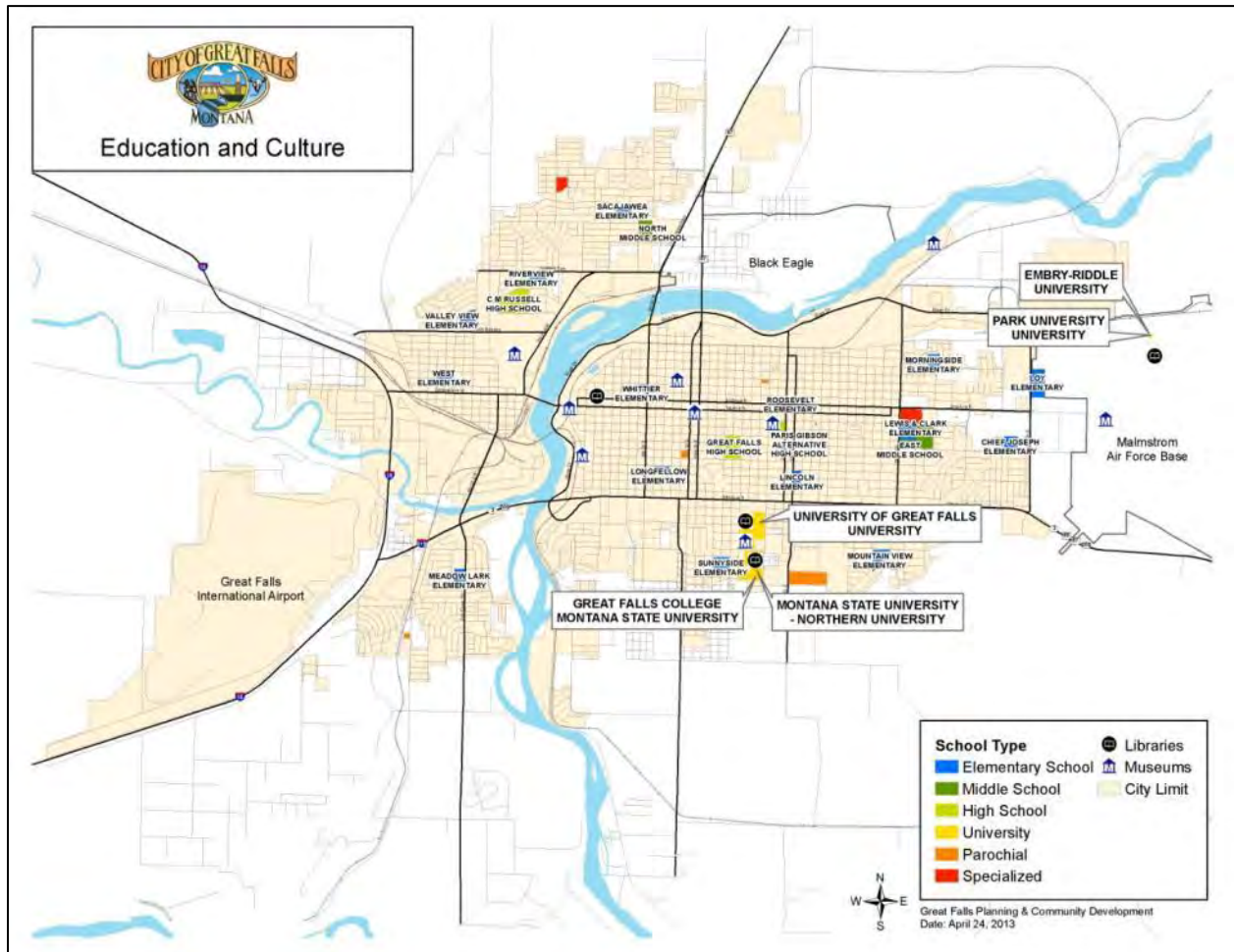
In addition, the City has four National Register Districts and several listed historic structures such as the C.M Russell House, the Cabin Studio and the County Courthouse. The National Register is the official Federal list of resources considered worthy of preservation. The Great Falls High School is listed on the Register as of March 2013. The Great Falls area also has a National Historic Landmark in the Great Falls Portage Route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Their expedition route from Belt (Portage) Creek to Malmstrom AFB, past Mount Olivet Cemetery and down to White Bear Island is a unique historical asset that the City can be proud of.

The City also is enriched through a number of special events such as Paris Gibson month, First Friday, Art Walk, Alive at Five, Western Art Week, Dogs and Dolls Parade and the Christmas Stroll. The Downtown Great Falls Development Association has acquired the Historic Trolley to promote and enhance cultural activities in the City, with a special focus on downtown.

The City has 16 public elementary schools, 2 public middle schools, 3 public high schools, 7 parochial schools, and 3 specialized schools. Plus the City is home to the University of Great Falls, and Great Falls College-Montana State University and has associations with Park University and Emory Riddle College. These institutions include regional and national relationships that further enhance the contributions these schools make to the City.



Map 10 depicts the locations for the Arts, Cultural, Library and Educational Assets in the City.



Map 10

### Non-profits

The City has a number of established non-profits and developing non-profits that make vital contributions to the City's social fabric. Some of the better known non-profits are NeighborWorks, Recreational Trails, Inc., Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity, etc. Examples of these agencies' logos are shown on the following page of this report. It is anticipated that non-profits will play an ever increasing role in maintaining the City's social fabric, as well as addressing gaps in government services. The City is fortunate to have these members of the community at work, and this report recognizes their often times unheralded contributions to the City's social realm.



Non-profits, like the public sector and others, must be responsive to changing funding requirements, and maximizing resources. It is a goal of this plan that these relationships be leveraged and become partnerships. Capacity building, information sharing, and the advent of new technologies such as GIS interactive mapping can help with these changes. In addition, smart technologies, social networking its innovations may also hold promise to those able to tap into these resources.

Social Partners



Salvation Army Family Services - Great Falls, MT



## Housing

The quality and availability of housing is an important element in planning for the City's future. According to the 2010 Census, Great Falls had a total of 26,854 housing units, 5.8% of which were vacant (for sale or lease or seasonal). In 2010, 2.2% of the population was reported to be living in group quarters.

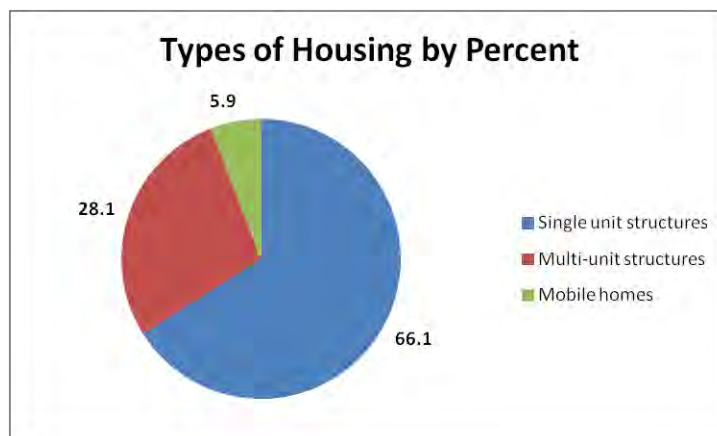


Figure 16

According to the 2009-2011 ACS survey, 66% of total housing units were single unit structures, 28% were multi-unit structures and 6% were mobile homes. Fourteen percent of units were built since 1990. In 2009-2011, the ACS reported that Great Falls had 25,000 occupied housing units. Approximately 16,000 or 63% of these units were owner occupied and 37% were renter occupied. An estimated 64% of residents had moved in since 2000. When compared with the 2000 census results, the trend indicates that home ownership has increased from 64.9% in 2000 to 65.9% in 2010.

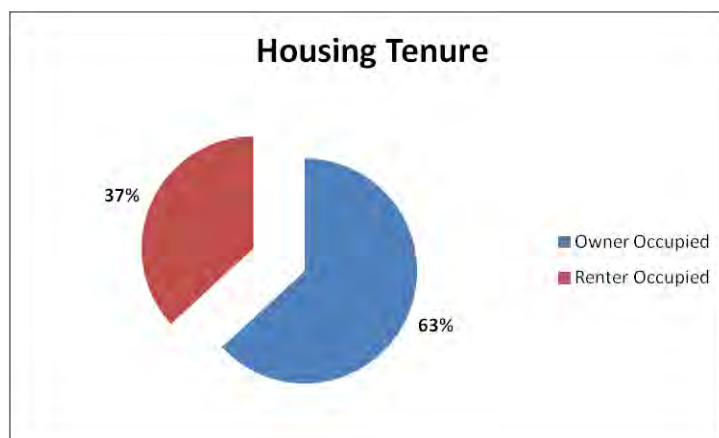


Figure 17

The median monthly housing costs for mortgaged owners was \$1,125, non-mortgaged owners \$363, and renters \$572. Reported housing costs were composed of 31% of owners with mortgages; 10% of owners without mortgages, and 40% of renters in Great Falls.

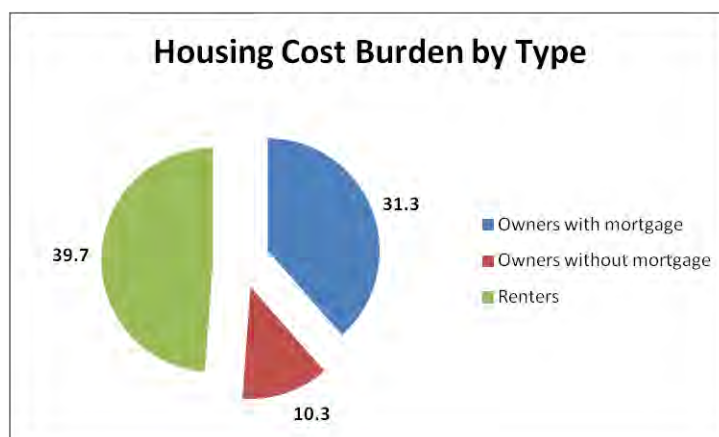


Figure 18

In 2000 the median home price in the City was \$92,000. In 2010 the estimated median home price in the City was \$152,000. Statistics from the Great Falls Association of Realtors indicate that 1007 homes were sold in 2012. The average sale price was \$183,170. The median sale price was \$156,500 and the average number of days on the market was 153 days. This represents an increase from the 911 homes sold in 2011 for an average of \$160,510 dollars.

Based on 2010 data, as reported from the Montana Department of Commerce, a median annual income of \$42,389 could afford a \$177,865 home and a \$1,060 monthly rent. When compared to average income levels for all occupations (\$34,577), the affordability of a house decreased to a \$145,085 purchase and \$864 in rent monthly level.

Although the City’s home ownership rate has increased, the Census reports that it is less than that of the state or national rate.

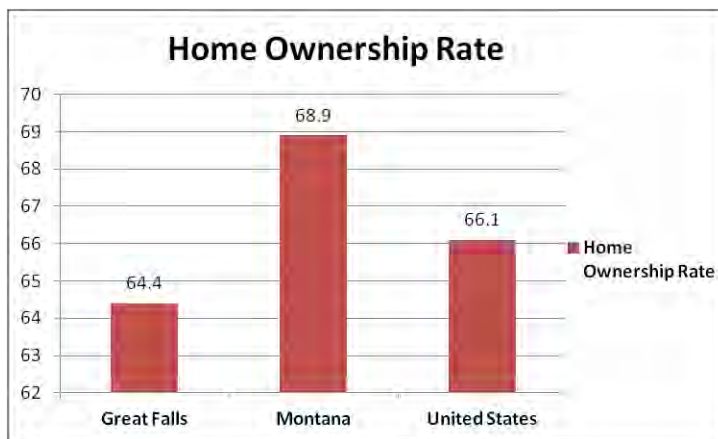


Figure 19

The CDBG program commissioned a survey in 2008 on housing needs. The survey results indicated there was an acute problem in terms of renters’ perception of affordability in the City. Renters responded that they wanted more affordable rental houses (85.8%), better quality rentals (80.4%), more affordable apartments (77.3%), more rental houses (73.3%), and more rental housing that allows pets (69.9%). Since there has been little change in the number of rental units available (see Figure 21), there is no compelling reason to believe that this overall condition has substantially changed.

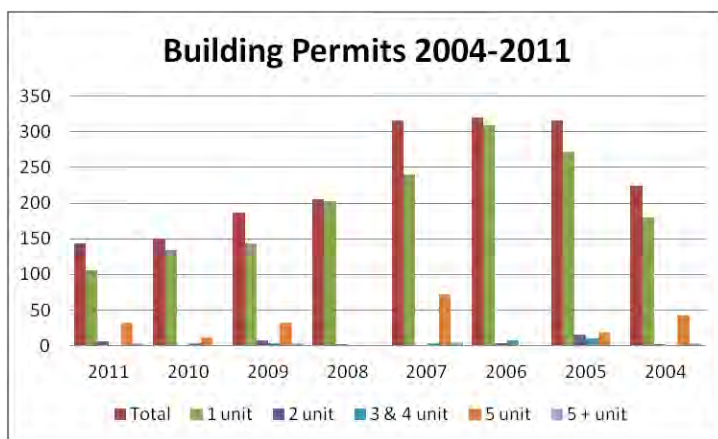


Figure 20

Overall almost half (49.8%) of all housing units are more than 50 years old. As these units continue to age, there will be a need for increased investment for maintenance, repairs, rehabilitation, and replacement.

The limited supply of affordable and rental housing creates problems for Workforce Housing. Workforce Housing is that housing needed by "essential workers" in a community i.e. police officers, firemen, teachers, nurses and medical personnel. Oftentimes these workers encounter difficulty acquiring affordable housing due to availability, price, and the location of housing. Given the overall climate of limited rental housing availability in the City, it is not unreasonable to think that these workers are also experiencing difficulties, especially during recruitment, relocation, and early phases in their careers.

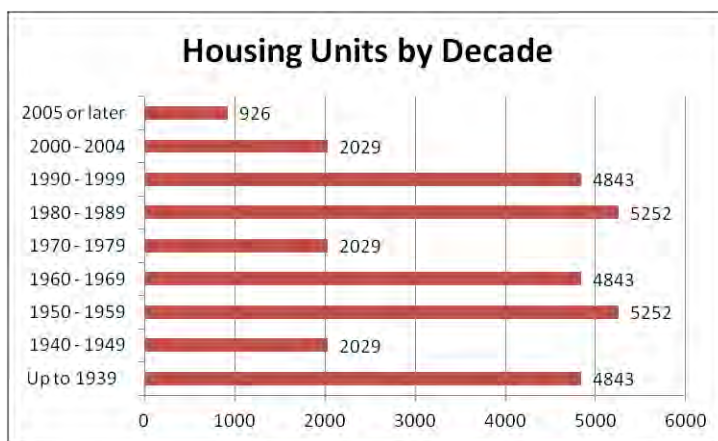
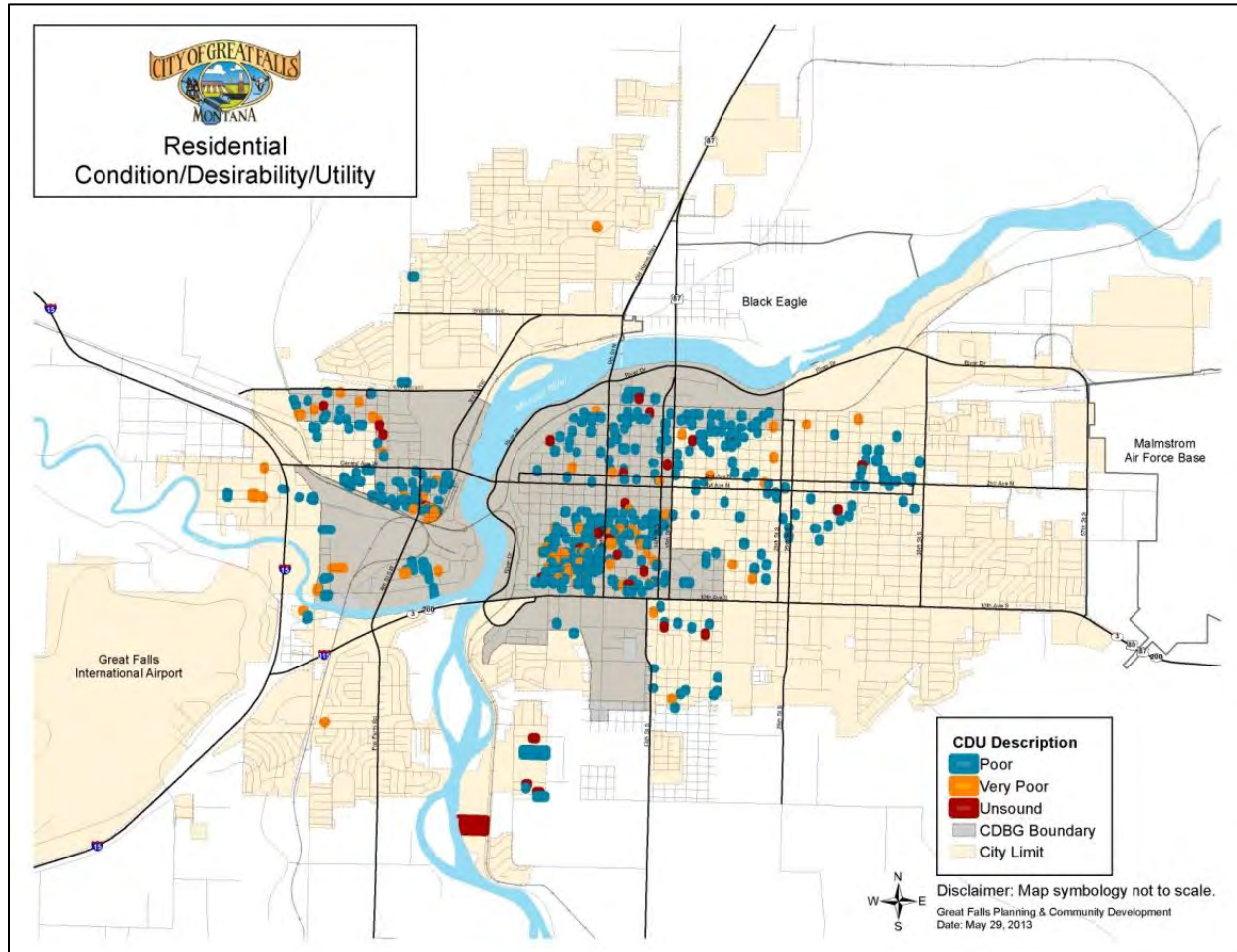


Figure 21

Military housing influences the availability of rentals and vacancy rates in the community. Malmstrom Air Force Base provides housing for military families and unaccompanied personnel, in addition to temporary lodging for visitors. According to the Joint Land Use Study (JLUS), there were 1,046 military family housing units on the base. Of the on-base inventory, 248 units (18%) were designated for officers and the remaining units for enlisted personnel. The base has dormitories for airmen and non-commissioned officers that account for 850 spaces. The *FY09 Economic Impact Analysis* identified that 1,393 (44%) of the military personnel live on base, while the remaining 1,756 (56%) live off base. Those living off base influence the City’s rental market.

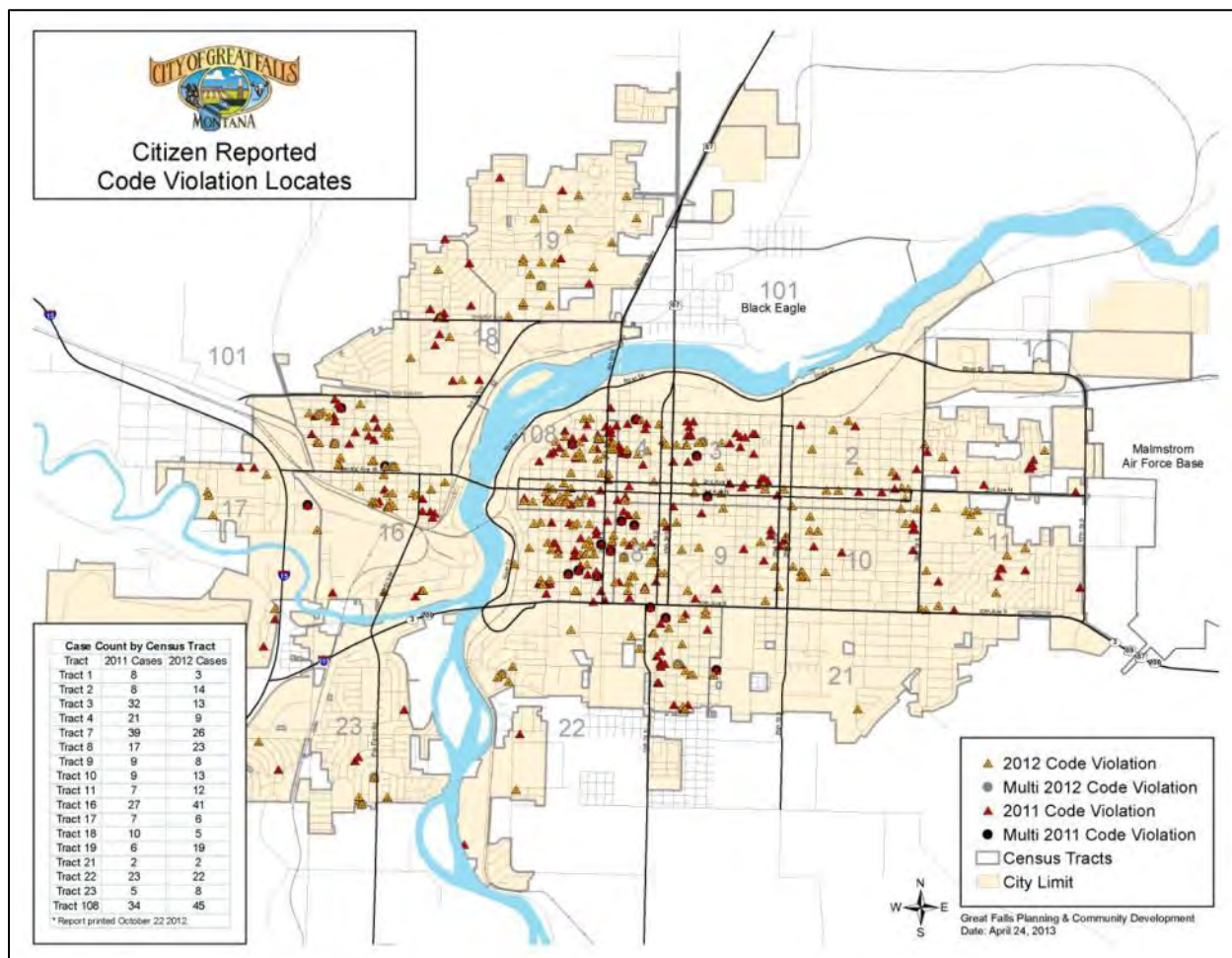
**Housing Conditions**

Aging housing units in poor condition tend to be located in the core area of the City, downtown, or older neighborhoods. Over half of the housing in the City is over 50 years old, making maintenance and repair more challenging. Department of Revenue 2010 data indicate that Conditions, Desirability and Utility (CDU) of up to 681 of 21,241 single family units (4%) of the City’s residential housing stock can be described as in “poor” condition. Map 11 depicts these results. About one third of the City’s geographic area is contained within the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) boundary for low and moderate income residents.



Map 11

Code compliance is an important component of maintaining a safe and attractive neighborhood. The City administers code compliance based on citizen reported violations. In 2011 the City responded to 264 complaints and in 2012 the City responded to 279 complaints. These complaints were distributed throughout the City, however, there the highest level of complaints were in Census Tracts 108 and 7. This data is reflected on Map 12.



Map 12

**Low and Moderate Income**

The City of Great Falls CDBG program assists with the housing and community development needs of those with low and moderate income. The CDBG boundary area is based on the 2000 census, and is still in current use by HUD. Most of this area relates to the core portion of the City, where density is the highest, and housing is the oldest. It can be generally said that this area is made up of the older structures.

The City of Great Falls receives CDBG funds on an annual basis, and the amount of funds is determined by a formula set by the federal government. The City Commission prioritizes the CDBG funding annually. To receive these funds, the City must adhere to strict compliance protocols and Federal Fair Housing requirements. Overall, Great Falls is experiencing an acute lack of transitional, rental and affordable housing. Great Falls continues to grow as a community while the gap between emergency shelter and rental housing increases; however, this need has been identified and efforts are being made to address this deficit.

**Transitional Housing**

The City's CDBG review has determined that transitional housing is the highest housing need in the City in recent years. The 2010-2015 *Consolidated Plan* for the Community Development Block Grant Program states that transitional housing with support services is the highest priority for individuals and families who are homeless, as well as special populations such as teenagers, young parents, ex-felons, or people who have mental illness. Transitional housing is that housing intended to literally "get people up on their feet." It often occurs at a crucial time in a person's transition from an emergency status. Transitional housing increases a person's odds of readjusting to the outside world.

Oftentimes an emergency shelter is lumped into the same category as transitional housing; however, transitional housing is designed for people who are trying to achieve independence, but do not have the resources and finances to do so. During this transitional time, social services play a crucial role in assisting people to gain the skill set to live independently. Often people are referred and transferred from an emergency shelter to transitional living once they are ready. Currently Great Falls does not have a transitional housing facility for individuals, which means there is a gap in the cycle of gaining independence. Without this crucial step people will continue to experience homelessness and for longer periods of time. In addition, people can fall backwards and lose hope during this window of potential change.

Other CDBG priorities are intended to:

- Provide public facility and infrastructure assistance, including American with Disabilities Act (ADA) handicap accessibility. Also provide energy efficiency improvements to provide a suitable living environment.
- Provide support to public service agencies operating programs that benefit low income persons.
- Provide first time homeowner buyer assistance for low and moderate income families.

- Provide construction and rehabilitation assistance for very low to moderate income homeowners or property owners with low and moderate income renters to upgrade the City housing stock to provide and sustain safe and affordable housing.
- Provide decent affordable housing opportunities for very low and low income renters, particularly the elderly or the disabled.
- Provide funding to projects which will create decent paying jobs with benefits for persons from low to moderate income households.

Examples of eligible activities include projects carried out by non-profit organizations or agencies, such as rehabilitation of private and public buildings, paving streets, and providing public services (for example, child care). Also included are economic development activities such as creating jobs to be filled by low income persons. These examples are a partial listing only of possible eligible activities.

In addition to meeting CDBG eligibility requirements, the activity must also conform to a number of programmatic requirements such as environmental clearance standards and labor standards. The City provides CDBG funds to a variety of local non-profit agencies to carry out housing and community development activities, including public service and public facility improvement activities.

### **Housing Rehabilitation**

The City administers three housing rehabilitation programs to assist people making repairs to private homes and rental units. Funding for these programs come from the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development and must be used to benefit low income people. Income eligibility is based on Section 8 income limits set by the U.S Department of Housing & Urban Development.

One program is referred to as the City's Water and Sewer Loan Program. This program is intended to stabilize and improve water and sewer service lines by providing financial assistance to landlords and homeowners who own their rental and residential property. This program can be of assistance to property owners in older subdivisions that were built before the advent of modern day septic tank and health code requirements. The City and County share a number of these locations, especially along the southern boundary of the City.

The water and sewer program requires repayment plus 3% interest when the project reaches partial completion. Handicapped, elderly and low income owners may be interest exempt, depending on their financial ability to repay. Funds are available on a limited basis, through a selection process. Mobile homes are not eligible but manufactured units on permanent foundation are eligible.

During the public participation phase of the Growth Policy Update, the lack of rentals was mentioned by over ten different focus groups as being a weakness in the community. Due to the lack of affordable rental units, the amount of people utilizing subsidized housing and Section 8 vouchers has increased and created a large waiting list for the Great Falls Housing Authority and Opportunities Inc., which offer rental housing and vouchers. According to "2010-2015 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice Updates for 2012," the subsidized housing statistics show that there are a total of 1,335 total units with an occupancy rate of 96%. This total is based on the agencies that use subsidized funds through the



government. The waiting list for subsidized housing is a year and a half for a one bedroom and one year for a two bedroom.

### **Housing Availability**

About one third of the City's geographic area is defined as low and moderate income according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Based on information reported to HUD, the City has 1,551 subsidized housing units plus 490 public housing units. An estimated 2,396 families are on waiting lists for the less than 500 public and subsidized housing units. This need is above and beyond the other housing needs identified in this section.

The City only has one emergency shelter. Emergency shelters are designed for people to live temporarily, usually to get out of potentially harmful situations such as domestic violence, homelessness, etc. Emergency shelters allow for people to gain quick access to get off of the streets. Typically, emergency shelters house people for very short periods of time less than 60 days. The Great Falls Rescue Mission serves as Great Falls only emergency shelter and has about 134 beds. According to Jim McCormick, Development Director at the Great Falls Rescue Mission, the people are staying longer, some for over 3 years due to the lack of available housing.

The Section 8 vouchers are distributed by Great Falls Housing Authority and Opportunities Inc. Currently, these programs are experiencing a large wait for eligible units. The waiting list for the Great Falls Housing Authority is 100 people and 1,281 people for Opportunities Inc. Overall it is difficult to find market rate housing with or without HUD funding. The lack of quality housing limits the mobility of those with lower incomes. This adds to the financial pressures people in this condition experience.

### **Homelessness**

The City's 2013 Montana Housing Status survey reported 339 homeless people in Great Falls. This is an increase from the 132 homeless individuals that were reported in the statewide housing survey undertaken in January of 2012. Table 5 depicts the number of reported homeless people in Great Falls in recent years. As can be seen, survey results for the last three years report steady increase in the number of the homeless. One explanation for this increase in numbers is that it is related to the increase in families seen amongst the homeless population. The Continuum of Care for Homelessness in the City is a group of service providers and representatives in the City that have been meeting since 1997 to coordinate responses on this issue.

<b>Housing Status (Homeless) Survey Results 1997-2013</b>				
Year	Alone	With children (under 17)	Family and other	Total
Oct-97	41		40	81
Feb-98	13		15	28
Aug-98	31		44	65
Apr-98	36		58	84
Apr-00	59		not available	65
Apr-01	111		112	223
Apr-02	67		127	194
Apr-03	73		151	224
Jan-05	67		53	120
Jan-06	75		63	138
Jan-07	54		90	144
Jan-08	128		105	233
Jan-09	80		113	193
Jan-10	75		71	146
Jan-11	100		106	206
Jan-12	72	27	131	230
Jan-13	94	62	183	339

Table 5

Another dimension of the homeless problem in Great Falls is that related to the high school population. The population of homeless students in Great Falls was 244 by the end of the 2012 school year and at one point there were 280 homeless students. The transitory and unstable conditions these students face heighten the challenges these students face.

During the last three years the percentage of the 10,000 students district wide who qualify for free and reduced lunch has slowly crept up from 36% in September 2009 to 44% in March of 2013, with individual schools reaching as high as having 75% to 98% qualifying.

### Strategic Future Issues

The opportunity to participate in the regional development of oil and gas offers great potential for economic growth. However, the City, and its partner non-profits, must likewise monitor oil and gas development to ensure it is prepared for the social impacts. Recent oil and gas “booms” have proven to be regional and national magnets for job seekers, resulting in tightening employment markets for key trades and job sectors such as welding, plumbing, truck drivers, and electricians, in addition to attracting displaced job seekers who may fail to obtain jobs. Impacted communities in eastern Montana have had housing costs triple, as well as intense service demands with respect to police, fire, hospitals, schools and roads. The 18-month tax holiday and the limited funds cities receive in terms of the State’s distribution formula further complicate the ability of local governments to respond quickly. The City should continue to work with the County and its regional planning partners, and non-profits, to assess these issues and plan for possible changes in this regard. Examples of growth preparations may include such actions as assessing the City’s codes for clarity and functionality, providing for “temporary housing” uses as conditional uses, preparing for school age children that may be somewhat transient in their educational timeframes here, and consideration as to how the City can best make its services work for new members of the community.

Such growth would help the City fund key services. The City should continue to carefully monitor police, fire and park maintenance funding as it relates to the City’s growth and boundaries. In the event that there are shortfalls in funding, it may be necessary for the City to plan for new ways to fund these needs.

Police, Fire and the Cascade City-County Health Department all play key roles in terms of emergency response and preparedness. Examples of potential emergencies may include both natural and manmade situations. These threats can range from wild fires, flooding, to a train derailment or a pandemic influenza outbreak. Given this range of threat, it is important that emergency planning continue into the future.

Recent data appears to indicate that homelessness and poverty are on the increase in the Great Falls area. It is very important that this data continue to be monitored and understood in its fullest context. Further this data should be shared with all of those that are involved and impacted by these associated issue. If this trend continues it may require a more comprehensive set of solutions and resources to address.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

### Introduction

The Environmental element includes water, air and land resources associated with life in the City. The Missouri River, the River's Edge Trail, and the quality of the City's natural environment are environmental assets. The Environmental Working Group recognized the value of the Missouri River and its contribution to the City, along with the River's Edge Trail, the City's trees, clean air, water and access to the outdoors. Public input underscored the value of these assets as being fundamental and key to the City's identity and quality of life.

### Goals and Principles

- To grow in a manner that maintains opportunities to enjoy, experience and learn about the natural environment.
- To create a built environment that encourages active and healthy lifestyles.
- To achieve a sustainable and efficient urban form that meets the diverse needs of the City.
- To maintain open space opportunities, trees and fresh air for all to enjoy.
- To encourage and promote resource conservation as part of our daily activities.
- To maintain and enhance the Missouri River, River's Edge Trail, its values, and heritage for perpetuity.
- To maintain and enhance the River's Edge Trail.
- To partner and encourage the restoration of properties damaged by waste and neglect.
- To increase energy conservation and the use of clean energy in the City.
- To reduce development pressure on lands being actively used for agriculture.

The City's environmental quality is also influenced, in part, by the following entities:

The *Montana Department of Environmental Quality* (DEQ) administers Federal environmental programs under agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency. These include programs relating to air, public water drinking supply, hazardous waste and the Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. This program controls point source discharges of wastewater such that water quality in State surface water is protected. The Department also permits storm water resulting from small municipal storm sewers in accordance with effluent limitations, monitoring requirements, and other conditions.

The *Park and Recreation Department* has a Natural Resources Division. The Natural Resources Division provides arboriculture, horticulture, and natural resource services on all public property and rights-of-way within the City of Great Falls. Part of this work includes the care and maintenance of 15,000 trees located within the General Boulevard District. Services provided within the District include pruning, removal, planting, leaf pick-up, streetscape design and the furtherance of healthy trees. Property owners are assessed for this service based on the size of their lots.

The *Department of Public Works Stormwater Division* manages stormwater through a DEQ permit in coordination with the Cascade City-County Health department. These activities are funded through the Storm Drain fund, assessed to residential and commercial owners. The Storm Drain fund safeguards community health through improved water quality, increases pavement life of streets, reduces flooding and property damage and allows emergency vehicles to use our streets during heavy rainstorms. The

Department also reviews industrial discharges and ensures that these discharges are managed safely. The *Cascade City-County Health Department* plays a key role in the environmental health of the community. The Department permits new septic systems as well as evaluates septic tank replacement. The Department also monitors air quality, reviews subdivisions, stormwater applications in addition to its many other public health roles.

*Outdoor and Conservation Non-Profits* make a significant contribution in the City. The City benefits from the work of many committed conservationist, recreational, trail and outdoor groups. These groups often work closely with the State Departments of Natural Resource and Conservation, and Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This advocacy, educational and information sharing relationship bolsters the environmental quality of the City, and can provide expertise that the City may not have. Recreational Trails, Inc. (RTI) is a volunteer, non-profit corporation that works with agency partners to develop, extend and maintain River's Edge Trail.

## Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan

The public participation process for *Imagine Great Falls* demonstrated a strong continued support for the implementation of the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*, which was adopted in 2004. The Plan was a priority recommendation of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan. It was intended to guide development and redevelopment along the river, and seize upon opportunities for a more desirable and sustainable development pattern on urban riverfront lands, particularly with respect to future private development.

The *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* describes the tranquil natural beauty of the river nestled amidst the urban activity around it. The Plan further recognizes the River's value to the community as a focus of economic and social vitality. The Plan was conceived as an ongoing vision, recognizing the challenge of transitioning historic and industrial land uses over time. The plan sets forth a series of strategies and actions to make the vision a reality with respect to sustainable development, and the conservation of land. The Plan calls for steps toward enhanced livability, growth and economic development along the river.

The success of the *West Bank Master Plan (2010)* on the northern shore of the river is attributed to the vision and forethought of the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*. This work included the clean-up of brownfield sites, the formation of a Tax Increment Finance District, a Historic District, and plans for the West Bank Park. To date these steps have served as a platform to attract redevelopment including a Federal Courthouse, restaurants and a hotel.

Although progress has been made on the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* there is a desire among supporters to keep forging ahead and address those parts of the plan that have yet to fully engage. Many believe that the river can still be utilized more as an economic amenity, focal point, and better integrated with surrounding development in the City, especially with the City's resurging downtown area. Recently, the *Downtown Access, Circulation and Streetscape Plan (2013)* noted that the City should better utilize its opportunities to integrate its public waterfront with the community at large. Other issues cited during the planning process are concerns about public access to the river, the need for riverbank stabilization, the monitoring of shoreline conditions and water quality.

## Wildlife

Other City environmental assets include our location within lands that formerly and currently provide habitat for animals. Wildlife habitats within and surrounding the Great Falls area include both grassland and riparian ecosystems. Although few large species are found today, a number of small rodents and predators are common. A wide variety of songbirds, some scavengers, shore birds, upland game birds, hawks, eagles and owls are found in the Great Falls area. Sparrows, robins, swallows, meadowlarks, and warblers are among the common songbird species. Magpies and crows are the prevalent scavengers. The area lies in a major waterfowl migratory flyway, as well as providing habitat for year-round residence of a number of waterfowl species. Numerous species of ducks, geese



and swans are thus present at one time of the year or another. Major prey species include ground squirrels, prairie dogs, mice and jackrabbits. The City is within close proximity of the game management areas and the unpopulated mountainous regions. It is not unusual to see eagles, hawks and an occasional prairie falcon. Great Falls also has a growing population of deer, which should be monitored for potential conflicts.

## **Trails**

Public outreach results demonstrate that the River's Edge Trail is a unifying asset, gem and immensely popular with this community. Increasingly "the RET" is becoming a symbol of Great Falls and a metaphor for what this City can do. The River's Edge Trail is also becoming increasingly known by out of town visitors and guests.

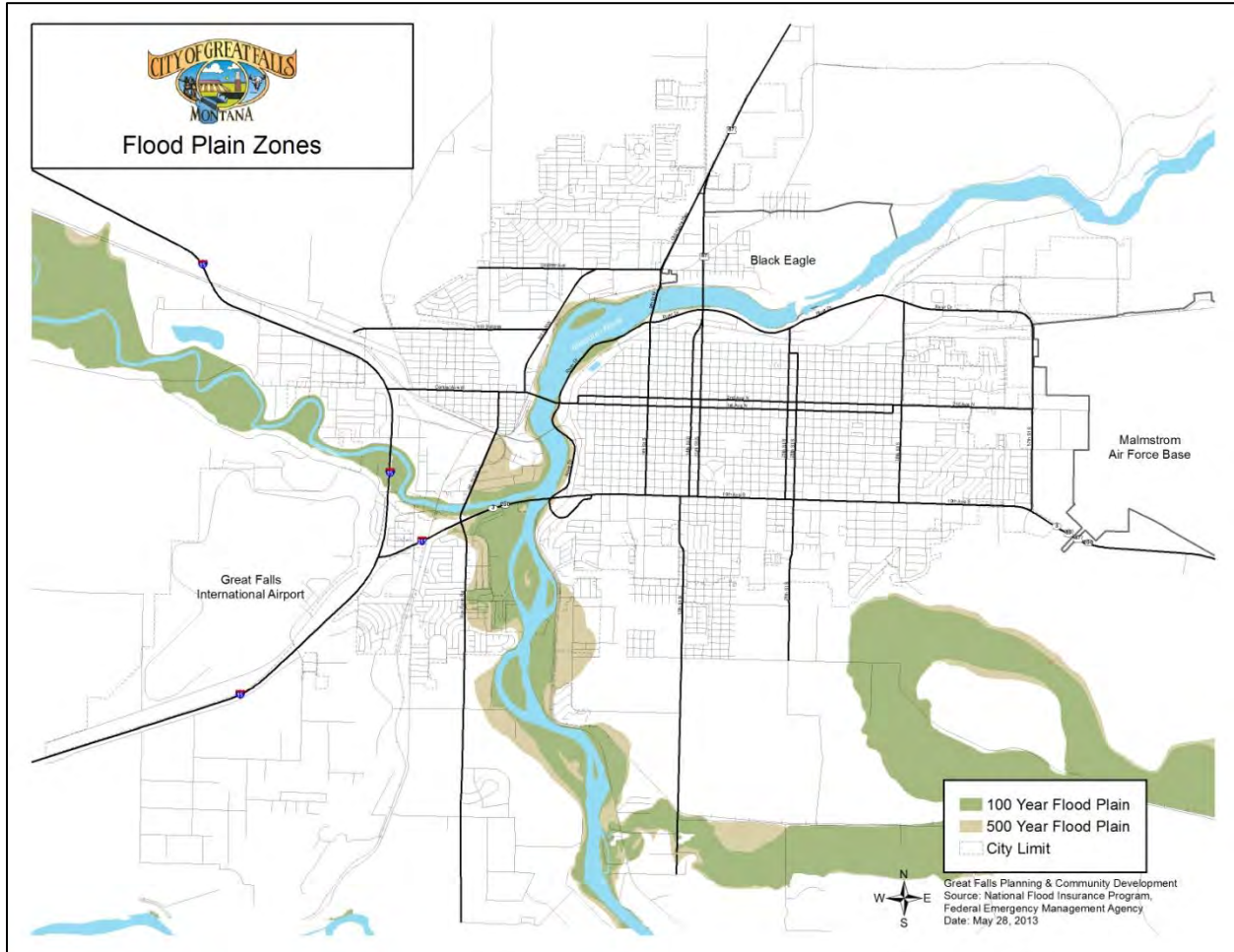
In 2000 the River's Edge Trail was one planned segment. Today the River's Edge Trail provides non motorized recreation along 17 miles of the Missouri River corridor. It is comprised of over 50 miles of paved and dirt segments which span between the Great Falls Visitor Center and Sacajawea Springs. Urban portions of the trail use the path of the abandoned Great Northern and Milwaukee railroads. The paved trail extends from Warden Park to Crooked Falls on the south side, and from Garden Home Park to Black Eagle Memorial Island on the north side.

The River's Edge Trail is the result of a cooperative partnership of the City of Great Falls, Cascade County, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Montana Department of Transportation, PPL Montana, and a volunteer citizen group, Recreational Trails, Inc. Planning, construction, and maintenance of the trail began in 1989 and continue today with future plans to improve connectivity between existing segments and expand the trail system along the Sun River.

Other potential projects could include boardwalk connections, or other recreational amenities. The City should continue to work with its partners on strategic connections to the trail, recreational enhancements and maintenance issues, while remaining cognizant of the growing cost of maintaining and managing a large system.

## **Flooding**

Flooding in Great Falls has historically been caused by rapid snowmelt combined with heavy rainfall in the Sun and Missouri River Basins, causing the Missouri River and the Sun River to leave their banks. Floodwaters can cover many blocks, and are very dangerous. Even though they appear to move slowly (3 feet per second), a flood two feet deep can knock a man off his feet and float a car. This past century the City has had major flooding events in 1908, 1953, 1964 and 1975. These events created the need for evacuations and inflicted significant property damage. Flooding exposure has been reduced in the City due to levee construction. Map 13 illustrates the City's flood zones.



Map 13

### Water Quality

Montana state law protects all groundwater resources as State Waters. Groundwater is a critical source of drinking water and irrigation water for many. One of the biggest threats to groundwater locally is the existence of septic tanks. The Cascade City-County Health Department regulates septic tanks locally, with authority from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Further, not all lots within the City are served by water and sewer and existing septic systems fail annually, needing replacement or upgrade to sewer. Properties within Upper and Lower River Road are transitioning to sewer. Cooperation and education are essential tools in preventing groundwater degradation, as well as incentives for homeowners to transition to sewer.

In 1972 amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Act, later referred to as the Clean Water Act, prohibit the discharge of any pollutant to waters of the United States unless the discharge is authorized by a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. In 1990, the Environmental Protection Agency promulgated rules establishing Phase I of the NPDES storm water program and worked to delegate this authority with the State's DEQ. Phase I addressed such concerns as discharges from larger construction activities disturbing five acres of land or more. Montana's DEQ is now working to implement



Phase II NPDES storm water requirements, with the City of Great Falls and Cascade County. Phase II requirements include construction activities on smaller sites in addition to implementation of Stormwater Prevention Plans. Other changes to the Clean Water Act now require states to monitor and assess statewide water conditions, identify and list water bodies that fail to meet standards, and prepare water quality improvement plans. These plans must include quantitative limits, known as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLS) for each of the pollutants of concern.

Urban development can impact water quality through point and non-point source pollution. Point source pollution is the discharge of impaired water through pipes. Non-point source pollution is other runoff. Common sources of non-point source pollution are: stormwater, septic, riparian degradation, and fertilizer. Population density and intensity of land uses in suburban and urban water sheds results in higher concentrations of pollutants in waters draining from these areas. Best Management Practices (BMPS) are recommended by the regulatory entities involved to mitigate non-point source pollution. Water in the Missouri River has tested for metals, higher concentrations of sediments and nutrients, at times. As impervious coverage increases so does the volume of stormwater runoff unless managed. Suspended sediments from eroded soils create the most problems in developed watersheds, as do nutrients and metals. The mitigation of stormwater issues is another realm of environmental protection that requires extensive intergovernmental cooperation and education of the public.

### **Upper and Lower River Road**

One area of the City that has had groundwater issues is referred to as the Upper and Lower River Road area. In 1996 the Cascade City-County Health Department and the Department of Environmental Quality initiated an 18 month groundwater pollution study in the Upper and Lower River Road areas. The subject area included about 3,000 residents. At that time, this was the largest area in Cascade County with density that did not have public water or a sewage system. No imminent health hazards were found; however, it was determined that impacts to the area groundwater were being caused from individual sewage septic systems and two aging sewer lagoon systems.

The study recommended area residents alleviate potential public health problems by developing an official water and sewer district in order to be eligible for state and federal grants for the planning and construction of public water and sewer systems. In addition, such a district would have contracting authority for any Interlocal agreements that might be possible with the City of Great Falls for connection to City water and sewer lines already existing in a portion of the area. The study was divided into two separate areas along Upper and Lower River Roads. Although problems were noted in both areas, the worst problems were noted in the northern portion of the study area.

In 2001, property owners along Lower and Upper River Roads voted to create a water and sewer district with a five-member board. The district and the City entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in 2003 to connect to the City's water and sewer system by annexation. After one failed vote, the proposed district was divided into small districts to lower the cost per household.

Today four districts have been annexed into the City and assigned zoning classifications that recognizes and conform to existing land uses. While the involved areas have water and wastewater services, other public infrastructure such as roadways, paving, curbs, gutters, sidewalks and storm sewer and drainage is nonexistent or substandard. As a result the City has agreed to phase in additional improvements and code compliance requirements bringing the area gradually up to City standards. Also, there are still issues of

concern outside in the Upper and Lower River Roads area that require monitoring, outside of those areas that have been annexed.

## **Air Quality**

The City's air also is monitored by the Cascade City-County Health Department. The City's air has improved through the years. The Air Quality Program in Cascade County is under contract with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. They continuously monitor carbon monoxide and particulate matter 2.5 microns or less, or PM 2.5. The monitoring station is located at Overlook Park on Tenth Avenue South. Overall the City normally exceeds air quality standards; however, this does not negate the desire to minimize pollution, reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMTs), and encourage a balanced multi-modal transportation system. In addition, although the City has improved its air quality over time, particulate matter must still be monitored. Recent high levels of particulate matter have been attributed to large and persistent wildfires in the area. High levels of particulate matter can be a problem for everyone, and can particularly affect those with asthma and other health vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is important that safe air quality levels be maintained for everyone's health needs.

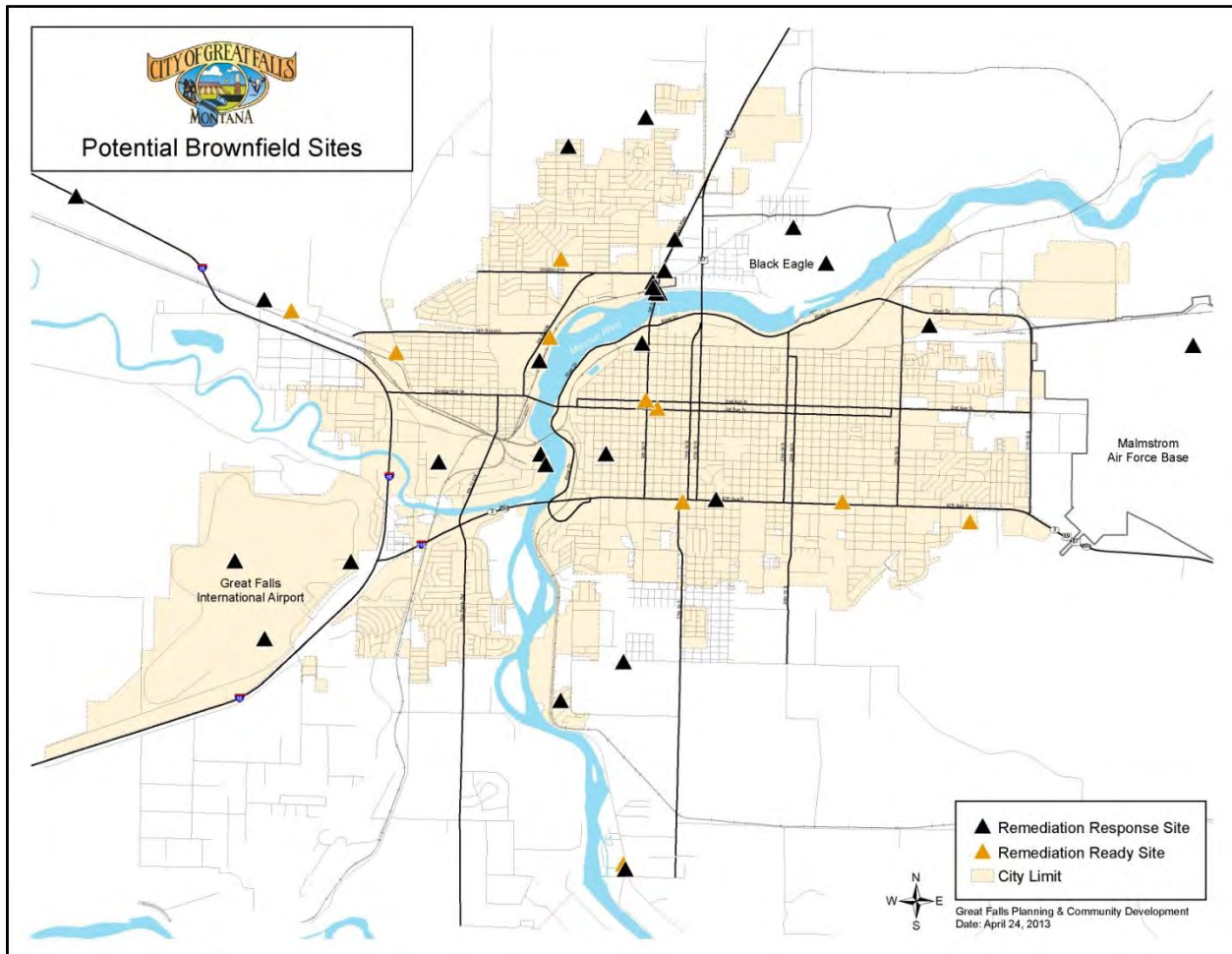
## **Trees**

The City has a proud tradition of maintaining its trees and nurturing their health. The City cares for over 44,600 trees and 4.5 acres of landscaped areas containing thousands of shrubs and numerous annual and perennial flower gardens. This includes streets, parks, golf courses, and other public property. Major revenue sources are properties within the Boulevard District, donations and some fees. Major challenges, in recent times, have been damage from bark beetles to the American Elm and pines and damage from drought and freezing. The City should continue to invest in its urban tree canopy by maintaining and expanding the City's tree planting program, and other beautification efforts. In addition, the City needs to update its tree inventory to better identify future needs in this regard.

## **Brownfields**

Given past practices throughout the United States, as well as the City's industrial past, it is not surprising that there are a number of properties identified as in need of environmental clean-up or remediation. Brownfields are defined as vacant, idle or abandoned commercial or industrial properties that became contaminated in the past by toxic or hazardous substances such as fuels, chemicals, or solids like asbestos. The City has a number of sites that are going through the remediation process, or are closed and potential brownfield candidates.

The Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA) has a revolving loan fund and expertise facilitating brownfield redevelopment. GFDA has been successful in obtaining assessment grants. The City should pursue, or partner, to obtain a city-wide brownfields assessment grant to expedite the potential adaptive reuse and redevelopment of some of these properties. Mountain Mud, Easter Seals and Goodwill facilities are all successful remediation and redevelopment projects. Map 14 depicts potential brownfield remediation sites at various stages of readiness.



Map 14

**ACM Smelter and Refinery**

In March of 2011, the EPA with Montana DEQ announced the addition of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company Smelter and Refinery site in Cascade County to the National Priorities List of Superfund sites. Being on the Superfund list makes the site eligible for federal cleanup funds that will support extensive study and cleanup using the Superfund process while the EPA coordinates the work. Listing also guarantees public participation in the cleanup decisions, provides opportunities for a qualified community group to receive a technical assistance grant, and authorizes a health assessment process. The ACM site contains contamination from historic smelting and refining activities at the Anaconda Copper Mining Company’s Great Falls Reduction Department. The site is a former metals refinery adjacent to the unincorporated community of Black Eagle along the Missouri River. This area is under the jurisdiction of Cascade County but adjacent to the City of Great Falls, and includes the city-owned Anaconda Hills Golf Course. Its redevelopment would be a tremendous asset to both the City and the County.

The area, referred to as "Smelter Hill" contains about 442 acres of land north of the Missouri River and east of Black Eagle. The Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) owns about 367 acres of this land, which was

the site of a large metals refinery from 1893 to 1980. Several parcels owned by others account for the remaining 74+ acres on Smelter Hill, including Tailrace Island.

Smelter Hill's location and natural features make it an attractive site for many potential uses. Over the years, a wide variety of ideas about the site have been discussed in Great Falls, including an amphitheater, a zoo, museums, memorials, trails, ballfields and more.

The RTI group is interested in establishing a multi-use trail link between the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center Foundation property, property in Black Eagle, and the Atlantic Richfield property. The EPA has met with RTI and the City of Great Falls to discuss their goals. Trail proponents wish to work with all landowners and parties involved in investigation and cleanup to facilitate trail development for the enjoyment of Black Eagle and Great Falls residents and tourists.

The Superfund process ensures a comprehensive risk assessment and clean up. The process is underway and an initial assessment has been released. The reclamation of this site could play a pivotal role in the Great Falls metropolitan area in the future. It is important that the future of this area be determined in a cooperative way, with the support and participation of all stakeholders.

### **Environmental – Friendly**

During the working group process, other environmental friendly and sustainable concepts were discussed. This process heard from a number of people that want the City to make progress on what they describe as environmental and sustainability issues. Members of the community with this interest would like to see an more environmental awareness and opportunities for best practices in the City.

Many people in the community are still committed to recycling. Given Great Falls' location, many recognized some unique challenges to recycling in this location (i.e., distance from markets) and understand that it would be preferable if future recycling practices could be demonstrably cost effective.

The importance of environmental education was discussed, such as some of the work currently being done at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center. Rain gardens are excellent ways to teach citizens about non-structural stormwater management practices as well as beautify the landscape. A rain garden demonstration project could help create this opportunity. In addition, energy efficiency and conservation was recognized as a practice that could produce cost savings in the long run, beyond the other contributions that clean energy can offer.

Compact development patterns facilitate pedestrian, biking and transit opportunities. Connections between neighborhoods, shopping areas, schools and parks encourage greater pedestrian activity when the walking experience is safe and comfortable. Compact development, in general, is better for air quality and eases development pressure on agricultural, natural lands and habitat. Compact development encourages the efficient use of land and reduces the inefficient use of infrastructure.

In addition, promoting infill and enclave development, the redevelopment of underutilized lots and brownfields, the use of existing infrastructure, and multi-modal transportation are considered environmental friendly policies because they are gentler on the environment, reduce sprawl, and more efficiently utilize existing land. Generally it is viewed that infill and redevelopment can reduce the pressure to develop prime agricultural lands.

## **Strategic Future Issues**

Changes to the Clean Water Act requiring statewide assessment of water conditions will be very important to the environmental health and future of the Missouri River. This process requires that all waterbodies be assessed and those that fail to meet standards will have to prepare water quality improvement plans. These plans must include quantitative limits, known as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLS) for each of the pollutants of concern. This process will be very important toward protecting future water quality of the Missouri River.

Likewise the remediation of brownfield sites in the City offer great opportunities in the future. The ACM site, aka Smelter Hill, is a large piece of land wedged between Black Eagle, the Missouri River and the outskirts of the City and the County. This piece can provide a major economic, recreational and historic and cultural contribution to both the City and County in the future.

## ECONOMIC

### Introduction

Participants in the planning process identified economic diversity and better paying jobs as the number one need in the City. Most people seemed to agree that the City should prepare for regional opportunities as well as possible local changes. In addition, there appeared to be a recognition and acknowledgement that the City could not grow and prosper, nor be a place of the future, if its young people did not have opportunities for good paying jobs here. Continued economic diversification would also allow the City to grow and develop in a balanced, sustainable way.

The Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA) actively recruits high wage primary jobs as part of its mission. This mission is enhanced by State efforts to support economic development. Recently Montana was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> for overall business climate, 6<sup>th</sup> for overall tax climate, 6<sup>th</sup> for cost of labor, and 4<sup>th</sup> for the most educated workforce. In addition, in 2012 Montana was ranked #1 in the nation for entrepreneurship activity in the Kaufman Foundation Entrepreneurial Index.

There are positive signs for the future. The City has no sales tax, a 5.4% unemployment rate in 2012, and 1,500 new primary sector jobs slated for the near term future.

### Goals and Principles

- To diversify and strengthen the City's economic base by ensuring growth, quality development and employment opportunities.
- To enhance, strengthen and expand the City's existing economic base.
- To attract new businesses and support the expansion of existing businesses in a manner that bolsters employment opportunities in the City.
- To support and encourage efficient, sustainable development and redevelopment through-out the City.
- To attract businesses that will be good stewards and help maintain our quality of life.
- To encourage businesses and industries that will utilize existing infrastructure, especially those that create optimal and sustainable economic development opportunities within our Tax Increment Finance Districts.
- To encourage Workforce Housing near to major employers.
- To keep improving the City's amenities, including our downtown, so that prospective companies will view Great Falls as a community that can meet all of their needs.
- To continue to forge partnerships with the City's educational, tourist, and business-related organizations in a manner that will attract future development.
- To make the City of Great Falls a "destination" location.

The following are some economic related organizations working on these issues.

The *Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce* advocates, promotes, networks, and supports businesses in the Great Falls trade area, with the goal of helping them grow and prosper.

*Great Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau* has access to over 2092 hotel rooms and over 150,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space. The bureau can assist groups from 15 to more than 2,000 in finding accommodations and meeting spaces. Additionally, the Bureau actively promotes Great Falls area tourism and visitation. The City's Visitor Center is located at Overlook Park, and offers a number of resources to make visiting the City easier.

*Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA)*, a public/private partnership organization focused on economic development, is governed by a 36 member Board of Directors that includes regional and public and private partnerships. The GFDA promotes and stimulates economic development in Cascade County and the surrounding region. The GFDA works on efforts to strengthen workforce skills, recruit new workers, attract investment and provide financing support, and cooperates to support and expand business development in the City.

*Great Falls Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)* collaborates to create a funding resource dedicated to attracting events and growing events in Great Falls. This is done through grants and by the expansion of tourism-related infrastructure.

*Sweetgrass Development* is a private non-profit corporation created in 2004 to support economic development in Glacier, Cascade, Pondera, Teton and Toole Counties and the Blackfeet Nation. Sweetgrass Development offers a variety of economic and community development services, small business technical assistance, grant writing and administration and business recruitment and retention.

*Vibrant Futures* is a HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant project made possible by the partnership for Sustainable Communities. This grant was submitted by Opportunity Link, a regional social assistance organization based in Havre. This effort focuses on developing a region-wide vision for the communities of north central Montana, which includes planning efforts, capacity building and information exchange with regard to such issues as community health and safety, economic development, regional transportation, water quality and resource management.

## Regional Role

The City of Great Falls is the largest city in north central Montana encompassing over twenty miles. As such, the City serves as the financial, trade, health care and transportation center - the hub of the region. Rural residents in surrounding communities may travel to the City once a month to buy goods, obtain services or receive medical treatment, augmenting the Great Falls-area economy. Today the City relies on medical, military, agriculture, manufacturing, hydroelectric power and services for much of its economy.

The Great Falls economy was one of two urban areas in Montana that did not experience declines during the recession. Part of this stability is attributed to the City's role as a major regional health care and trade center serving central and northern Montana. In a report entitled "*How Business Friendly Are Montana's 25 Largest Cities?*," completed by the Montana Policy Institute and American Indicators, Great Falls ranked within the top ten of Montana's business friendly cities, based on cumulative indicators for Economic Vitality, Business Tax Burden and Community Allure.

Benefis Health System, the major health care provider in Great Falls, plays an important economic role in the City. Benefis has two campuses here in Great Falls. The not-for-profit hospital creates 2,700 jobs directly, and an additional 2,100 health care related jobs elsewhere in the local economy indirectly. According to State reports, total employment in health care grew by 6% and 4% respectively during the recession years of 2008 and 2009. According to United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, health care represents fourteen percent of Cascade County's gross domestic product.

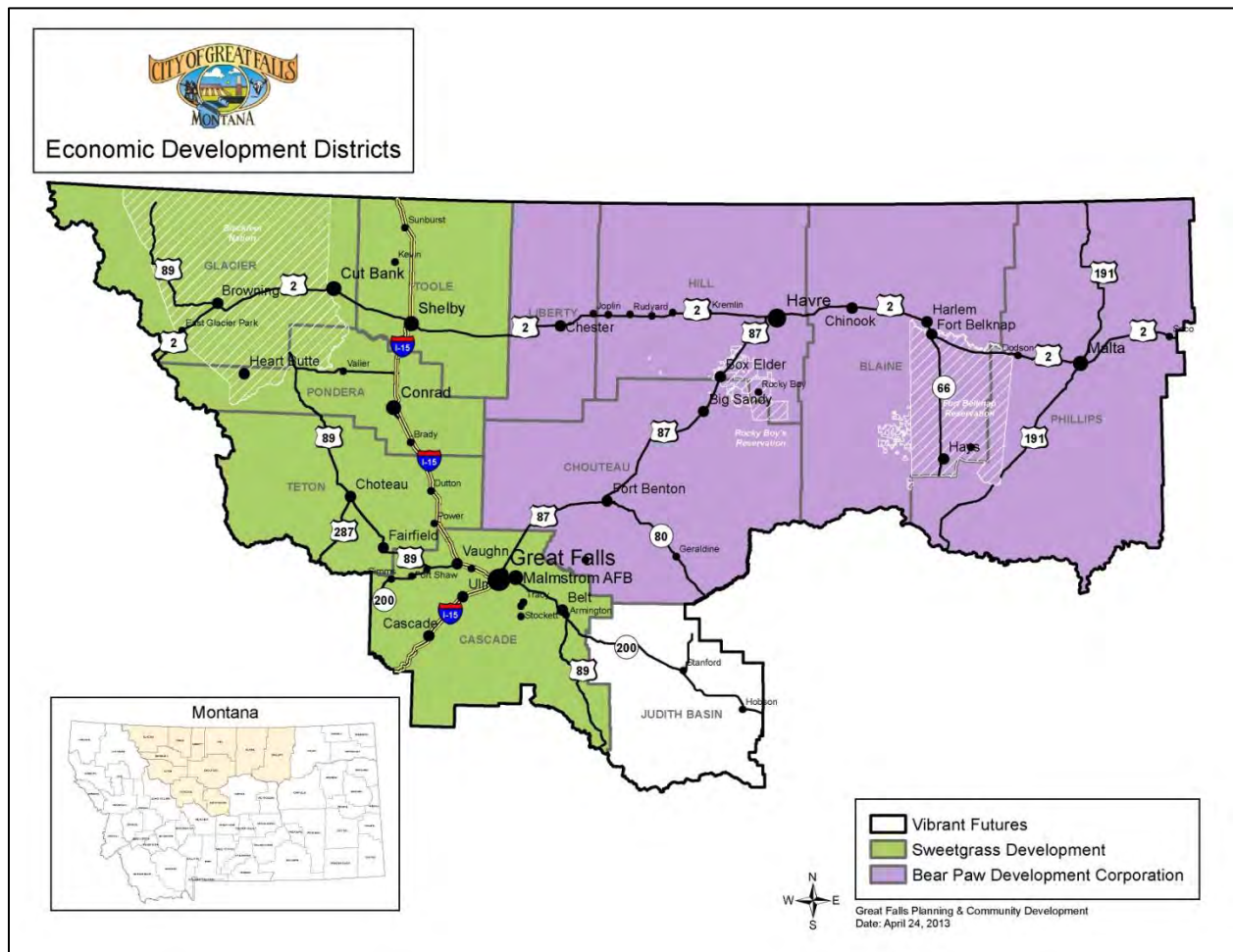
The medical service area for Benefis includes rural clinics in Blaine, Chouteau, Fergus, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Phillips, Pondera, Teton, and Toole Counties. Roughly forty percent of the patients needing certain types of intensive care are transported to the hospital from outside of Great Falls. In 2009 Benefis nearly doubled the size of its east campus, and later opened an Orthopedic Center and a professional center. Benefis Health System incorporates a number of specialty centers including the Sletten Cancer Center, MONARC Injury Center, Heart Center, and Surgical Services, as well as a state-of-the-art patient care facility. These facilities represent a long term commitment to Great Falls.

Great Falls is also home to a second large health care provider, the Great Falls Clinic. The Clinic provides immediate care and specialized care options for the Great Falls region. Together with Benefis and numerous other support providers the health care sector of the local economy is an important source of employment and job diversity in Great Falls.

Great Falls is part of the Sweetgrass Economic Development region and the Vibrant Futures Regional Planning area. These regional planning areas are shown on Map 15. Since Great Falls is the largest city in either region, the City shares in the region's potential of being well positioned to capitalize on the growing needs for domestic energy sources, the need for new related infrastructure and opportunities for renewable energy. These opportunities include wind, bio-fuels and hydro-electric based power and petroleum based by products.



The Vibrant Futures effort is funded through a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The purpose of Vibrant Futures is to enable the communities of north central Montana to complete region-wide visioning, planning, and capacity building and information exchange. Vibrant Futures is working to support local efforts to identify high priority needs for the region in an economically and environmentally sustainable way. The partnership is based on the following principles: 1) provide more transportation choices 2) promote equitable affordable housing, 3) enhance economic competitiveness 4) support existing communities, coordinate and leverage investment, and 5) value communities and neighborhoods. The City of Great Falls and Cascade County are part of the Vibrant Futures partnership.



Map 15

The oil and gas industry represents a nine billion dollar economic impact to the State and supports 4,600 jobs in exploration production and refining. For example, the recent decision by the ADF group of Canada to locate and build a 100,000 square foot steel fabrication and assembly plant in Great Falls is a welcome example of this sort of investment. GFDA and Great Falls College-Montana State University have

worked together to develop a curriculum for welding and other skilled jobs generated by the location of ADF. This emerging energy cluster is evolving to be a major component of the regional economy and is growing both as a revenue generator and employee base. Increasingly, the development of power (of all kinds) serves as a buffer in the event of future economic downturns.

The City's proximity to the "Golden Triangle" of Montana is another potential source of future economic diversity, especially in terms of value-added agriculture. This area refers to the bountiful wheat growing area located in the region between the City of Great Falls, Conrad and Havre. Secondary, value-adding industries are those industries that transform raw resources into processed substances from which industrial or consumer products may be manufactured.

The Sweetgrass region is another area of economic focus in north-central Montana. The Sweetgrass Economic Development region includes Glacier, Toole, Pondera, Teton, Conrad and Cascade counties. The Vibrant Future work includes all of the Sweetgrass region and one additional county. This area is known for its prairie grazing lands, the raising of small grains such as wheat and barley, forage crops, and forage animals and small amounts of durum wheat for the production of pasta. Increasingly, dry peas are being grown. The fastest growing segment of agricultural production in this region is related to organics and natural products. According to the *Great Falls Region Defense Diversification Project*, the Sweetgrass region has significant competitive advantages for agri-processing such as access to abundant, consistent, high quality commodities, proximity to a variety of energy sources that includes electricity, natural gas, oil and coal, rail transportation, water resources and a capable workforce. The report recommends agribusiness retention, expansion and enhanced collaboration with producers, processors and regulators to bolster this potential.

The City lies 100 miles south of the Canadian border. The City's close location to Canada creates opportunities for trade and tourism, and an expanded sense of regionalism. The growth and dynamism of the Alberta province of Canada is well known in Great Falls, including the cities of Calgary and Lethbridge. Many participants in the *Imagine Great Falls* planning process cited this as an important potential partnership. Overall, the City benefits from Canada's tourism and investment, and this trend certainly can be extended into the future with some forethought. Twenty-nine percent of non-resident visitors to Great Falls are from Canada. Transportation enhancements, marketing and "business friendly" approaches can maintain and augment this trend.

## **Strengths and Opportunities**

### **The Military**

As can be seen on Table 6, Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana Air National Guard (MANG) have 4,427 and 826 military-related personnel respectively. Of Malmstrom's 4,427 personnel, 3,839 are military and 588 are civilian. The City is also home to the United States Army Reserve and the Montana Army National Guard. These reserve units, referred to as the 889<sup>th</sup> Quarter Master Company and the C Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 163rd (CAB) Regiment, further support the military in Great Falls as well as contribute to local economy. It is estimated that up to two hundred more residents are involved in the

military though these reserve units. It is important to note that military numbers are fluid; however, the military’s importance to the local Great Falls economy is significant and far reaching.

<b>Military in Great Falls</b>		
Air Force	Malmstrom Air Force Base	3839 military + 588 civilians
Montana Air National Guard	MANG 120 Air Fighter Wing	826 military

Table 6

According to the Fiscal Year 2009 *Economic Impact Report*, Malmstrom Air Force Base created an estimated 1,490 indirect jobs and had a total economic impact to the region of \$434 million. This included a total annual payroll of \$222 million, total annual expenditures of \$162 million, and an estimated annual job value of \$50 million. In 2012, total military and civilian wages in Great Falls was \$206 million. Expenditures for construction, services, materials, equipment and supplies in 2012 were approximately \$69 million. In 2012, the contribution of indirect jobs was estimated to be approximately \$62 million. Collectively the total estimated impact of Malmstrom Air Force Base to the City was \$337 million in 2012. These numbers indicate some yearly adjustments but nonetheless underscore the impressive contribution of the military to the City’s economy. In fact, it has been estimated by the University of Montana’s Bureau of Business and Economic Research Department that the local impact of the military in Great Falls represents 46% of the City’s economy.

Perhaps this contribution can be further understood when other aspects of the military’s contribution are considered. Table 7 illustrates the 2012 utility fees for Malmstrom Air Force Base. These fees include water, heating fuel, sewage, electricity, and diesel fuel. These utility fees are incurred to maintain Malmstrom’s capital assets and accrue to the City.

<b>UTILITIES</b>	
Water	\$520,439
Heating fuel	\$1,162,599
Sewage	\$336,570
Electricity	\$6,160,358
Coal	\$1,842,526
Fuels (Diesel)	\$438,471
<b>TOTAL</b>	10,460,963

Table 7

Malmstrom Air Force Base has capital assets. MAFB owns 3,900 acres, of which 489 acres are in the public domain. In addition, MAFB has 24,606 acres in easements. On base there are 222 buildings, 775 vehicles, and both dorm, guest and privatized housing. Members of the military pursue degrees in the City of Great Falls. Children of military members attend local schools. Table 8 depicts information about the military’s contribution to the both the public school system, and other off duty educational pursuits.

<b>Military and Education</b>	
K-12 Military Dependents Enrolled in Great Falls Schools	\$1,007,222
Total Enrollments	897
<b>Off Duty Education</b>	
Tuition Assistance	\$951,625
Associate degree	149
Bachelor	21
Master	10
<b>Total Degrees</b>	<b>180</b>

Table 8

The military’s contribution to the City’s stability has been maintained by careful planning. In January of 2007, the U.S Air Force announced plans to deactivate the 564th Missile Squadron from its mission on the Malmstrom Air Force Base. The decision was made final and publically announced on July 2, 2007 and was estimated to take a full two years to complete. The Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) Defense Diversification Project studied a host of economic issues including the impact and diversification potential of the City. In the 2009 report, *Great Falls Region Defense Diversification Project*, it was estimated that there were 1.1 family members for each active duty personnel and reported that the Air Force uses a .29 indirect job multiplier for every MAFB job. In addition to payroll reductions incurred when a position is vacated, the report indicated that there is the potential for significant losses in utility revenue, contractor fees and supplies. At that time a 14% reduction in personnel was estimated to result in a \$20 million dollar loss to the City’s economy, but this decline was offset by other military manpower decisions.

Likewise there has been a change in mission for the Montana National Guard (MANG). The mission for the 120<sup>th</sup> fighter wing Montana Air National Guard is in transition from F-15s to C-130s. At least \$48 million is being appropriated to facilitate this transition. The C130s are versatile and can operate into 2040. This sort of resiliency continues to yield benefits to the city and is illustrative of the type of cooperation and support for the military that has characterized the City for decades.

In 2011, the City participated in the *Joint Land Use Study (JLUS)* for Malmstrom and its associated Missile Complex. The purpose of the JLUS study is to protect the viability of current and future missions at

Malmstrom AFB while providing for growth and economic sustainability. The acceptance of the JLUS report by the City and the County represents the City and County’s commitment to collaboration and joint planning. The JLUS planning process establishes a framework to avoid conflicts and land use encroachment and to mitigate existing and future conflicts. Of particular relevance is the stated report objective of preserving the option of reopening the runway at Malmstrom. The runway option could be an important component in the base’s future.

The military presence in the Great Falls metropolitan area also contributes to the local population since many who serve here choose to stay or return to the Great Falls area. The City and the County have a higher percentage of veterans by percentage than does the State or nation. These veterans contribute to the City’s economic base by remaining in the Great Falls area. Figure 21 shows the percentage of veterans in Cascade County.

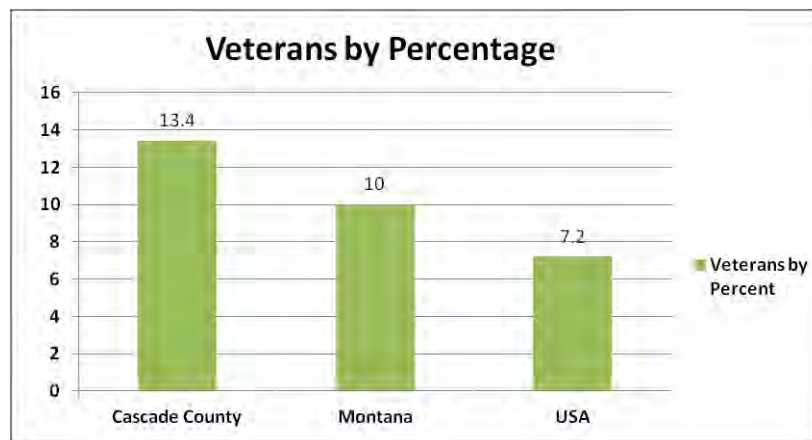


Figure 21

**Other Strengths and Opportunities**

**Industry**

The City of Great Falls has a historic and traditional industrial heritage. Industry still holds an important place in Great Falls. For example, the City is the home to Calumet Montana Refining petroleum refinery. This company owns and operates the 9500 barrel per day complex heavy oil refinery in Great Falls. The company purchased these refining assets in 2012 and has upgraded them to meet current environmental standards. The refinery makes a full range of fuel products including various grades of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and distillates. Heavy crude oil processed at the refinery is also well suited to the production of high grade asphalt products.

Other large industrial employers include Pacific Steel and Recycling, Pasta Montana, General Mills and IMC.

**Education**

Great Falls also has key educational assets. The Great Falls Public School system is highly regarded and school enrollment is increasing at the grade school level. The public school system is comprised of 15 elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools and one alternative high school. In addition, there

are a number of private schools as well. The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind is located here and is reputed to be one of the finest special education schools in the United States.

The City is home to the University of Great Falls (UGF), a private Catholic college that is fully accredited. The University of Great Falls was founded in 1932 and provides post-secondary education to the region. In addition to its campus offerings, UGF serves 31 sites in Montana, Southern Alberta and Wyoming through its telecom Distance Learning Program. The UGF offers undergraduate degrees in over 20 programs and several Masters Degree programs, including an on-line Masters of Art in Teaching in partnership with Bellevue University of Nebraska.

Great Falls is also home to Great Falls College-Montana State University. An integral part of the College's outreach mission is learning opportunities for workforce development, including contract training. This includes customized training assistance to businesses and individuals such as Great Falls Clinic, Pennsylvania Power Light-Montana, Veterans Upward Bound, and the Montana Air National Guard Family program. Currently, the College is training welders for the oil and gas support manufacturing industry that is growing in the City. The Great Falls College MSU offers two-year degree programs in a wide array of fields. This school also has affiliations with several four year programs throughout the State.

The City is also proud to be the location for the McLaughlin Research Institute. The McLaughlin Institute is a center for neurogenetic research on Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other degenerative nerve diseases. The Institute is an independent, non-profit organization located in Great Falls, Montana. The work of the Institute is internationally known and is the foundation for medical advances that will prevent and cure these devastating diseases, while finding new therapies.

### **Tourism**

Tourism is one of Montana's leading industries and primary revenue drivers. According to the Montana Department of Commerce, every dollar spent on tourism advertising yields \$157 in visitor spending in Montana. Funding for tourism marketing efforts can generate increased visitor spending, which in turn increases income, property and corporate tax collections. The City's Visitor Center, the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and Chamber of Commerce support the statewide and regional marketing effort. The Great Falls Development Authority has undertaken a branding effort to promote the City in all circles.

The City's heritage has conjured up nostalgic terms such as "Electric City" and "Authentic Montana." Sporting enthusiasts love the River's Edge Trail and other gems such as the Lewis and Clark Interpretative Center. The Interpretative Center offers exhibits, live programs, and video accounts of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Giant Springs Heritage State Park preserves the largest natural, cold water springs in the world, and feeds the Roe River, the shortest river in the world. Great Falls was the home to cowboy artist Charlie Russell and his original home, log studio along with a modern art museum, are enjoyed by many today as are museums such as the Paris Gibson Museum of Art and other cultural assets. In addition, the visitors to the City can see five area falls, including "the great falls." The First People's Buffalo Jump located nearby to Great Falls has become an international destination. The City's downtown, historic buildings and events further support tourism growth and potential in the area. There is great interest in

designating the Missouri River and its association with Lewis and Clark, as a National Heritage Area. Such a designation would further bolster the tourist potential of Great Falls.

A review of local tax revenue as reported from the State Department of Commerce indicates tourism receipts are on the increase. Table 7 below illustrates this trend.

City of Great Falls Gross Lodging Tax Revenue	
2007	\$991,934 (+13%)
2008	\$1,158,724 (+17%)
2009	\$1,121,022 (-3%)
2011	\$1,338,831 (+11%)
2012	\$1,421,509 (+6%)

Table 7

The City has implemented a local bed tax to enhance tourism efforts within Great Falls. The Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) was adopted by the City Commission in 2008. These monies fund grants and local efforts to sustain and grow. The mission of the TBID is to generate room nights for the lodging facilities in the City of Great Falls, Montana by effectively marketing and funding grants to promote the region as a preferred travel destination, within the State, regionally and with Canada to the north.

**Location**

It is interesting to note that the City’s location within close proximity to two major National Parks and public lands is increasingly recognized as an economic and recreational asset. According to Dr. Richard Barrett of the University of Montana, “Public lands are an essential component of the larger public infrastructure that provides the amenities and services needed for businesses and families all across Montana and the West to prosper.” According to Headwater Economics, economists believe protected federal lands are an important driver of economic growth. The report goes on further to state, “Across Montana and the West, protected federal land such as National Parks and Wilderness are associated with higher rates of job growth.”

Many believe that the City has great potential to capitalize on its location. The City is just a few hours away from Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. Numerous other state lands and ample fishing and outdoor recreational opportunities are close by. And, its proximity to the populous Calgary, Alberta could draw larger numbers of visitors to attractions and lower-cost shopping. Great Falls is also near the smaller population centers of Missoula, Lethbridge and Billings. Over time the City could attract more visitors from these three cities in the future.

The City also has potential as a location for retirees, including military veterans. Recently the City was ranked in the upper 25% of cities its size in terms of retiree amenities and support, including medical care. The City’s easy access to outdoor amenities and parks, could also be used to promote this potential further. Close proximity to military benefits such as discounted shopping and military medical care is attractive to retirees, and Great Falls is the only Montana community with these resources.

## Employment

The American Community Survey (ACS) reports that an estimated 58% of the City’s population age 16 and over is employed. The ACS report estimates that 35% of the population is not currently in the labor force. As can be seen in Table 8, most workers work in the private sector (77%). The City also has a large number (almost 17%) of Federal, State and Local government workers. Self employed workers comprise about 6% of the City’s working population.

Type of Worker	Number	Percent
Private wage and salary workers	20,877	77.2
Federal, state or local government workers	4,565	16.9
Self employed workers in their own business	1,589	5.9

Table 8

Together the local economy can be broken down into the following sectors. The top three areas of employment include business and management (about 30%), sales and office (about 27%), service occupations (21%). Natural resources, construction and maintenance jobs make up 11.6% of jobs, and production, transportation and material moving occupations bring in 10% of all jobs in the City of Great Falls. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the estimated unemployment rate in Great Falls as of December 2012 was 5.1%. This is again evidence that the City has weathered recent economic downturns better than most of its State and some national counterparts.



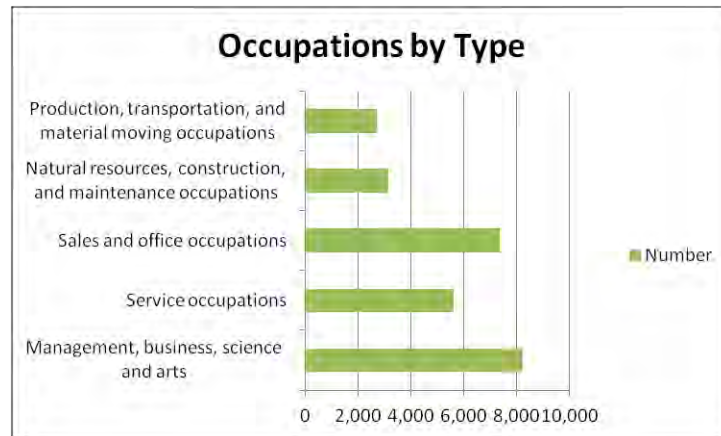


Figure 22

The top civilian employers in Great Falls are Benefis Health System (2,400), Great Falls Public Schools (1,613) and the Great Falls Clinic (780). Other major employers are shown on Table 9.

The above employers are some of the major civilian components of the City’s local economy. If the City expands its role as a regional medical center and as a place of higher education expansion and innovation, grows as a retiree location and a support location for oil and gas development, realizes its downtown vision, and taps into its potential for recreational tourism and workforce development, the local economy here in Great Falls can expand and grow, contributing even more to the City’s economic future.

Top Civilian Employers in Great Falls		
Name	Type	Number of Employees
Benefis Health System	Health Care Services	2,400
Great Falls Public Schools	Public School System	1,613
Great Falls Clinic	Health Care Services	780
Asurion Customer Service (formerly N.E.W)	Service Plan Service Center	687
City of Great Falls	Government	528
Wal-Mart	Retailer	501
Cascade County	Government	500
United Materials	Construction	305

Albertson's	Grocery Store	261
Easter Seals—Goodwill	Services for people with disabilities	249
Moonshine Grill (formerly Macaroni Grille)/ Chilli's	Restaurants	247
D.A Davidson & Company	Financial Services	246
Missouri River Manor	Nursing and	246

Table 9

**Income**

As the local economy grows and diversifies, so it is possible that income will continue to grow in the City. The median income of households in Great Falls was \$42,105 during the 2009-2011 ACS survey. This is an increase from \$32,436 in 2000. Fifteen percent of households had income below \$15,000 a year and 3% had income above \$150,000. Seventy-five percent of the households received earnings and 23% received retirement income other than Social Security.



Figure 23

Headwaters Economics, an independent non-profit research group, produced a nationwide comparison of counties in *A Profile of Socioeconomic Measures*. This report is instructive in that it considers changes in data collection techniques over time, and consistently applies these assumptions to all counties in the United States. Although this is based on county results, the information sheds light on this area.

The report's findings are:

- 100% of the population growth in Cascade County is due to births;
- From 2001 to 2010, the three industry sectors that added the most new jobs were health care and social assistance (1,230), finance insurance (525) and construction (486).
- In 2010, the three industry sectors with the largest number of jobs were government (9,388), health care, social assistance (6,869) and retail trade (6,810).

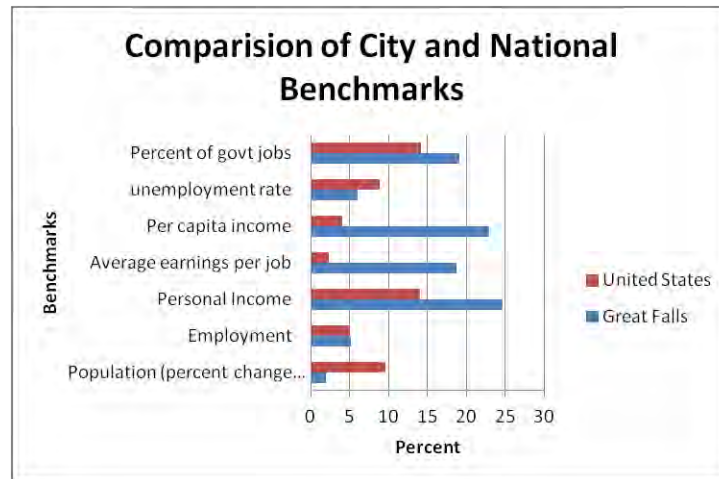


Figure 24

The report further states that from 2001 to 2010, the three industry sectors that added the most new personal income (in real terms) were government (\$146.7 million), health care, social assistance (83.6 million), and finance, insurance (\$37.5 million).

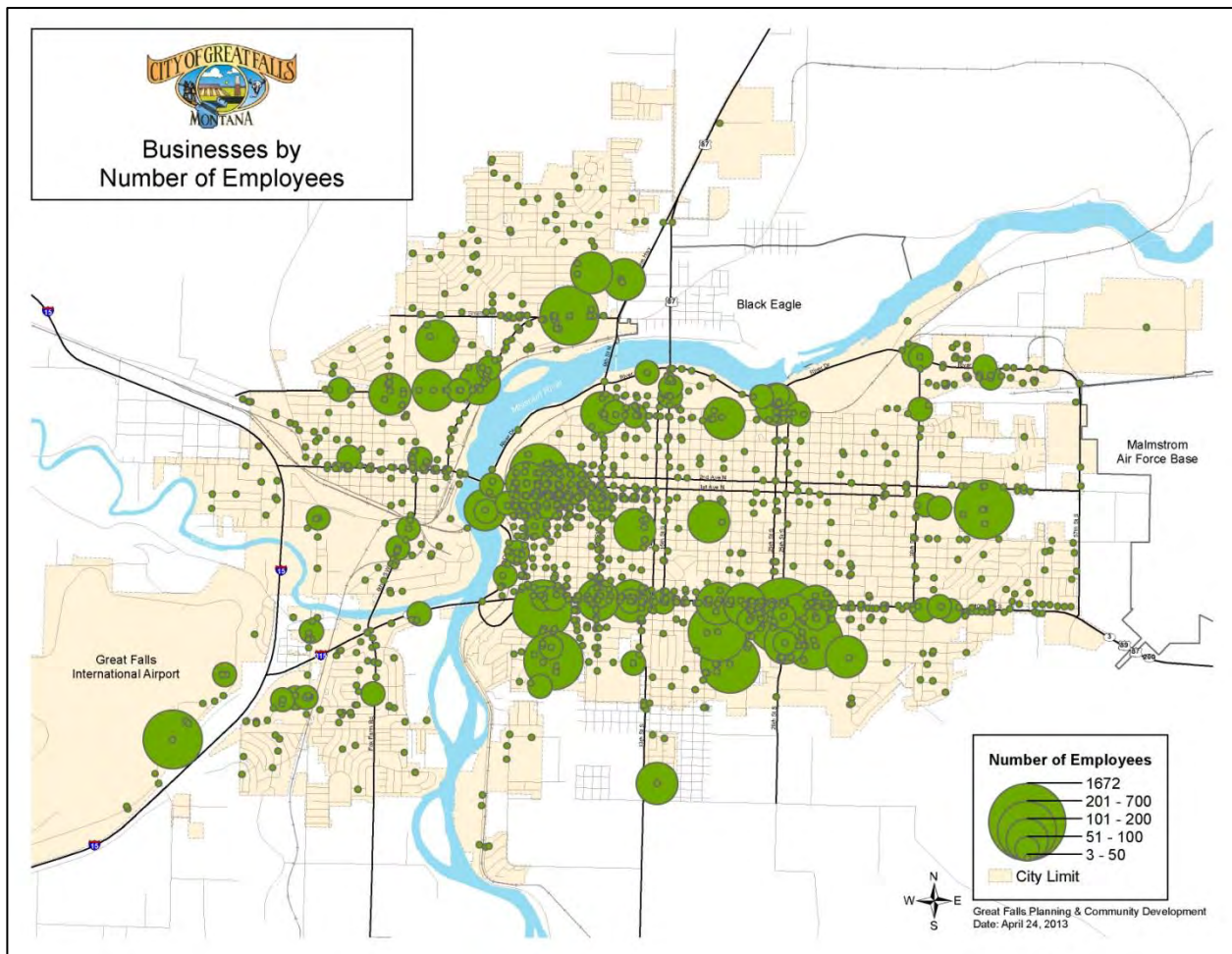
In addition, according to the report Cascade County outperforms other counties nationwide in terms of the following benchmarks: personal income (percent change 2000-2010) 24.7% versus 14.0%, average earnings per job (percent change 2000-2010) 18.7% versus 2.3%, per capita income (percent change 2000-2010) 22.9% versus 4.0%, percent of government jobs 19.1% versus 14.2%, all with a lower unemployment rate than the national average (5.9% versus 7.8% (December 2012).

Therefore, based on this information, Cascade County's does better with respect to average earnings per job (percent change 2000-2010), per capita income (percent change 2000-2010) and personal income (percent change 2000-2010) than other counties nationwide. In terms of the other indicators, Cascade County parallels the nation's economic trends.

**Businesses**

In addition to the military and civilian employers, the City benefits from an array of individual businesses. Map 16 locates 2,194 businesses within the City of Great Falls, and identifies them by the number of employees. The City has 2,095 businesses with 3-50 employees, 62 businesses with 51-100 employees, 25 businesses with 105-200 employees, and 11 businesses with 215-654 employees.

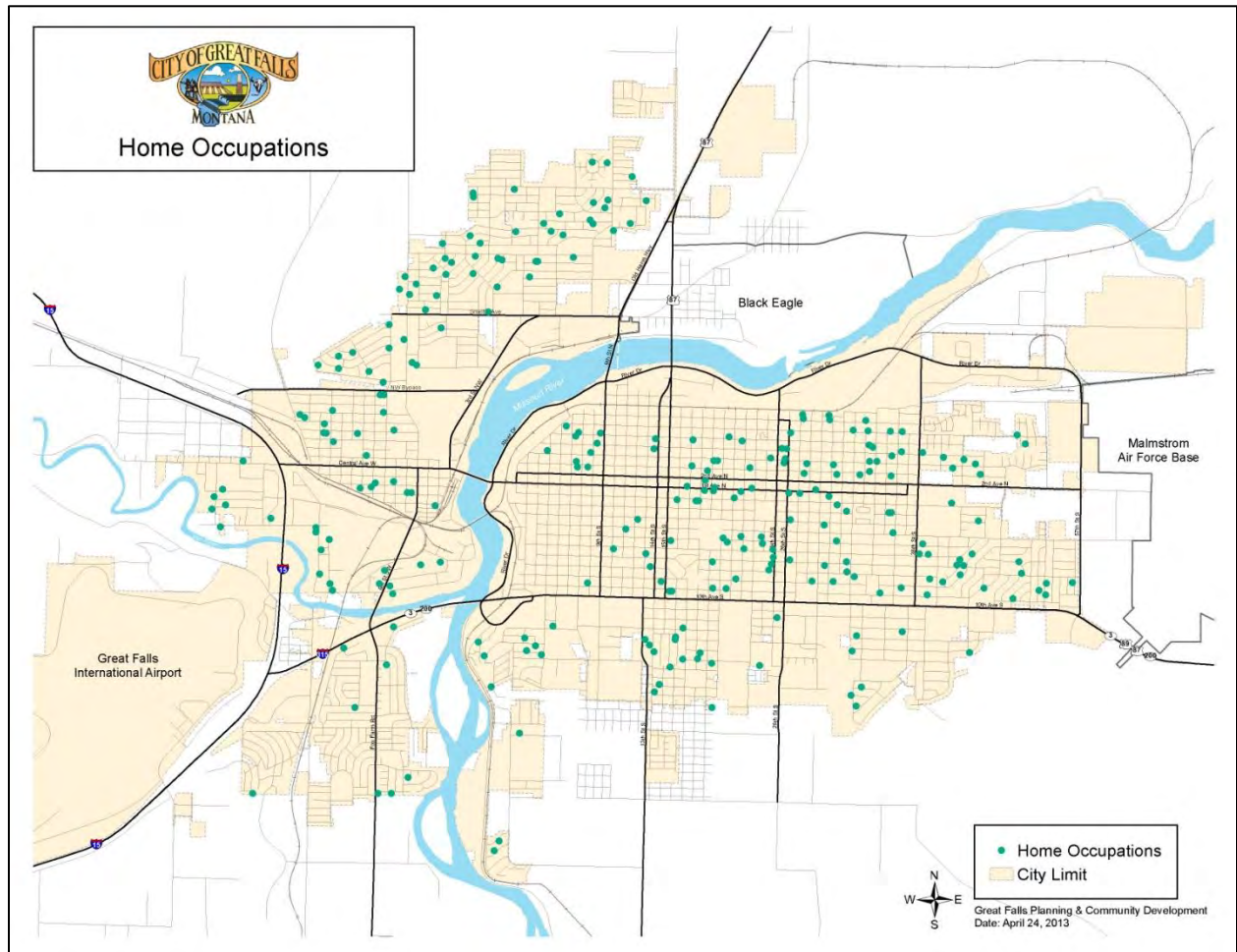
As can be seen, there are employment clusters in and around the City's medical areas, downtown, and its industrial locations. This map does not include Malmstrom Air Force Base, which is outside the city limits but is a major employer.



Map 16

**Home Occupations**

In addition to the businesses located within the City of Great Falls that create employment, there are 269 home occupations pursuant to Title 5, Chapter 2, Official Code of the City of Great Falls. This data is from the City’s license data base, as reported in April 2013. This count does not include home contractors. A home occupation is a lawful business conducted from home that does not infringe on one’s neighbors. Data for home occupations is shown on Map 17.



Map17

**Tax Increment Finance Districts and Urban Renewal Plan Areas**

The City is supportive of its businesses. One tool the City uses to promote industrial development and economic revitalization is the Tax Increment Finance District (TIFs). TIFs are an option allowed by the State of Montana Urban Renewal Law Title 7, Chapter 15, Parts 42 and 43 MCA. A tax increment finance district is created to provide local funds for community development, redevelopment and revitalization. Improvements funded by a TIF should increase property values and expand the tax base within the designated district. A property owner in a TIF does not pay additional fees. An increment, or a portion of

the regular taxes paid are reinvested back into the designated area for needed public improvements or payback of debt issued to finance needed improvements.

TIFs follow a detailed application process and require City Commission approval. Components of a TIF application may include the expected stimulus, employment, taxes, unique opportunities, project feasibility, developer capacity, a statement of blight, and timeline. Generally, the maximum limit of a developer request for TIF funds is 10% of the construction and rehabilitation component of the project, exclusive of acquisition costs. Table 10 and Map 18 refer to the current TIFs in the City of Great Falls.

Tax Increment Districts				
Name	Year	Type	Acres	Plan
Central Montana Agricultural and Technology Park and International Malt Plant Ordinance # 2996, 2911, as amended	2005	Industrial 7-15-4299 MCA	300	
West Bank Urban Renewal Tax Increment Finance District Ordinance #2967	2007	7-15-4206 MCA	222	West Bank Master Plan and Urban Renewal Plan
Great Falls International Airport Tax Increment Financing Industrial District Ordinance # 3043	2008	Industrial 7-15-4299 MCA	1,972	
Great Falls Downtown Urban Renewal Plan Ordinance #3088	2012	7-15-4206 MCA	164	Downtown Master Plan and Urban Renewal Plan
East Industrial Park (includes undeveloped American Ethanol site)	2013	Industrial 7-15-4299 MCA	395	Amended in 2013 – not active at this time.

Table 10

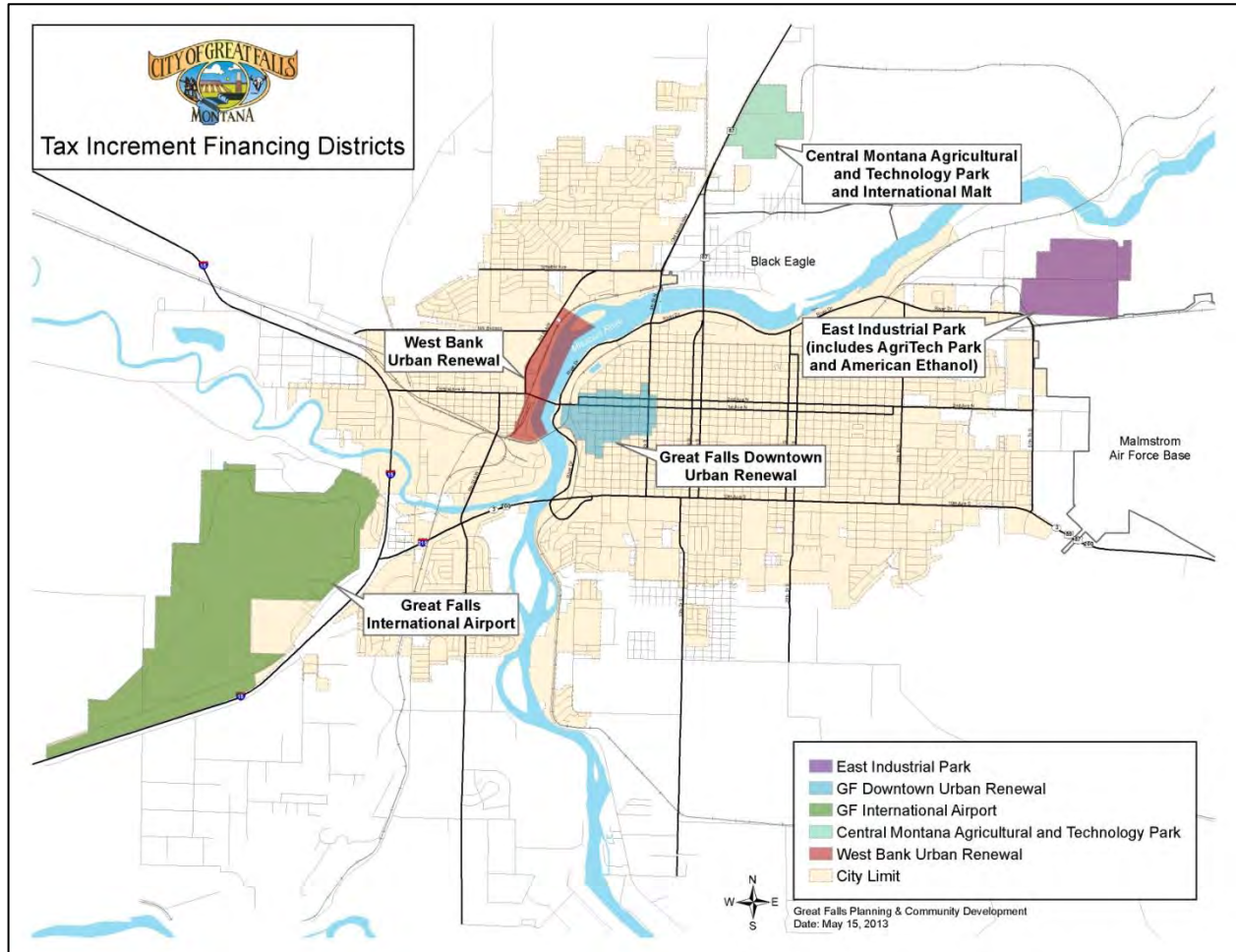
**Tax Abatements**

The City also encourages economic development by encouraging the use of State tax credits. The City has processed the use of State tax abatements for eligible projects under 15-24-1402, and 15-24-1501 MCA. Several industrial projects have qualified as “expanding industries” such as Montana Eggs, Steel Etc. Holding and Double Bogey, LLC. Recently, the law firm of Church Harris utilized historic tax credits to complete the successful renovation of the Baum-Trinastich (Owl Cigar) Building.



In addition to State incentives, these projects can receive other forms of help and support. The Great Falls Development Authority provided Montana Eggs support in the form of a \$767,000 loan to expand its warehouse and shipping facility. The City assisted the project by agreeing to annex the land, and construct the extension of water and sewer to the new agri-processing facility.

It is important that the City deploy its tax incentives wisely.



Map 18

**Strategic Future Issues**

The City’s current economic growth is expected to hold steady for the near future. In fact, according to the Montana Department of Commerce, the City of Great Falls is projected to grow 2% per year 2012-2015. This is approximately the same average growth rate as before the recession. But this does not mean the City is without economic challenges, as discussed previously.

To address issues related to the Great Falls significant military presence, the City is a member of the Montana Defense Alliance (MTDA). The MTDA is comprised of five key stakeholders including the City, Cascade County, Airport Authority, Great Falls Development Authority and the Chamber of Commerce. The group is charged with advocating for military mission retention, new missions, and coordinating any Base Realignment and Closure Process that may occur.

Encroachment is the number one concern of the United States Air Force for its installations. To address this issue, the City partnered with Cascade County and the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) to perform a *Joint Land Use Study* of Malmstrom Air Force Base. The Study surveyed possible encroachment issues around the base and facilities in the missile field. As a result of this work, the JLUS report provides a framework for policy makers to consider when evaluating land use issues around the base. The report also serves as a future guide, addressing potential land use and development concerns before creating a conflict with installation.

The Air Force requested additional BRACs since the last round since the December 8, 2005 report to assist with reducing its underutilized assets. This presents both a challenge and opportunity to Great Falls. Another BRAC round could result in a change of mission, new mission, or reduction and or adjustment to the mission at Malmstrom. However, the facility has attributes that could support additional missions and enhanced use lease arrangements. Enhanced use leases are an option whereby private developers are allowed to lease unused or underutilized property. These type of partnerships have become increasingly utilized in the United States.

The City and County will continue to utilize services and support from the OEA. The effect of a base realignment due to BRAC or missile further reductions would have a significant economic affect on the community, region, and state. A universal theme throughout the public participation process was that regardless of Malmstrom's status, the City needs to diversify its economy, build on current strengths, and be open to new opportunities.

Adaptability, diversification and collaboration are the quintessential ingredients the City must apply if there are future changes in the status of Malmstrom Air Force Base. One of the first steps local communities take when facing changes in military missions is to assess the economic impact based on current conditions, and coordinate with state and local governments. Continued planning, communication and cooperation is important to adjust to any change.

Of course there are unknowns as to any scenario in this regard, and the mix of possible options and scenarios, including the status quo, are not predictable at this time. There does appear to be a couple of constants in terms of military base adjustments. Once information is at hand, local collaboration, preparedness, and responsiveness to the OEA is fundamental to weathering changes of this sort, meaning that in the event of any change at Malmstrom or MANG, it would become crucial that the City and County (and their respective residents) would need to work very closely and cooperatively together.

The approval of ADF and Agri-Tech Industrial parks are important achievements toward increased economic diversity. These locations are within the City's TIFs, and as such, create ample opportunities for future industrial development and improvements. Many envision a future that expands on these gains. In addition, residents embrace a future where the City can provide support industries for the oil and gas industry, manufactured housing, and more value-added agricultural development.

The notion of a mill levy for economic development was put forward as a tool the City might need to consider in the future, while improving its "business friendly" image now. Many cited the City's need to make Great Falls a better place for young people to stay. Some recognized that to do this well would involve more than just jobs, but also investment in the amenities that would also make Great Falls more of a satisfying place to stay, such as the creation of a destination facility for theatre, music and the performing



arts. Although there is a call for economic growth, many stated a belief that to accomplish this in a way that will benefit everyone requires a balanced, cooperative approach based on the common ground needs of the various stakeholders involved.

In summary, the City has many opportunities to build on the progress it has made in attracting and developing new business and industry. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, support services for the oil and gas industry, value-added agriculture, greater interest in the Downtown, and expansion of the City's medical sector, as well as continued workforce partnerships. This work will allow the City to grow and prosper in the short term future and beyond.

## PHYSICAL

### Introduction

The Physical portion of the Growth Policy Update includes the built environment of the City, and those elements, both natural and man-made, that influence the way the City looks and functions. Some of these factors include the design and lay-out of the City, its design, the City's development standards, and the infrastructure of the City. The historic development of the City with its grid, boulevards, river corridor and parks, was one of the most intrinsic, appreciated, and highly recognized aspects of the City during the outreach phase. The Physical Working Group reviewed the City's trends and conditions in this regard, in addition to developing their own visions and conceptual map recommendations.

### Goals and Principles

- Promote a livable, dynamic and vital community.
- Encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City.
- Encourage balanced growth in a way that meets the differing goals and aims of the City.
- Ensure that new development meets City standards while paying a fair share of costs.
- Offer transit and non-motorized modes of transportation viable options to residents.
- Encourage development in areas that can best accommodate it based on infrastructure, access, and proximity to major employers.
- Foster a development pattern that encourages infill development, adaptive reuse and the use of existing infrastructure as opposed to sprawl, low density and haphazard development.
- Provide a safe, efficient, equitable and accessible transportation system.
- Develop new and diverse housing supply throughout the City, including single family residential, multi-family, and housing for those with special needs.
- Create a built environment that allows for multi-modal opportunities and protection of the City's natural amenities.
- Direct industrial development and planned industrial growth to the City's industrial TIFs.
- Implement the *Downtown Master Plan* and the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan and Medical District Plan* as amendments to this Growth Policy Update.

The *Departments of Planning and Community Development and Public Works* manage many of the aspects related to the City's physical and urban development. The last section of this report, referred to as the *Implementation*, will present Development Constraints and Conceptual Growth Areas and Priority Strategies.

The *Physical* section of the report is divided into five sections. These are:

- Natural Characteristics
- Urban Characteristics
- Development Standards
- Growth Trends
- Strategic Future Issues

### **Natural Characteristics**

The City of Great Falls is located in the Missouri River Basin, at the confluence of the Missouri and Sun Rivers. The Missouri River Basin is the largest basin in the State of Montana, draining more than half of the State's land. The Missouri River approaches from the south and the Sun River joins the Missouri River from the West.

The valleys of both rivers are relatively narrow, with high bluffs that rise 200 to 300 feet above the river elevation. At the confluence of the rivers, the valleys widen into a broad plain. The majority of the City is located to the north and west of the Missouri River, and north of the Sun River. The City's main flood zones occupy narrow reaches through the City. Great Falls does have floodplain zoning regulations in effect and has recently updated its floodplain ordinance. Elevations drop as the Missouri River travels northward through the City creating the five waterfalls that the City has become renowned for.

Great Falls lies in an area classified as the Teton River – Judith Basin Grassland. This type of range is characterized by an abundance of Sandberg bluegrass and prairie junegrass. Other types of vegetative cover common to this generalized area include bluebunch wheatgrass, needleleaf sedge, and threadleaf sedge. The fertile lands in this region have been converted to grain production and forage. Within the City of Great Falls, of course, these lands are now in urban use.

There are a number of soil associations in the area. Most are well drained and of compositions common to semi-arid regions. Clays, loams, and silts are the primary textural components of most of the soils. A United States Geological Service map, referred to as the Engineering Geology for the City of Great Falls (1977), depicts these clay areas in a generalized manner. Development on these soils can require additional geotechnical study and additional safeguards at times.

Flooding in the City has historically been caused by rapid snowmelt combined with heavy rainfall in the Sun and Missouri River Basins, causing the Missouri River and the Sun River to leave their banks. The City has had at least four major flood events in the past and now is protected by a levee.

### **Sand and Gravel**

Montana Code Annotated (MCA) requires that a Growth Policy address sand and gravel impacts. The City has no substantial impact from sand and gravel development. There is one sand and gravel permit issued in the City for permit number MTG490009 at 3930 Lower River Road. The permit is to allow a dredge to remove sand from an area of the Missouri River that is approximately 1 acre in size. After separating the sand and the water, water is placed in sedimentation basins to settle out excess sediment and then return the water to the river. Their average reported discharged rate is approximately 425 gallons per minute. The process operates 5 days a week for about 3 months out of the year.

The effective date on this permit authorization is from November 1, 2012 through October 31, 2017. The permit is renewed every 5 years.

## Urban Characteristics

### Infrastructure

#### *Road network*

The City of Great Falls maintains approximately 383 miles of streets and alleys inside the City limits, including 80 miles that are not paved. Maintenance consists of pavement rehabilitation and restoration, street cleaning, snow and ice removal, alley maintenance and the nuisance weed program. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) maintains approximately 39 miles of streets within the City of Great Falls. Interstate 15 traverses Great Falls and is a north-south transcontinental highway that extends from the Canadian border at Sweetgrass, Montana to San Diego, California.

Some of the street system in Great Falls is comprised of City streets and alleys that are designated Federal Aid Urban Routes (FAUs). The City provides minor maintenance on the FAUs and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) manages any projects involving FAUs where federal funding is utilized. From a regional perspective, Great Falls is mainly served by Interstate 15. Other major north and south highway access to the area is provided by US Highways 87 and 89.

The largest road facility in Great Falls is 10th Avenue South which has six lane, raised-median cross sections with dedicated left-turn bays for most of its length. At the present time there are very few locations within Great Falls where traffic volumes exceed optimal levels for the number of lanes present. Instances where this condition does exist are River Drive North, between 15th Street North and 25th Street North, which carries 14,800 vehicles per day (vpd). Tenth Avenue South between 20th Street South and 38th Street South is also in excess of or approaching optimal levels for the number of lanes present.

The City maintains about 12,332 traffic signs, 89 City-owned traffic signals, and 61 State-owned traffic signals. The Traffic Division within the Public Works Department is responsible for the maintenance of all roadway signs and signals.

The primary planning document for transportation funding is the *Great Falls Area Transportation Plan*, last adopted in 2009. The City's transportation plan is consistent with the Growth Policy. The transportation plan must be adopted every four years per requirements. The next update is planned for the summer and fall of 2013.

The City of Great Falls is one participant in a cooperative local transportation planning process that jointly adopts plans for the area transportation improvements. In order to receive Federal and State transportation funding, the City must participate in the Great Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), per Federal law.

There are two major improvements planned for the short term horizon. These proposed road network improvements are shown on Map 30, referred to as Potential Growth Areas. Specifically, these projects are:

- *South Central Arterials*: Reconstruction with widening and bike and pedestrian facility. This project includes wider driving lanes, shoulders, reduced and realigned vertical curves, drainage improvements, signage, and intersection re-alignment.

Location: 13<sup>th</sup> Street South from 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue South to 27<sup>th</sup> Street South; 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue South from 13<sup>th</sup> Street South to 26<sup>th</sup> Street South; 26<sup>th</sup> Street South from the City limits to 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue South.

- *Fox Farm Road:* Reconstruction with widening and bike and pedestrian facility. This project includes wider driving lanes, shoulders, reduced vertical curves, drainage improvements, signage.

Location: Fox Farm Road from the City limits to Dick Road.

## Sidewalks

City Code requires owners and tenants of any premises within the limits of the City to keep the public sidewalk in front of and adjoining their premises in good, safe and substantial condition and otherwise be responsible for maintenance and upkeep. New construction must also install a sidewalk where none previously existed.

The City and State, to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, install sidewalks and curb ramps where they are lacking, with priority going to the City's major roadways. Since 2006, at least 25 miles, or 383 blocks, 134 intersections and 4,844 feet of trails have been built with State funds.

The City Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) funds grants to enhance community transportation networks through historic preservation, landscaping, and sidewalk and trail projects. Also sidewalks and ramps have been installed in qualifying portions of the City as part of the CDBG program.

Four CTEP projects are currently underway, including the Riverview School bike and pedestrian path, Sun River Trail, 25<sup>th</sup> Street North Bridge and Civic Center Restoration. The Riverview project was let for construction in March 2013, with construction slated for late spring. The Sun River Trail project solicited Proposals for Engineering Services in late 2012, with the design phase to begin in April and May 2013. The 25<sup>th</sup> Street North Bridge Project purchased its needed easement in 2012, with design continuing into 2013 and construction projected for 2014. Civic Center restoration will continue into 2013, with construction hoped for late in the construction season.

## Bike Paths and Trails

Public bike and pedestrian paths are maintained by either the City of Great Falls, Montana Department of Transportation or Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. However, a vast majority of trails are maintained by the City's Park and Recreation Department. The non-profit entity, Recreation Trails Inc., assists with the maintenance and costs when possible and the Trails Working Group makes management decisions regarding the River's Edge Trail. The City's Bike Plan is included in the *Great Falls Area Transportation Plan*, and will be updated in late 2013 to better identify the City's preferred bike network.

Trail improvements happen on a project by project basis. Two specific projects relate to downtown connectivity and the trail. Pacific Steel's new headquarters includes easements for the River Edge Trail to cross their property. NCI Engineering has recently completed a study establishing a proposed connection between Broadwater Bay and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North. This proposed trail alignment is along the riverfront, avoiding parking lots and the railroad crossings that currently mark the trail. These types of trail improvement projects hold promise for the City's future trail system.

The maintenance of trail improvements can be expensive. National figures indicate that it can cost up to \$5,000 to maintain a paved mile of trail. Responsibility for trail maintenance can vary depending on whether the segment is deemed to be a transportation connection or considered part of the Park system. The outreach process for the *Imagine Great Falls* process included support for more city-wide connectivity and mobility improvements, including those necessary for city pedestrian and bike safety. The maintenance of trails and bike paths can be challenging, and is an on-going point of discussion in the City.

Finally, the City and State are beginning to install on-street pavement for bicycle facilities. The first markings will be installed on 9<sup>th</sup> street, 57<sup>th</sup> street, and the far-eastern segment of Second Avenue North, in 2013-2014.

## Assessments

Great Falls has three only three basic yearly assessments. These are:

- Street Maintenance District
- Lighting District
- Boulevard District

The three basic districts and subsequent assessments are established and maintained based on Montana State Law. Assessment resolutions must be passed annually by the City Commission before the assessments can be placed on property. The assessments are based on land use and/or parcel square footage.

### *Street Maintenance*

Every parcel within the City limits is assessed for street maintenance with a square footage cap of 12,000 for residential properties and 1,000,000 for commercial properties. Every property, including undeveloped parcels, benefits from access provided by public roadways. Street maintenance includes, but is not limited to, sprinkling, graveling, oiling, chip sealing, seal coating, overlaying, treating, general cleaning, sweeping, flushing, snow and ice removal, and leaf and debris removal.

### *Lighting Districts*

Parcels benefitting from street and alley lights are assessed for the installation, utility cost, and maintenance of the individual districts. The City has 18 street lighting districts. The first one was created in 1912. Approximately 70% of the City is contained within a lighting district. Maintenance has reportedly been an issue, at times, and this consideration should be included in future decision-making regarding the Districts. However, many of the lights are maintained by a private utility, leaving the City with no direct method for monitoring maintenance response times.

### *Boulevard Districts*

Parcels in the boulevard district are assessed for the cost of maintaining, pruning, spraying, and otherwise caring for public trees in the district. The original Boulevard District was created in 1946 with Ordinance #3570. It includes much of the core area of the City. There is also a small Boulevard District that was created for a few subdivisions in the 1970s. Map 21 depicts the original Boulevard District.

## Utilities

The City operates storm drain, potable water, wastewater collection and refuse collection utilities. Considered together, the City's water and wastewater rates are the lowest of Montana's seven largest cities. The Public Works Department maintains a 5 year Capital Improvements Schedule for system wide improvements related to its utilities.

The City has in the past also matched CDBG funding with other funding sources to make projects in the City's Low and Moderate Income defined area possible. Without this funding, households would be responsible for paying special improvement district fees to pay for infrastructure improvements.

## Water

The Missouri River has remained the supply source for the water utility since 1889. Previous to 1917, river water was settled in open ponds and then pumped directly into the distribution system by steam driven pumps. In 1910, electric motor driven centrifugal pumps with an 8-million gallon a day capacity were installed, and by 1917 a newly constructed filtration facility was placed into operation.

Potable water facilities include structures designed to collect, treat, and distribute clean water, including distribution mains, a treatment plant and storage tanks or reservoirs. The Water Plant uses a conventional filtration system which treats and delivers an average of 4.5 billion gallons of drinking water per year. The municipal water system consists of a water plant, 310 miles of water mains and three booster pump stations. The system serves approximately 64,000 customers. Single family per capita water usage was estimated at 123 gallons per day (GPD) in 2005. Per capita water usage has been decreasing due to the advent of conservation methods.

Today, raw water from the Missouri River receives modern treatment methods of coagulation, flocculation, sedimentation, filtration and disinfection before it is pumped into over 310 miles of water distribution lines. There are seven storage facilities in the distribution system with a total capacity of over 12 million gallons. On April 18, 2012 the City Commission approved a \$1.27 average monthly rate hike for water improvements. The City's water pipes average 40 years old - the oldest in the state. Planned Water Plant improvements include UV disinfection to meet new regulatory standards, re-locating ammonia feed facilities for safety reasons and replacement of the electrical system for age and reliability reasons.

The City has a *Water Master Plan* that was developed in 2006 based on a planning horizon of 2025. The report reviewed the Great Falls water treatment, storage and distribution system. The report found that the water quality delivered to customers in Great Falls is excellent and exceeds regulatory requirements. The report identified needs over the next 20 years based on facility age, conditions, and service areas with less than ideal pressures, vulnerability issues, regulatory and safety issues and expanded service areas. The report also recommended that the City vigorously defend its water rights on an on-going basis.

Today the City's current population is approximately 9% under the growth projections used for the report, when adjusted for the inclusion of Malmstrom AFB and Black Eagle. In addition to the *Water Master Plan*, the Department of Public Works maintains a Capital Improvements Schedule that projects the improvements needed for the water system for the next five years. The Department may apply for CDBG funds, at times, when improvements are needed within that designated area. Current planned improvements include the installation of a new bulk ammonia handling system, replacing and upgrading filter media, replacing filter building ceiling and design work to replace electric switch gear at the Water

Treatment Plant. These improvements are currently estimated to cost \$1,350,000. In addition, at least \$300,000 of water storage tank repair, removal and relocating costs are planned.

The onsite Water Testing Lab routinely tests for contaminants in the water, as required by Federal and State laws. A Water Quality - Consumer Confidence Report is created annually from the previous year's analysis data and is distributed to water system users. In 2012, the City operated without any violations, exemptions, or variances regarding water quality.

## **Wastewater**

The sanitary sewer system is designed to collect, convey, treat and dispose of sewage through trunk mains, interceptors, and a treatment plant. These facilities presently consist of 256 miles of collector and transmission mains, 4,454 sewer manholes, 32 lift stations, and the wastewater treatment plant located on the Missouri River south of the former Westgate Mall. Together this system operates to collect and treat 3.6 billion gallons of wastewater per year.

The City has a *Facility Plan for Wastewater* (1998). The plan states that the basic facilities of the City will provide adequate service for the next 20 years. The plan includes recommended improvements for the wastewater treatment plant and collection system. The plan also notes MDEQ's adopted water quality standards, and accompanying permit requirements, that govern discharge to State and Federal water. Portions of the Plan have been updated since 1998, but this does not negate the need for an overall update during the next few years.

In the plan, a one percent growth rate is applied. This rate includes a projection up through the year 2020. The capacity of the system was evaluated based on a 2020 population of 75,050. The use of this assumption means that the City still has excess and sufficient capacity in its system; however, this excess capacity tends to be in the south central area of the City. Further, capacity hinges somewhat on whether any large industrial users are added to the system. To avoid this impact, the City can require pre-treatment of industrial wastewater. Pre-treatment reduces the impact of this added effluent to the City's wastewater system.

In 1960, the City of Great Falls constructed a primary treatment plant, located at 1600 6th Street Northeast, which included sedimentation, chlorine disinfection and anaerobic digestion for solids processing. The facility was upgraded and expanded in the mid 1970's to include secondary biological treatment, solids thickening facilities, and a heat treatment system for solids processing. In 2003, the heat treatment system was replaced by anaerobic digesters. In 2008, co-generation equipment was installed, which utilizes the anaerobic digester gas bi-product for the production of plant electricity as well as thermal energy to heat the digester tanks. In 2011, co-generation saved \$151,000 in electricity costs.

The City has over 256 miles of gravity sewer collection mains, some of which are over 100 years old. Pipe materials include concrete, vitrified clay, asbestos cement, brick, cast iron, and in more recent years PVC and HDPE. Key system expenditures planned include \$4.4 million over the next few years to provide ultraviolet disinfection and \$12.6 million to extract ammonia so as to meet new State and Federal standards.

In addition to the utilities enterprise fund fees, the Public Works Department may, at times, apply for CDBG funds when improvements will benefit that designated area. Current planned projects include

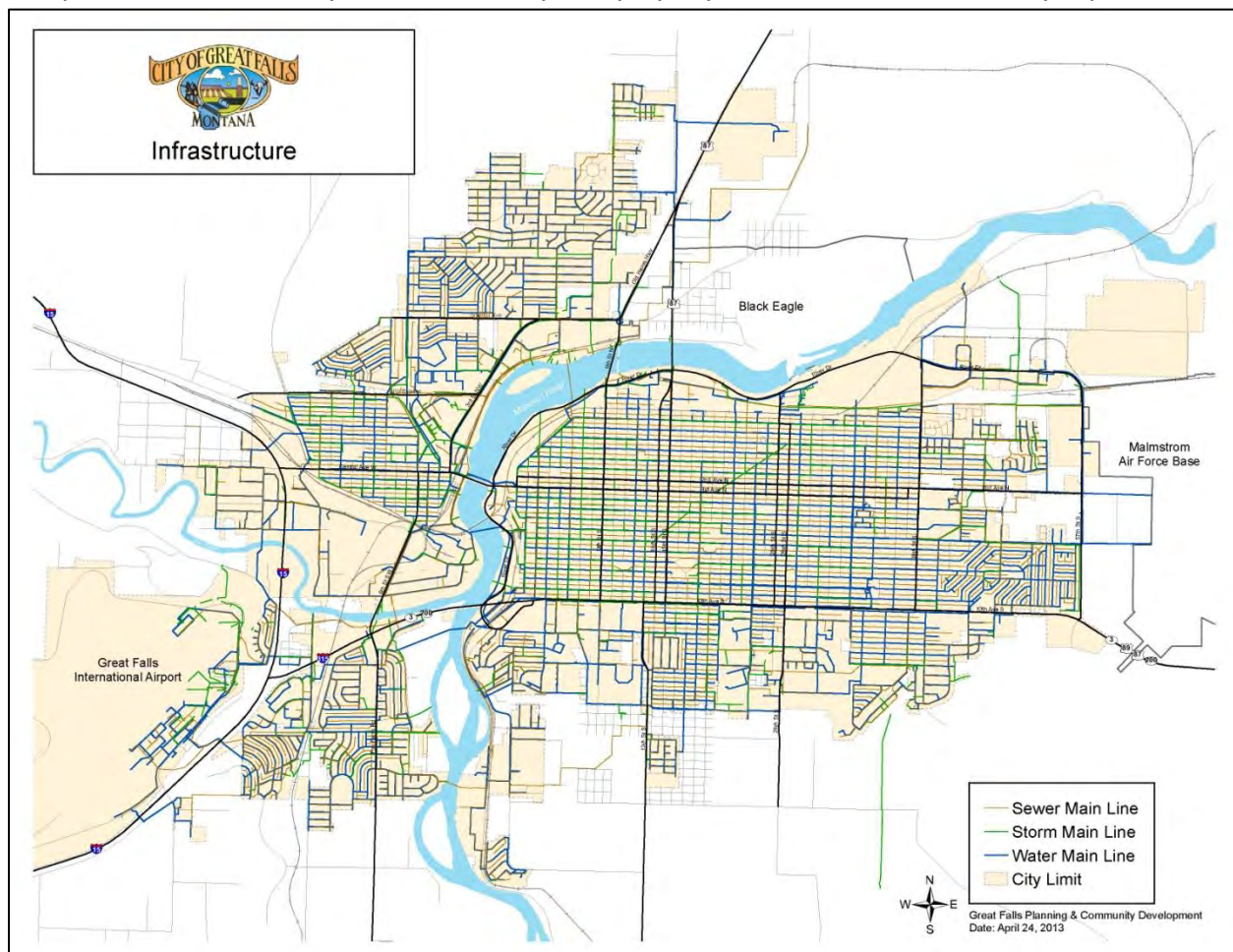


design replacement for plant aeration and disinfection systems, sprays, aeration system and consultant services for a major meter installation project at the wastewater treatment plant. This project is phased and will include \$4 million of the estimated \$19.5 million total improvements planned in this regard. Another planned project includes replacing underground heating lines and upgrading return activated sludge pumps at the wastewater treatment plant. This project is currently estimated to cost \$340,000.

In addition to the *Facility Plan for Wastewater*, the Department of Public Works maintains a Capital Improvements Schedule that projects improvements needed for the wastewater treatment plant for the next five years. Veolia Water North America is currently under contract to operate the wastewater treatment plant and lift stations.

## Drainage

The City's Public Works Department prepared a *Storm Drain Master Plan* in 2003. The City maintains approximately 103 miles of public storm drains, over 3,300 manholes or inlets and seven detention basins. The total system is valued at over \$50 million, with improvements and major repair projects guided by a five year capital improvements program (CIP). New development is assessed a stormwater fee of \$250 per acre. Developers must work with the Department of Public Works to demonstrate that there will be adequate stormwater conveyance and that adjacent property owners will not be adversely impacted.



Map 19

## **Sanitation**

The Sanitation Division is responsible for the collection and transportation of solid waste from approximately 15,000 residential and 1,700 commercial customers to approved disposal sites. Nearly 40,000 tons of solid waste are collected and disposed of annually.

The City of Great Falls has a long-term contract with Montana Waste Systems Inc. for solid waste disposal. The High Plains Landfill is located 10.5 miles north of Great Falls on the Havre Highway. For commercial and residential customers, there is a fee at the landfill.

The capacity of the permitted and licensed portion of the landfill is estimated to be sufficient for the life of the planning horizon and beyond.

## Development Standards

### Floodplain Management

Every year flooding causes hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage to homes and businesses around the country. The Community Rating System (CRS) is part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and is administered by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Among other benefits, our community participation in the CRS program earns reduced premiums for NFIP insurance for properties within our community. This includes saving lives, preventing repetitive property damage from flood events and reducing the cost of flood insurance. CRS recognizes community efforts beyond those minimum standards by reducing flood insurance premiums for the community's property owners. The CRS is similar to, but separate from, the private insurance industry's programs that grade communities on the effectiveness of their fire suppression and building code enforcement.

In 2013, the City incorporated changes to reflect map modernization techniques to improve overall floodplain management. The City participates in the National Flood Insurance Program and uses FEMA's updated and enhanced maps. This technique is based on available Global Positioning System (GPS), GIS maps and aerial photography.

Modernization provides citizens, staff and the community a comprehensive approach to disaster mitigation planning, economic development and emergency response. Builders, existing property owners and developers now have updated information for making well-informed decisions on where to build, how they can affect the properties within flood prone areas and property owners flood insurance rates. Insurance agents and lending institutions can use the updated information to manage existing and future risks.

The City participates in many of the public information and floodplain management activities described in the CRS Coordinator's Manual. The current rating for Great Falls and Cascade County is 8 on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the lowest. This rating provides a discount in flood insurance premiums by 10%. The maximum discount allowed by NFIP program is 45%.

### Subdivision

Montana Subdivision and Platting Act (MCA 76-3-501) requires that all local governments adopt subdivision regulations that are consistent with the State's regulations. Subdivision regulations control the standards by which land is subdivided and developed. Subdivision regulations ensure newly divided land is developed with adequate access to public facilities and utilities. Once development is complete, the city becomes responsible for the infrastructure.

The purpose of the City's subdivision requirements are found in the Official Code of Great Falls Title 17 Chapter 24-24.

- Prevent the overcrowding of land
- Lessen congestion on streets and highways
- Provide for adequate light, air, water supply, sewage disposal, parks and recreation areas, ingress and egress, and other public improvements
- Require development in harmony with the natural environment
- Protect the rights of property owners
- Require uniform monumentation of land subdivisions and transferring of interests in real property by reference to a plat or certificate of survey

- Comply with the requirements of the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act (MSPA) – Title 76, Chapter 3, MCA
- Implement the City’s adopted Growth Policy

The City’s subdivision code is based on the following design principles:

- Minimize the amount of impervious surface within the subdivision
- Preserve the character of the surrounding area
- Preserve natural features, including wetlands, riparian habitat, and drainage ways
- Promote a walkable and bicycle-friendly community
- Create street continuity and an interconnected street network
- Accommodate the housing needs of City residents
- Promote other purposes in the City’s Growth Policy

Subdivision regulations work in conjunction with zoning regulations to ensure the public health, safety and welfare of the citizenry. Subdivisions can play a role in the provision of sidewalks, trails and parks, and are building blocks of design for a community. The Planned Unit Development (PUD) process is used in some communities to promote creativity, design innovation, mixed-use, trails and open space. The City should review its PUD process to ensure that it does not needlessly limit different types of projects.

Another subdivision issue that was identified during the Growth Policy Update was access to subdivisions. Two subdivision access points are recommended according to Model Land Development Code standards. The City has no requirement in this regard and a number of existing subdivisions do not meet this preferred standard. Further, Chapter 5 of the International Fire Code specifies standards for emergency access on streets with cul-de-sacs and dead-ends. The City should review its subdivision code from an emergency access, design and circulation perspective to ensure it is adequately maintaining a safe and reasonable standard with respect to this important need.

In summary, new subdivisions, private developments, and public projects should be designed to enhance opportunities for non-motorized transportation by pedestrians and bicyclists by providing safe streets, sidewalks and room for future trail connections. These facilities could include easements, shorter block lengths, a system of bike paths, designated bike routes, sidewalks and proper curb cuts as well as other considerations for bicyclists and pedestrians. These improvements would offer greater multimodal opportunities for people to go to work, shop and school and build on the City’s existing framework in this regard. The City should review its subdivision ordinance to see whether improvements can be made with respect to connectivity, safety, access and design.

## **Zoning**

The City of Great Falls instituted zoning in 1930. The City’s Land Development regulations are found in the Official Code of Great Falls, Title 17, and Chapter 20-68. This compendium addresses land use, zoning, subdivision and platting, design, transportation, parking, outdoor lighting, landscaping, erosion, stormwater, signs, and non-conformities.

Table 13 displays principal uses by zoning district. These districts are shown on Map 20. Please note that zoning differs from existing land use in that it establishes the development standards on a property. This may include density, lot size, height, setbacks, and lot coverage. In addition, proposed uses must be consistent with other applicable requirements of the Land Development Code. Compliance with the zoning

code does not negate other land development requirements such as development of slopes, storm drain, floodplain etc. A summary of the zoning code is shown below. For complete information please refer to Chapter 20 in the Land Development Code.

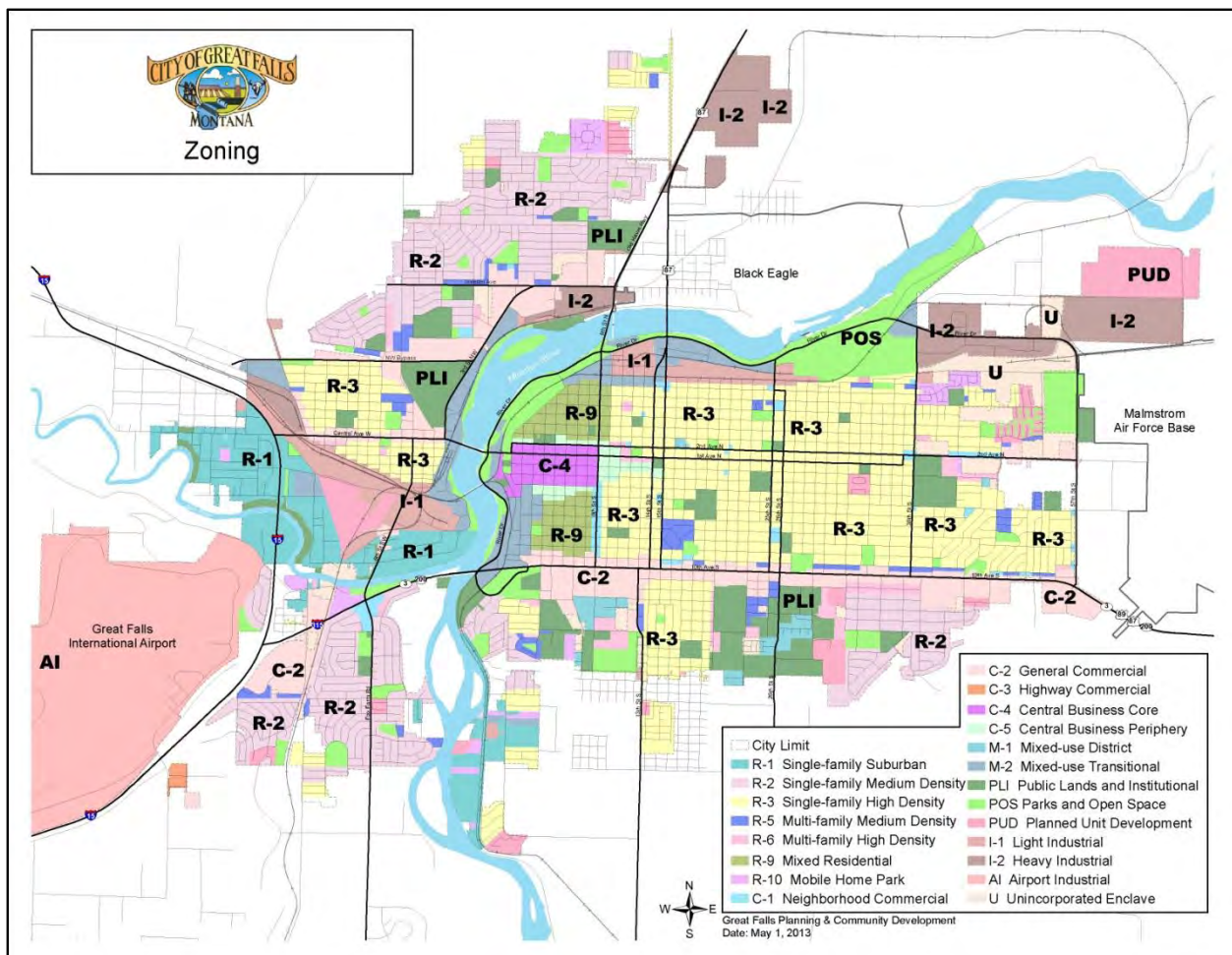
The zoning code was overhauled in 2005. From time to time, minor updates are made to these regulations. Several potential code revisions have been identified as part of this Growth Policy Update. Most of these changes relate to the strategic desire to promote infill and redevelopment and more efficient utilization of some types of lots.

One task is to review the zoning districts in which townhomes are permitted in order to expand this use either by allowing it in more zoning districts or improving the review standards so as to make it more suitable for other zoning districts. Another area of review is to evaluate whether there is sufficient Light Industrial (LI) zoning in the City to meet the needs of small businesses, contractors, tradesman and other users. Part of this review would be to develop strategies to accommodate these users if a need is identified. Also there are a number of historic commercial buildings in the City that do not have conforming zoning. Putting these buildings back to work would be beneficial in many ways. Lastly, the creation of new options for mixed-use development is consistent with the *Downtown Master Plan* and *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* visions.

Zoning by Category and Area					
Type	District	Name	Intent	Acres	
Residential	R-1	Single family suburban	Low density single family residential	737	
	R-2	Single family medium density	Moderate density single family residential	2,333	
	R-3	Single family high density	Single family detached on a 7,500 sf lot	3,012	
	R-5	Multi-family medium density	Two family residence	232	
	R-6	Multi-family high density	Townhome and multi-family	165	
	R-9	Mixed residential	Mix of single, and two family and multi-family	250	
	R-10	Mobile home park	Mobile home	157	
	Commercial	C-1	Neighborhood commercial	Commercial that is compatible with residential	107
		C-2	General commercial	High traffic commercial	1,085
		C-3	Highway commercial	Interstate oriented commercial	16
C-4		Central Business Core	High activity CBD uses	142	
C-5		Central Business Periphery	Buffer between downtown and residential	82	
Mixed-use	M-1	Mixed-use	Balance of commercial, residential, institutional and public spaces	139	
	M-2	Mixed-use transitional	Provides a transition from industrial and warehouse uses	484	
Industrial	LI	Light industrial	Allows manufacturing, storage and wholesale operations	408	
	I-2	Heavy industrial	Allows the processing of raw	405	

			materials	
	AI	Airport industrial	Airport and support uses	2,162
Other	PLI	Public lands institutional	Schools and quasi public uses	1,000
	POS	Parks and open space	Improved and undeveloped park and recreation areas	1,058
	PUD	Planned Unit Development	Context sensitive zoning district	272
Overlays		Great Falls International Airport	Address height and noise issues	2,479
		Floodplain	Chapter 56 Code requirements	417
		Southside Business Overlay	Allows flexibility in a historic commercial area	34
Accessory		Accessory Living Space	Allows accessory living space within qualifying single family structures	

Table 13



Map 20

**Compatibility**

Zoning review considers the effect of development on the public health, safety and welfare. Zoning standards can address the size of a development, the setbacks, proposed use of a property, lot coverage, and height. Zoning also promotes land use compatibility by establishing minimum standards for design and development of a proposal. The Zoning Code is a key implementing tool of the Growth Policy. The Growth Policy can, consistent with State law, provide policy support, a work plan, and interpretative direction as to future zoning needs in the City.

The Design Review Board addresses visual aspects of commercial and industrial development applications subject to 17.12.3.010. The Design Review Board makes recommendations on commercial applications. These recommendations are intended to further goals related to compatibility and neighborhood character, street activity, safety and visual aesthetics.

In response to concerns about safety and the physical appearance of signs, the City undertook revisions to the sign code by adopting Ordinance 2896 in 2005. The revisions stated that all signs and supporting structures which do not conform to the provisions of the sign code, that were constructed in compliance with previous regulations, shall be regarded as nonconforming. Nonconforming signs could remain until December 31, 2015 provided such signs are properly repaired and maintained. By December 31, 2015, all nonconforming signs are to be brought into conformance. There was a provision and a process for determining grandfathered signs.

Some have expressed concerns about the number of casinos in the City. There are 92 casinos licensed within the City of Great Falls. Ordinance 2900 adopted interim zoning prohibiting casino gambling in all zoning districts except B-3 (CBD) district and the First and Second Industrial district pending completion of the updated Land Development Code. The interim regulations also included distance criteria with respect to schools, residentially zoned property, churches, park or playground. These restrictions were carried forward in the 2005 Land Development Code update to the extent that they are now included in the C-2 and C-4 zoning districts, along with the distance, design and spacing criteria.

**Traditional Neighborhood Design**

The City is fortunate to have a number of subdivisions, neighborhoods and residences which demonstrate traditional design features. Some of these traditional design features include bungalow style homes, porches, alleys, smaller narrower lots, boulevards, side and rear garage entries, and reduced front setbacks. These features can collectively create a defined neighborhood character that is very much appreciated by those that share these attributes.

Aside from their design attributes, traditional neighborhood designs also have some functional attributes. These attributes may include accessible but less visible utilities, front yards without driveway interruptions, safe and comfortable sidewalks, and tree shaded boulevards. In addition, these neighborhoods are reputed to promote a “sense of community” by many.

Conventional development styles and codes have discouraged and reduced opportunities for this style of development. In the United States, there is an urban planning technique referred to as Neotraditional Design or New Urbanism. This movement seeks to restore traditional elements into new community design and the values embodied by this style of development. The techniques commonly used to reintroduce Neotraditional Design and New Urbanism include master site plans, form based codes, and design review.

Given the history of development in this regard, traditionally designed neighborhoods are a resource that should be conserved. Infill development should be compatible with the prevailing attributes of a neighborhood and incorporate and integrate appropriate design elements when possible. By encouraging infill development that is compatible and consistent with the existing neighborhood character, these neighborhoods can remain attractive, cohesive and distinct for residents now and in the future.

### **Downtown**

The *Downtown Master Plan* (DMP) was adopted by the Great Falls City Commission on October 18, 2011. The report analyzed the downtown in terms of four smaller sub-areas. These are the core area (what most would consider our traditional image of downtown), the Transition sub-area (surrounding the core), the Neighborhood sub-area (north and south of the core) and the Park and Riverfront sub-area (to the west).

A key recommendation of the DMP report is the creation of a TIF district, associated Urban Renewal Plan and the formation of a Downtown Development Partnership. The report also called for the expansion of residential development downtown. Today several residential projects are in various stages of planning and completion. About two thirds of the DMP recommendations are underway. The *Imagine Great Falls* planning process is intended to complement and mutually support the renewal of the City's downtown. As the core area of the City, and a vital element of business, commerce, entertainment, history and tourism, it is essential that the downtown continue its resurgence as part of the City's overall prosperity and future.

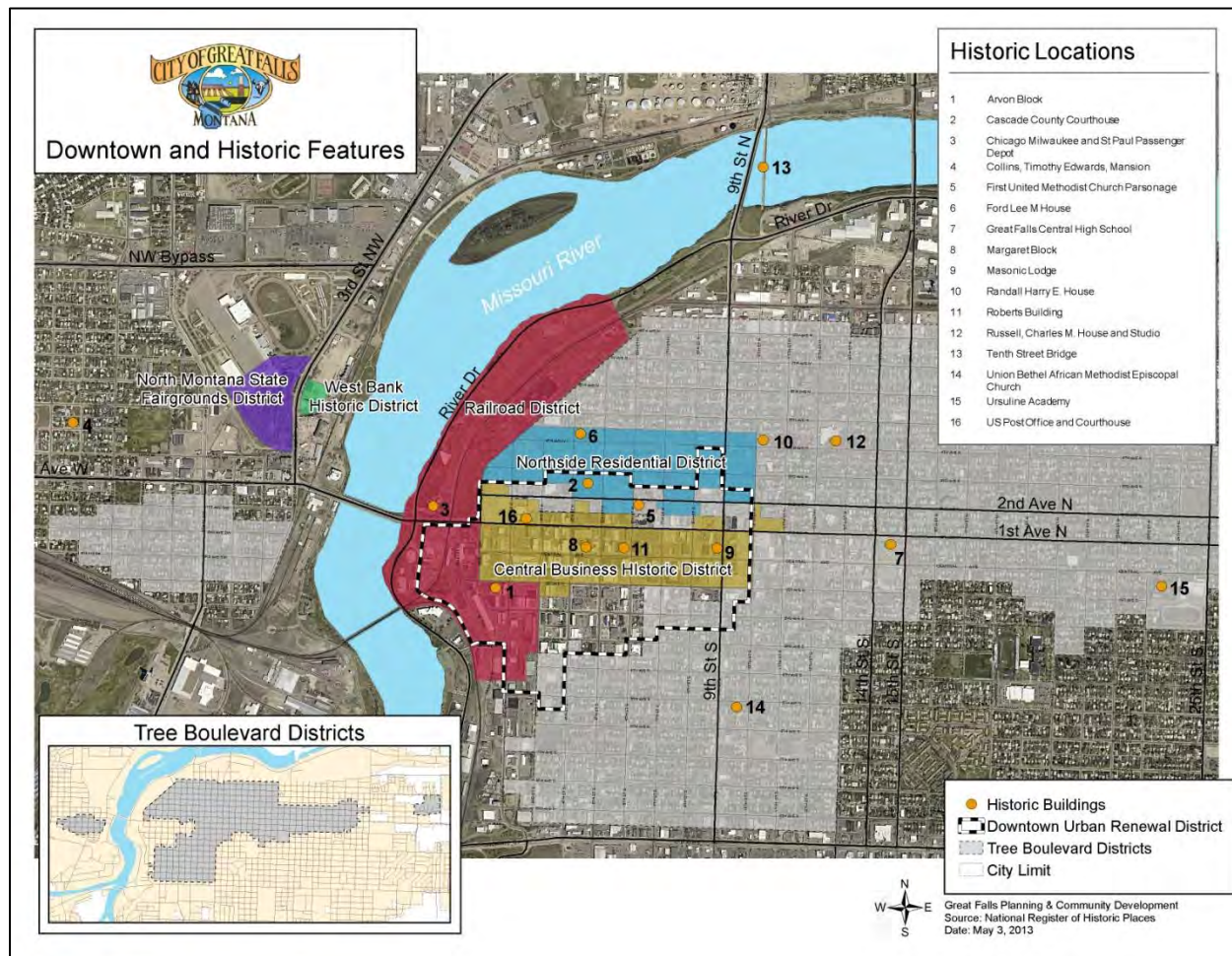
The City's downtown is a Historic District as is the adjacent Lower North Side neighborhood and the Railroad District. Potential downtown developers have shown interest in rehabilitating and repurposing historic properties by completing technical feasibility studies. Three feasibility studies were completed for the Rocky Mountain Building, the Arvon Block and the Baum-Trinastich buildings. The Baum-Trinastich project is complete. Two additional feasibility studies were undertaken for the Suhr Warehouse at 117 Park Drive and the GG Mills Building at 112 First Avenue South. The work on the new Public Drug Company Building at 324 Central Avenue is also complete and is consistent with guidelines for new construction with historic districts and contributes to the commercial character of the Great Falls Central Business Historic District. All of these projects support the goals and objectives of the newly adopted *Downtown Master Plan* and efforts should be made to continue and expand such work.

The *Downtown Access Circulation and Streetscape Plan* (2013) was a recommendation of the DMP and builds on findings contained in the original plan. According to the *Downtown Access Circulation and Streetscape Plan*, the downtown's buildings, streetscapes, parks along with the Missouri River play a primary role in articulating the City's rich culture and heritage. Well defined streets and streetscapes were discussed as providing a platform for human interaction, investment and public art. Connected bike and pedestrian networks were once again a highly valued outcome, especially between key assets such as the Missouri River, the River's Edge Trail and Gibson Park.

The *Downtown Access Circulation and Streetscape Plan* cited the importance of Gibson Park as a gateway to the river while noting that it lacks sufficient connection and access to the City's core. In addition, the 2013 Plan recognizes the investment of Pacific Steel's recent contribution, adding easement locations to River Edge Trail from their new downtown location, connecting downtown and the river. The 2013 Plan also notes the potential for even greater downtown connectivity, as well as putting forward recommendations for an enhanced public realm.



Recommended options for an enhanced public realm include bike facilities, intersection improvements, street trees and landscaping, wayfinding and other associated efforts. Map 21 illustrates Downtown and Historic related features.



Map 21

**Multimodal Mobility**

Transportation facilities and networks serve a variety of users, in addition to auto drivers. These users include transit riders, residents who no longer drive or are too young to drive, people with disabilities that prevent them from driving, residents who choose not to drive and residents who cannot afford to own and operate a vehicle.

The City is working toward implementing more bike, pedestrian and strategic trail projects and connections. These improvements are sought for the health, safety and well being of all elements of the community, from the elderly to children in strollers. These efforts are ongoing.

In the absence of a complete network, the development of a multi-modal demonstration project with a streetscape and pedestrian component would allow the City to have an opportunity to experience a multi-

modal facility. The design options included in the 2013 *Downtown Access Circulation and Streetscape Plan* is an example of a demonstration project worthy of consideration.

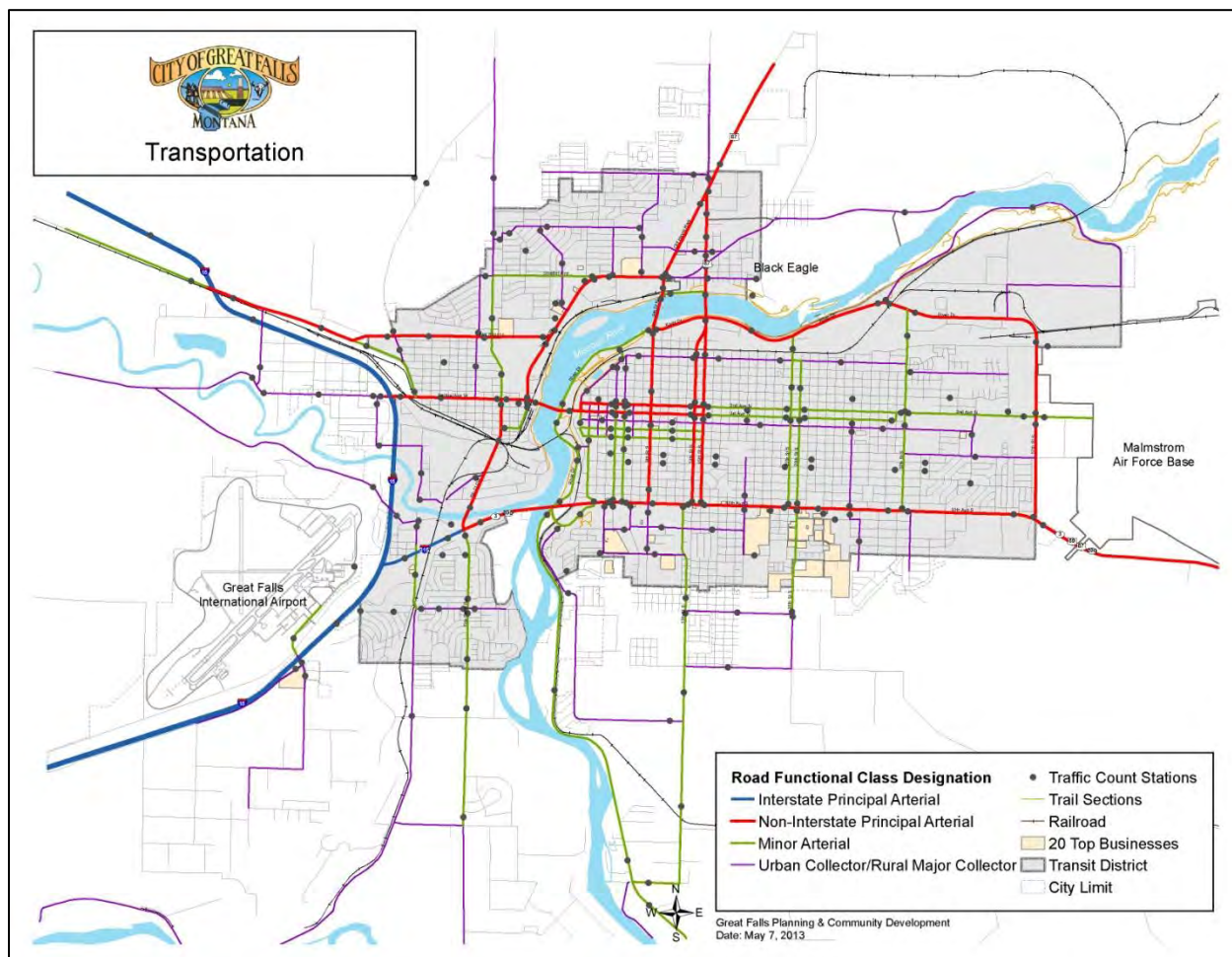
On June 29, 2012 Congress passed a new Federal Transportation Bill referred to as MAP-21. It changes the funding of pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks. The previous legislation, SAFETEA-LU contained dedicated programs including Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to Schools, and the Recreation Trails Program. All of these were commonly utilized sources of funding to make non-motorized improvements across Montana and the United States. Map-21 combines these programs into a single source called Transportation Alternatives. The full implications of this change are not known yet, but the implementation of Map-21 should be carefully followed since the City has utilized these funds in the past, and hopes to in the future.

The 2013 *Great Falls Area Transportation Update* will make recommendations on further steps to enhance mobility and maintenance improvements in the City. It is anticipated that this update will make recommendations to include the Map-21 changes.

Map 22 depicts the City's roads by classifications, and the location of other transportation-related information.

### *Great Falls Transit and Transportation*

The Great Falls Transit District operates seven bus routes Monday through Saturday. Great Falls Transit has been operating since 1982, offering to residents' primary, secondary and back-up transportation options. This option provides invaluable connections to people with disabilities and special needs or restrictions. It also facilitates employment by stopping at key activity centers and job support facilities. In addition, the Transit system helps reduce congestion, emissions, and the number of cars on the roads in a safe and professional manner.



Map 22

*Air Transportation*

The Great Falls International Airport (GFIA) serves as the primary commercial airport for north central Montana. GFIA is operated by an independent Airport Authority Board. The airport owns approximately 1,000 acres on Gore Hill at the western edge of Great Falls. Some of this land is also used for other activities, including the Montana Air National Guard 120<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group.

The airport has three functional runways, the longest of which is 10,502 feet long and 150 feet wide. For the 12-month period ending March 31, 2011, the airport had 41,591 aircraft operations, an average of 113 per day. Fifty two percent were general aviation, 12% were scheduled commercial and 11% were military related. At that time there were 108 aircraft based at this airport, including 61% single-engine, 17% military, 11.1% multi-engine, 8% helicopter, and 3% jet.

GFIA is served by five commercial airlines, including Allegiant Air, Delta Airlines, Frontier Airlines, Horizon Air and United Airlines, and is also used for general aviation, air taxi and military aircraft operations. The airport has a cargo sort facility, charter services, a helicopter training academy, and medical transport capabilities.

The airport has a separate International Arrivals Terminal for transcontinental processing and a designated Foreign Trade Zone. The GFIA serves both residents and tourists as a regional gateway for

tourism to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. Airline passenger traffic was up 10% in 2012. The airport is a major economic development asset in the city.

### *Railroads*

Rail service is still used to transport freight supplies. Agricultural products are the main transport of freight cars. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway is the primary operator in Great Falls for the transport of goods by rail. BNSF has a major rail yard in the City of Great Falls.

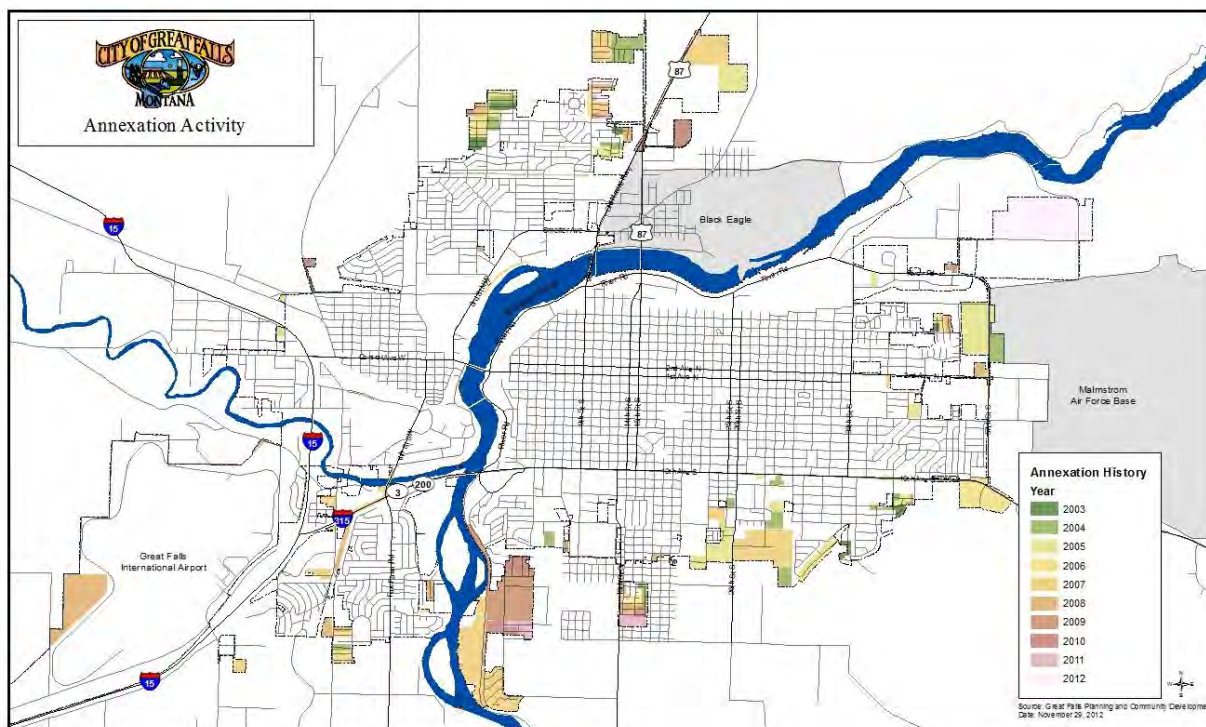
**Growth Trends**

**Annexation**

The City has expanded its jurisdictional boundaries geographically over time. About three quarters of recent growth during the last decade is a result of applications for development and individual annexation petitions. Staff reviewed the annexation trend for the last ten years. As can be seen on Table 14 and Map 23, the number of applications was highest during 2007, dipping to its lowest number of applications in 2010. Overall, annexations into the City of Great Falls tend to be somewhat clustered and can be found in the north by Skyline Drive, by Benefis East, Fox Farm Rd., the east end and several small locations. Newer areas to the City tend to be built at a lesser density than older portions of the City. Over time these disparities may lessen.

Year	Annexations Approved	Acres
2003	8	41
2004	16	168
2005	16	231
2006	19	176
2007	29	463
2008	20	204
2009	9	141
2010	5	82
2011	7	40
2012	10	215

Table 14



Map 23

### Annexation Subdivision and Infrastructure Costs

The infrastructure costs of new development are an important consideration for any project. These costs are particularly critical when new infrastructure must be introduced or extended to allow annexing property into the City limits. Most of the City's new subdivisions, in recent times, are a result of voluntary annexation. All property annexing into the City must meet City codes, as specified in the applicable annexation agreement. Infill development, in many instances, can avoid some of these costs. None of these development costs described in the following include the relevant application fees involved.

One such fee includes the dedication of parkland, or fee in lieu of if the development is residential. Park land dedication via plat or a fee in lieu of dedication must be conveyed to the City's Park Fund. For example, a 15 acre residential subdivision, proposed for annexation, could pay a \$25,000 fee in lieu of dedication.

In addition, new development must address storm sewer. A city storm sewer fee costs \$250 per gross acre. In addition, new development may be responsible for the possible reimbursement (where applicable) of prior contributors for installation of existing facilities such as sewer, water, paving, etc. which may vary depending on location. In terms of water service, it may be necessary to install and pay for necessary 8" main and appurtenances at approximately \$60 per lineal foot, with the owner ultimately only expected to pay proportionate share depending upon the parcel and ownership of surrounding property. In addition, owners, or future owners, are responsible for installing the service line from the building to the main, and any necessary tapping and connection fees.

As for sanitary sewer, once again it may be necessary to install and pay for necessary 8” main and appurtenances at approximately \$60 per lineal foot, with the owner ultimately only expected to pay proportionate share depending upon the parcel and ownership of surrounding property. In addition, owners, or future owners are responsible for installing the service line from the building to the main, and any required tapping and connection fees.

Other public improvement costs associated with new development include curb and gutter installation for property fronting upon public roadway at approximately \$14 per lineal foot. Five foot wide sidewalks adjacent to the property, at approximately \$4.75 per sq. ft., also must be installed.

With respect to the paving of new streets, the installation of sub-grade preparations and pavement for public roadway adjacent to the property is required at approximately \$28 per sq. yd. or \$96 per lineal foot, with the owner(s) once again ultimately only expected to pay proportionate share depending upon the parcel and ownership of surrounding property.

On-site property improvements and construction costs can also factor in depending on the size of the project, site conditions, and material, labor and equipment costs at the time of construction. Engineering design, testing and inspection are normally 15% to 20% of total improvement costs. Other potential costs include storm drainage improvements, wastewater lift stations and traffic control improvements.

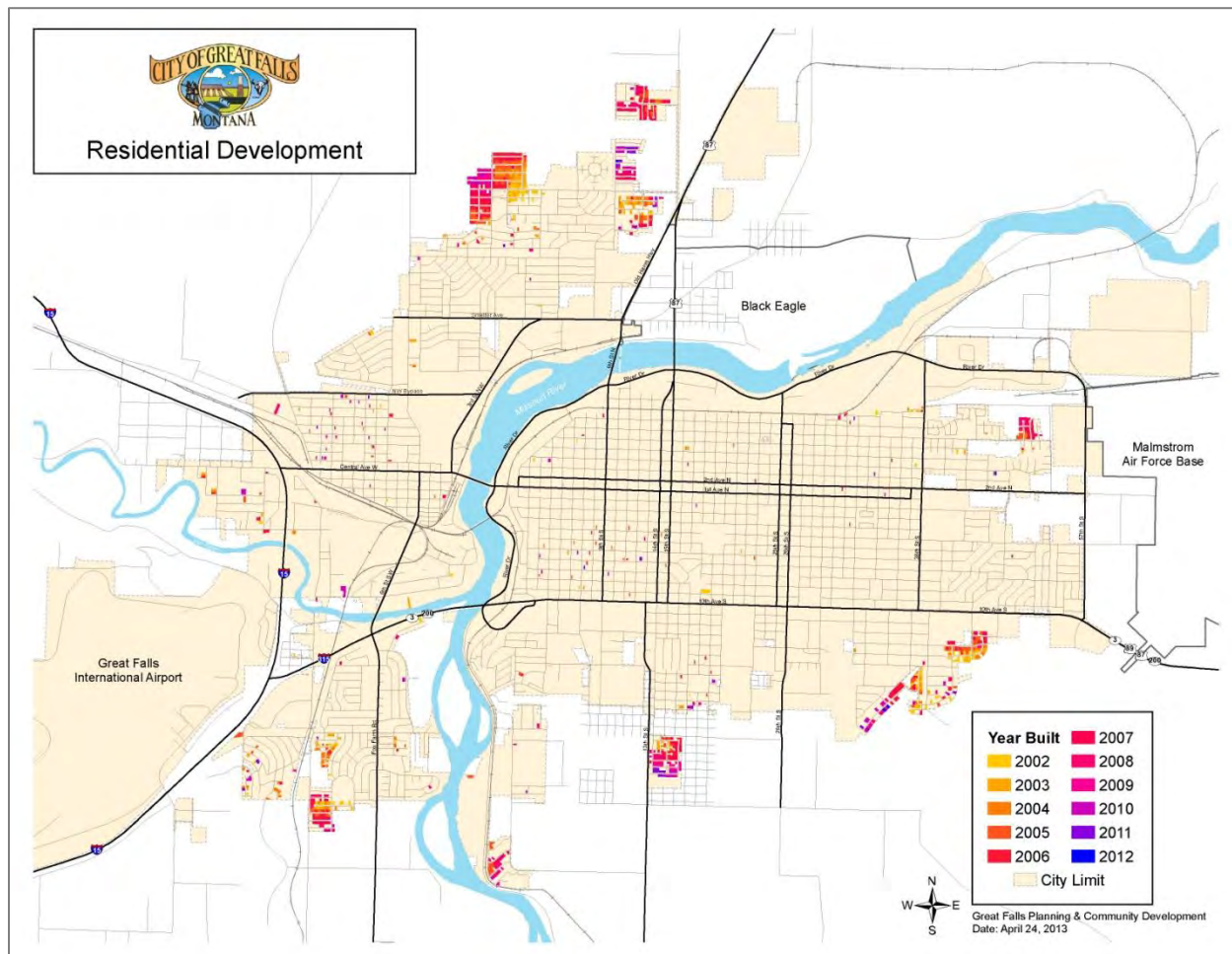
### **Residential development trends – City and County**

Department of Revenue 2010 data show that approximately 1,200 residential units of all types have been built in the City during the last ten years. During the same timeframe, 600 County residential units have been built within proximity to the City. An evaluation of this rate of residential growth is important to note because it does not appear to indicate a disproportionate amount of residential development occurring in the County as opposed to the City, or any sort of clear trend toward avoiding the City’s more stringent regulation requirements.

### **Development Pattern – City and County**

County zoning encircles the City’s jurisdictional boundary. Cascade County is not a provider of water and wastewater service nor does it accept the ownership of new roads and streets. Those in the County seeking urban development or services typically request annexation into the City; otherwise most County residential development is confined to larger lot development than required to develop in the City in order to accommodate wells, septic tanks and drain fields in accordance with size requirements and health safety standards. The County has a zoning district referred to as Urban Residential (UR). This small-lot zoning district (7,500 square feet) is intended, in part, to offer an option for older subdivision lots to develop by aggregating parcels or by annexing into the City.

In some instances, the development pattern of County subdivisions within proximity to the City is a factor in determining the City’s future growth. Overall there are 160 County subdivisions within a two mile periphery of the City. A number of these predate or were exempt from modern subdivision standards. These areas can oftentimes develop more slowly and differently from today’s typical subdivisions. For example, development in Castle Pines, Sexton Park or Finley’s Supplement to the south of the City has been intermittent and incremental. Map 24 depicts residential growth in the City and County for the last ten years.



Map 24

**Infrastructure Challenges**

Generally new subdivisions construct their own streets, and the cost is borne by the developer and passed on the buyers of the lots. Individual properties annexing are responsible for road improvements in front of their property, but it may be deferred until a larger improvement project comes forward. There is an economy in scale – the more properties involved, the lower the cost paid by each individual owner.

When development is of an individual or piecemeal nature, the costs to upgrade to City standards or retrofit an existing area can be prohibitive. Examples of differing standards that create this expense include water and sewer hook-ups, sidewalks, paved roads, and curb and gutter. Cost estimates for infrastructure improvements needed to bring lots up to City standards have ranged from \$20,000 to \$40,000 per lot.

Furthermore, hook-ups are not always optional even if an individual wishes to remain in the County. If new development, or a failed system, is within 200 feet of a State approved public collection and treatment system, it is mandatory for the property owner to connect to that system per the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 17.36.914.



There may be more of these challenges in the future. The State has upgraded its wastewater treatment system code over time, making septic tank replacement more challenging in some instances. When a septic tank fails, there are instances when a replacement tank cannot meet current standards or the existing soils are proven to be less than desirable for a replacement septic tank. These standards include size, separation, spacing, and setback requirements (such as the 100 foot setback from wells).

Individuals, residents, neighborhoods or portions of neighborhoods vary in their interest, willingness and ability to pay for City services and annex. Such locations may already contain existing development built to County standards. Lots and streets would need to be upgraded (to meet City standards) if brought into the City. It is difficult to obtain agreement as a “neighborhood” when some residents cannot afford the upgrade or simply have no interest in annexing into the City.

### **Infrastructure Solutions**

Some cities have addressed these conflicting areas with infrastructure studies, financing and incentives. They have taken this action based on the judgment that some sort of outside help is necessary. Cities have used bonding, grants, incentives for water and sewer hook-ups, joint development standards, expedited or streamlined processes, TIFs, and Special Improvement Districts (SIDs) to resolve issues related to annexing neighborhoods that do not meet City standards.

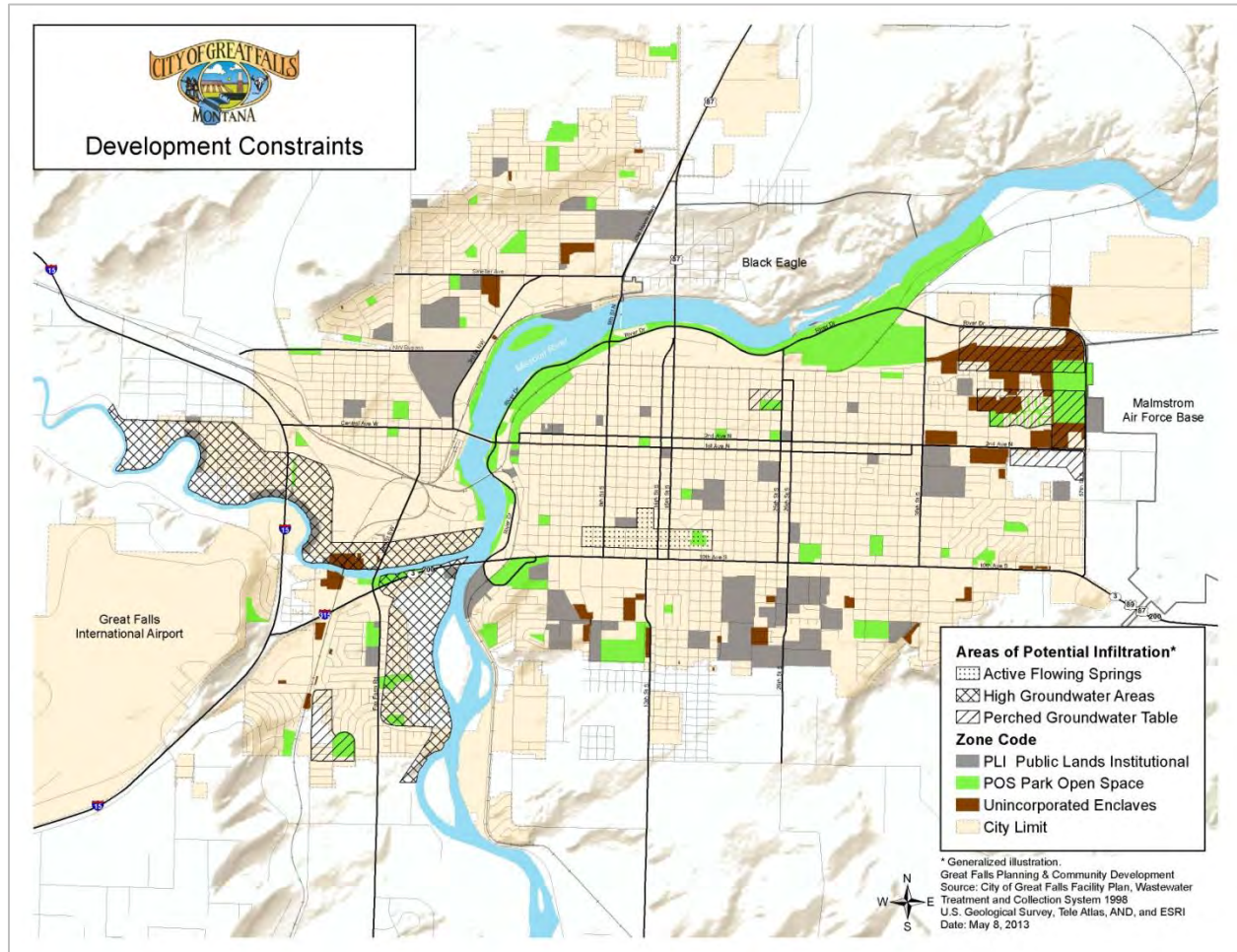
Special Improvement Districts (SIDs) are an infrastructure financing tool allowed by the State of Montana. The City has not found support for use of a SID since 1998. City street assessments pay for street maintenance city-wide, as it is a city-wide street maintenance district. It does not pay for road upgrades. Annexed properties are responsible for improvements to the roadway. In terms of Tax Increment Finance Districts, residential TIFs do not generate enough increment to fund street improvements. Instead they need to include commercial or industrial land uses to generate enough increment to fund improvements.

The City’s Revolving Loan Fund for Water and Sewer improvements can be used for qualifying residents, to help with sewer hook-up and improvements. This program provides financial assistance to income qualifying single family homeowners for water and sewer loans. The interest rate currently is 3%, and in some cases, this can be deferred, such as in the case of hardship conditions for the handicapped, elderly and those on low income(s).

Also there is a hardship provision allowed to an individual under special circumstances. A proposed connection can be deemed "economically impractical" if the cost of connection to the public system equals or exceeds three times the cost of installation of an approvable system on the site. The owner is responsible for the documentation necessary to waive the connection requirements. (ARM 17.36.914)

The City-County Planning Board was dissolved in 2005. Given the aforementioned issues, it may be prudent for the City and the County to develop a formal mechanism or study in the future to address planning and infrastructure issues within the locations impacted by conflicting development standards and infrastructure issues. This coordinating mechanism should also evaluate the need for joint development standards within a certain distance of the City’s boundary. Map 29 illustrates locations where the existence of County subdivisions and zoning are anticipated to influence City expansion in the future. These locations are within the City’s 20-year transportation planning study area.

Development Constraints

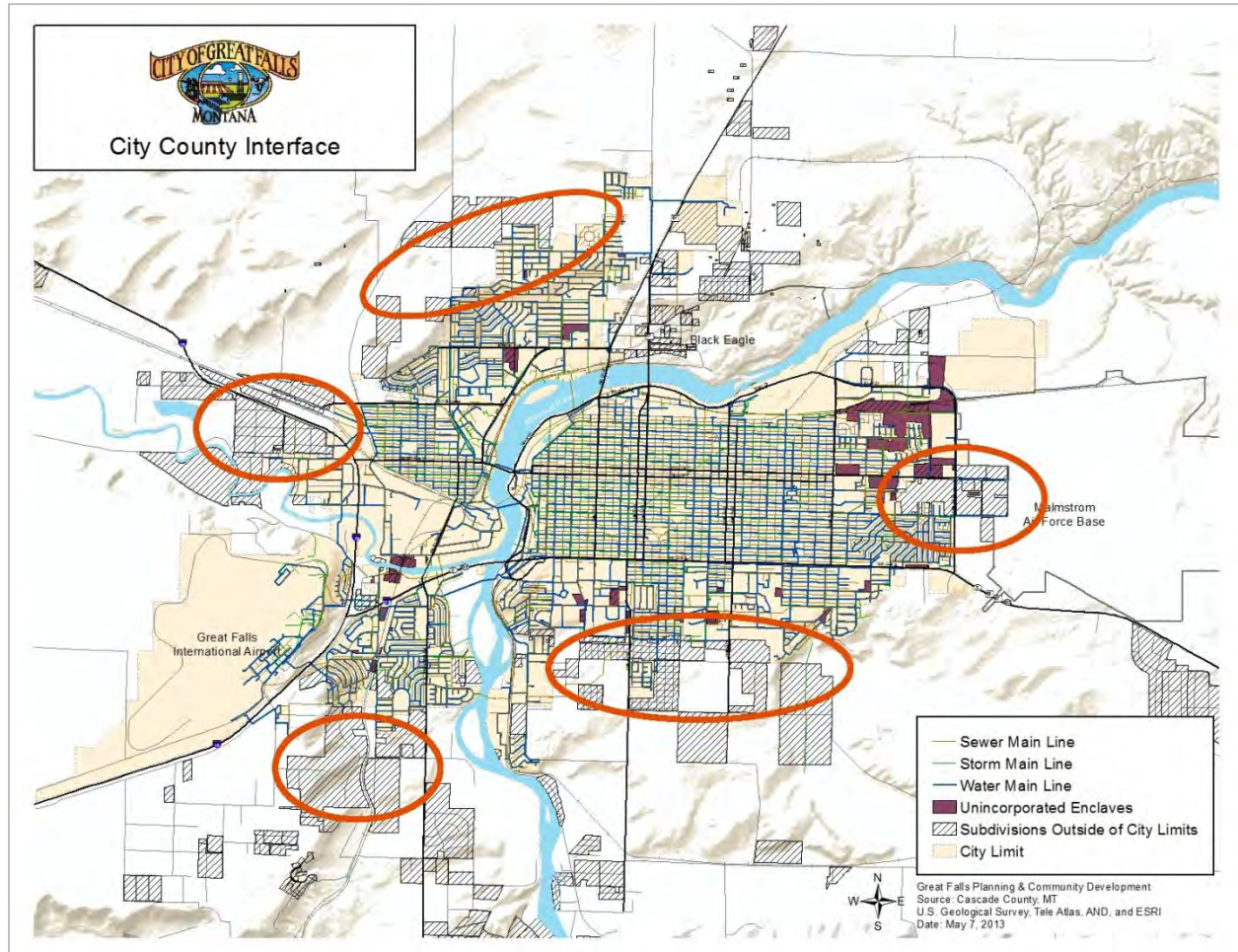


Map 24

Similar to most locations, the City has some development constraints or factors that require additional consideration. One aspect worthy of note is the City’s topography. As the map above shows, the City is located at the confluence of two rivers, and is somewhat encircled by elevation. In addition, a small portion of the City is in the floodplain, requiring additional safeguards for development. Further, there are several areas of the City with high water tables or drainage issues.

Also noted on the map are the lands that are designated Public Lands and Institutional and Parks and Open Space. These lands are not likely to redevelop. Lastly this map denotes the 34 County enclave areas within the City limits. These enclaves are shown in dark brown.

City and County Interface



County zoning can influence future development. Map 25 illustrates County zoning. Most of the County's zoning is for large lots in order to support rural lifestyles, and provide adequate space for wells and septic systems. However, Cascade County has several small lot zoning categories to encourage property owners to annex into the City if they wish to acquire City services.

Map 25 above identifies areas with potentially differing development choices. It is anticipated that development in the circled areas above will be somewhat slow and incremental for the short term future. It is in these locations where individual property owners may choose to annex on a case by case basis.

**Population Projection**

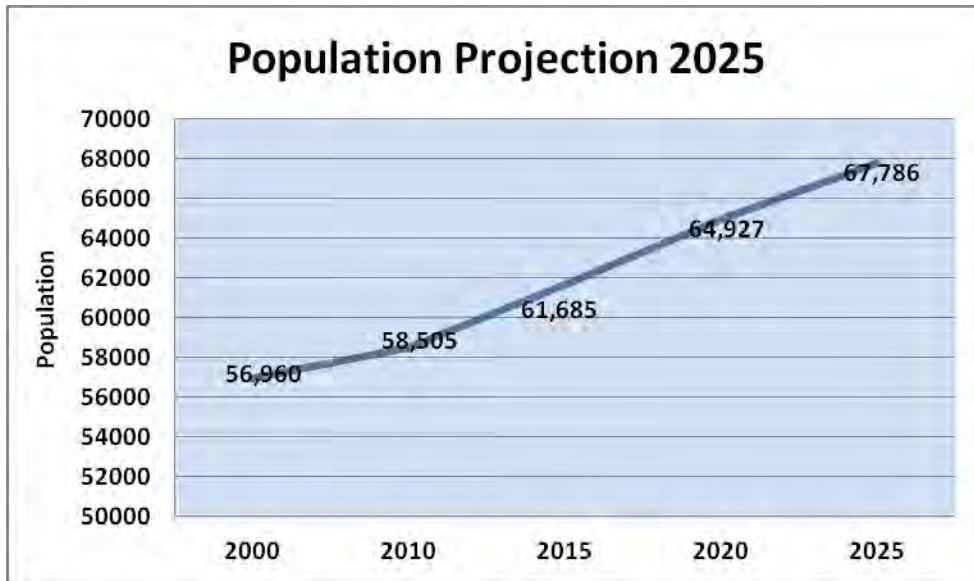
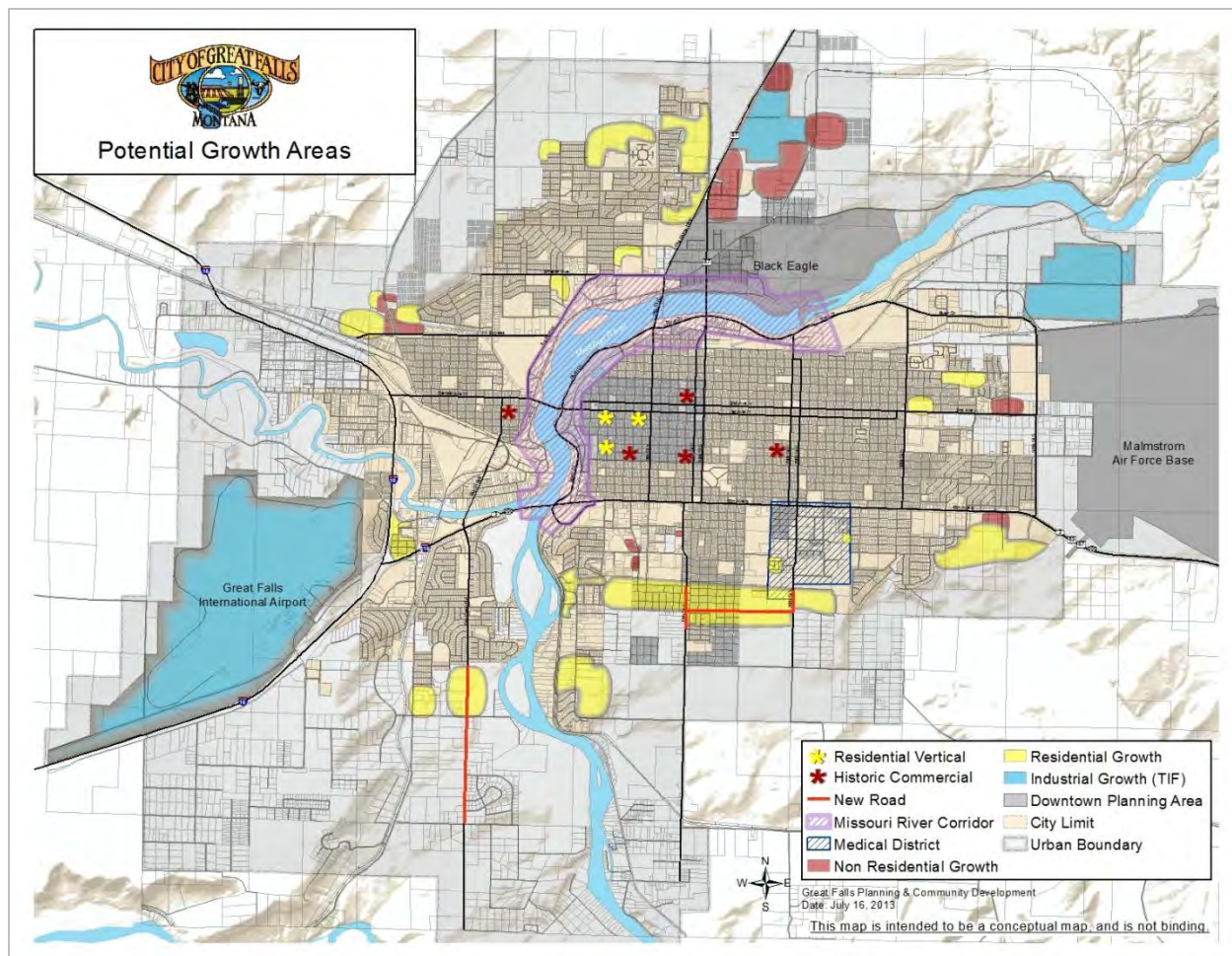


Exhibit 2

As can be seen by Exhibit 2, it is anticipated the City will continue to maintain a positive growth rate into the near future and throughout the planning horizon. This projection is based on the eREMI projections conducted for the State of Montana, as compiled by the Census and Economic Information Center at the Department of Commerce. As the central hub of the region and County, it is assumed that the City will maintain a 72% share of the future population of Cascade County.

Map 27 indicates that the City can accommodate this growth from a land use perspective if current trends continue. The City will also need to monitor and update its Water and Wastewater Master Plans accordingly. A positive growth rate will support continued economic growth and maintain a sustainable development pattern in the City.

Potential Growth Areas



Map 27

The map above illustrates logical areas for future development based on the existing infrastructure and development pattern. In addition, the Map 27 illustrates two road projects that are currently in the *Transportation Improvement Plan*. This map also shows the three industrial Tax Increment Finance Districts in the City. Anticipated residential development is shown in yellow. Possible mixed-use areas as well as other potential non residential development areas are shown in red. The *Downtown Master Plan*, *Medical District* and the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* boundaries are also highlighted. These planning areas have the potential to maximize their location-related advantages by developing more mixed-use projects along with residential development. The downtown is especially ready to support increased vertical residential development, through the restoration and repurposing of lofts, upper floors and other opportunities.

This map is conceptual and non binding and is intended as a snapshot of what may occur. The map is based on the current conditions and assumptions, and what we know today.

### Strategic Future Issues

The City's geographic growth, at this time, is largely defined by small, incremental annexations. These annexations include annexation agreements, zoning, and oftentimes subdivisions. All property owners of annexed properties must agree to and demonstrate the ability to meet the City's development standards and other requirements. Public facility extensions are reviewed as part of this application process, and agreements regarding costs and timing are determined at that time. These improvements may be costly and are borne by the property owner or developer.

There are many other ways to develop in the City that do not require these types of costly improvements. Some costly improvements can be avoided by building in areas with existing infrastructure and capacity, or in locations where it is much more readily available. The City has a number of vacant residential and commercial lots which do not require annexation. In addition, there are a number of areas of the City that have the additional development capacity; that is, they are not being utilized to their full potential. Many downtown buildings have upper floors that are not being utilized, or that could be converted and utilized to residential use. Continued redevelopment, and mixed-use development along the Missouri River, as envisioned in the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*, offers a tremendous opportunity to the City. The remediation of brownfields can offer new and different adaptive reuse opportunities. Lastly, there are a number of County enclaves within the City limits that could, in some instances, create new opportunities for City development or redevelopment. Enclaves can result in unclear, inefficient and irregular City boundaries that once again can be problematic to service providers.

The existing Water and Wastewater Master Facility Plans indicate that the City has planned for adequate population growth within its existing service area, although actual population growth with respect to capacity must still be monitored in the future. Capacity could still shift if a large industrial user became part of the system. If this occurred, it may become necessary for that user to pre-treat its discharge.

Given the costs of development that grows outward, contrasted with the redevelopment opportunities that exist within the City's existing boundary, this Growth Policy Update encourages, emphasizes and calls for the evaluation of infill and redevelopment opportunities within the City, as well as other strategies.

## Key Implementation Strategies

This Growth Policy Update includes the continuation of those existing policies determined to be still relevant, as well as a fresh look at new options. In addition, seven policies are highlighted as strategic opportunities for the future.

These seven strategies are:

- Encourage the Development of Underutilized or Vacant Lands and Enclaves
- Maintain a Commitment to the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*
- Fulfill the *Downtown Vision*
- Continue to Support Code Changes and Incentives to Promote Historic Commercial, Mixed-Use and Infill
- Evaluate Design Principles that Encourage a “Healthy Built Environment”
- Pursue Demonstration Projects in the City
- Maintain a Good Business Climate of the City

## Encourage the Development of Underutilized or Vacant Land and Enclaves

### *Commercial and Residential Vacant Lots*

Vacant lots are good candidates for infill development. Not all of these lots are immediately available for development; however, these lots do represent future opportunities for infill development in the City. These lots generally have access to existing infrastructure, as opposed to the development of new public facilities. In some cases, these lots may be considered “brownfields” in that they may require environmental studies to clean-up hazardous conditions on-site. A total of 14% of the City’s existing land use is vacant, consisting of about 1,500 acres. This acreage is comprised of 1,144 residential lots totaling 293 acres and 4,465 commercial lots totaling 1,239 acres. Maps 26 and 27 depict vacant residential and commercial lots in the City.

### *Enclaves*

“Enclaves” are areas still within Cascade County that are completely surrounded or encircled by the City. There are 34 enclaves totaling 405 acres in the City. These enclaves are shown on Map 25.

Enclaves create service delivery issues for City providers. Oftentimes residents can be confused by properties within their neighborhoods that, although appearing to be within the City, are actually subject to a different set of regulations. Nationwide enclaves are generally discouraged and prohibited in many governmental jurisdictions. Further, the existence of enclaves is difficult to justify in times of fiscal scarcity since they have access to the infrastructure that City residents must pay for. Some enclaves may contain limited development or be vacant.

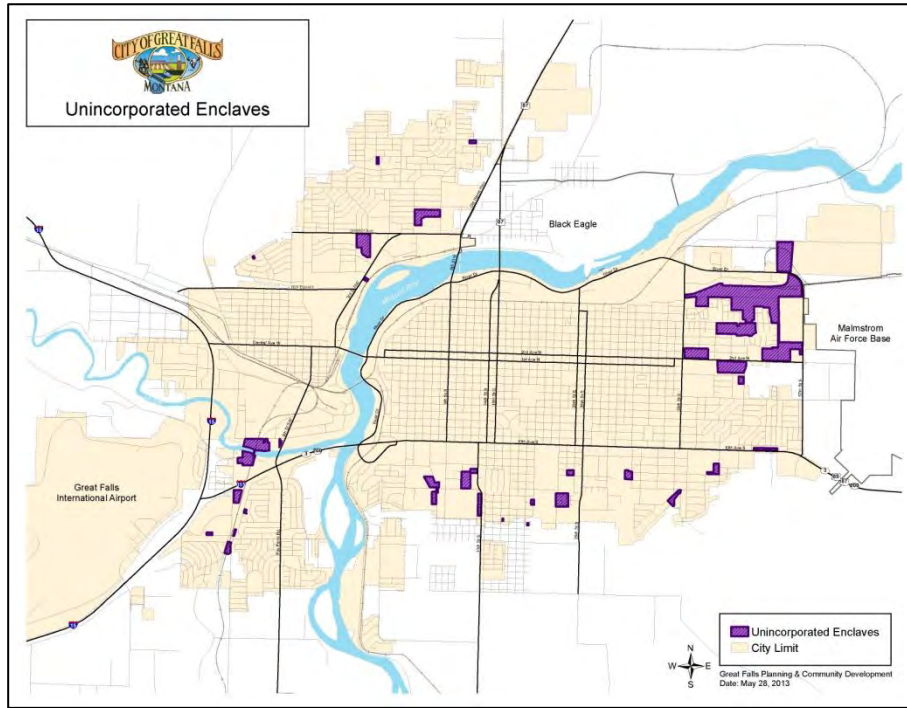
By virtue of their inner municipal boundary locations, enclaves may be candidates for annexation per Montana’s Code Annotated. Traditionally, the City has chosen not to exercise this option. The City should study these enclaves and evaluate their status. The *Imagine Great Falls* planning process is recommending that the City take a phased approach in terms of determining the status of these enclaves and the City’s needs.

### *Brownfields*

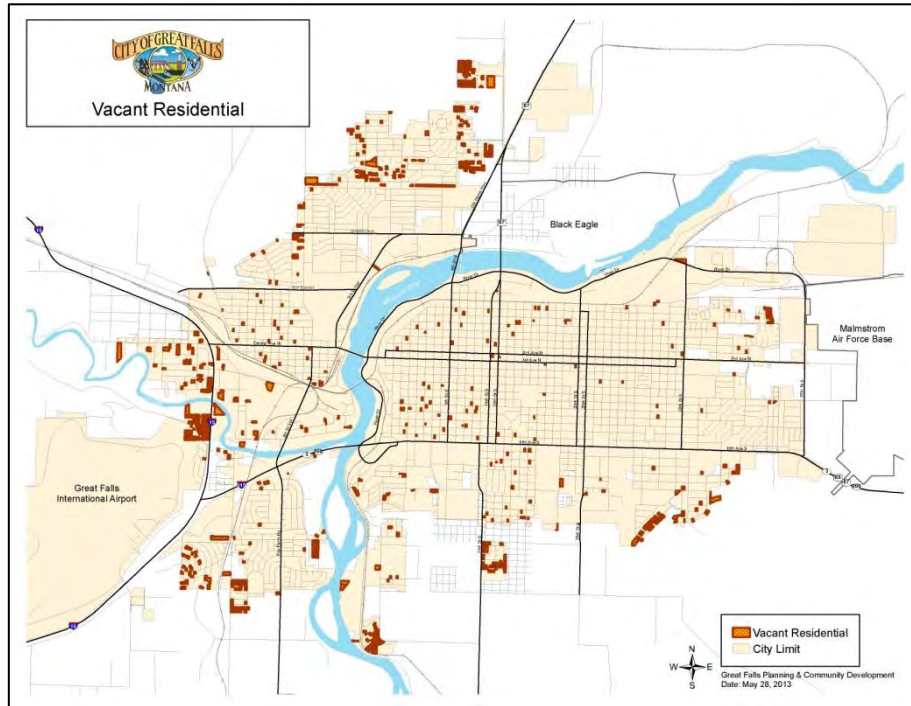
Brownfield redevelopment represents new opportunities for growth in the City. These locations, many of which are tied to early industry, typically have access to infrastructure and other facilities. These properties could be leveraged as new development opportunities within the City’s boundaries. In addition, the clean-up of one property may be a catalyst to revitalizing an area or other nearby parcels suffering from under utilization. The development of brownfield can yield great dividends to the City. Furthermore, there is financial help for the redeployment of these underutilized parcels. The Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund offers loans and gap assistance to qualifying owners of brownfield properties.

Reducing unnecessary code requirements and expediting brownfield projects can create more infill opportunities in the City. Brownfields are depicted on Map 14, as shown in the Environmental Section of this report. Policy Env2.3 states that brownfield projects should receive expedited local review.

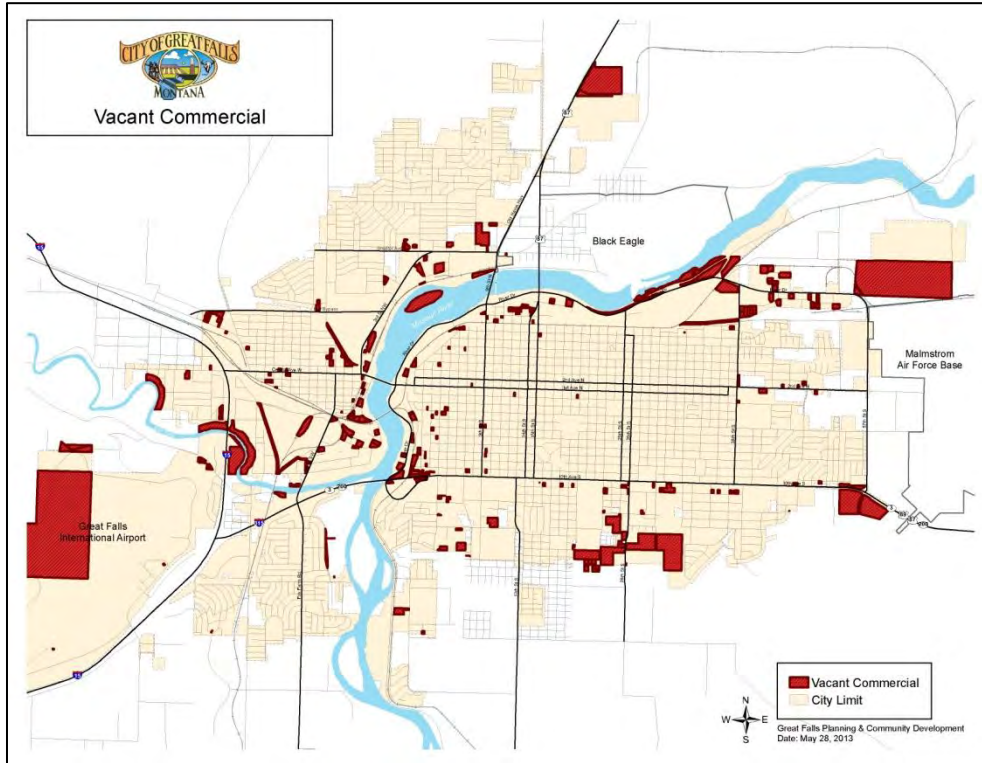




Map 28



Map 29



## **Maintain a Commitment to the Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan**

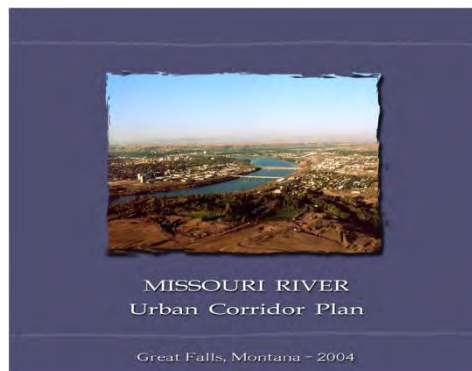
Perhaps the most unifying asset in the City is the esteem residents feel toward the Missouri River and the River's Edge Trail. The river is part of the City's history, character and future vision. Residents value this highly regarded jewel, and many rank it as the number one asset in the City. The City of Great Falls had the foresight and the commitment to recognize the river's role in this community in 2004 when it adopted the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*.

Some residents feel there is work yet to be done. These issues include water quality concerns, public access, and better use of the riverfront as a public amenity and for mixed- use development, riverbank stabilization, etc. The *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* was adopted as the long-term vision for the lands adjoin the river. Therefore it is important that this Growth Policy Update reaffirm the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* as part of its vision.

The Plan calls for the riverfront to be fully reclaimed as an asset for recreational, environmental, commercial development and the expansion of downtown. Part of this vision includes the desire for more mixed-use and housing development, views, access and public open space. In essence, it seeks a new and different role for the river's contribution to the City and is steadfast in belief in its vitality.

The *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* is the tool crafted to guide future development and redevelopment of the riverfront. The plan is bold yet humble. The plan is bold calling for a series of strategies for a more sustainable future for the river, but it is humble in tone in that it acknowledges it may take years and decades for this outcome to be achieved. Given the commitment the City's residents have demonstrated for the work done on the Plan, it is important that this Growth Policy Update reaffirm this work and its relevance today.

The West Bank redevelopment area is a step toward fulfilling the vision of the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*. This work includes the creation of a Tax Increment Finance District, the *West Bank Park Master Plan*, *West Bank Urban Renewal Plan* and West Bank Historic District. If the commitment for the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* is maintained, these projects can continue and flourish.



## Fulfill the Downtown Vision

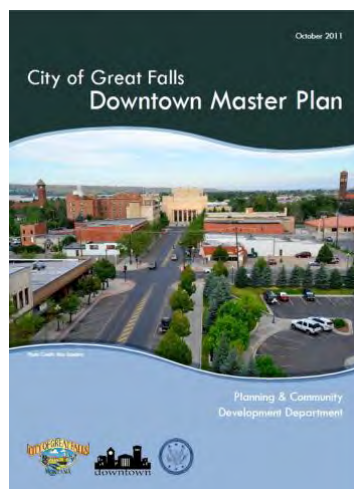
The *Downtown Master Plan* (DMP) was adopted by the Great Falls City Commission on October 18, 2011. The report analyzes the City's downtown in terms of four smaller sub-areas. These are the core area (what most would consider our traditional image of downtown), the Transition sub-area (to the south), the Neighborhood sub-area (to the north) and the Park and Riverfront sub-area (to the west).

A key recommendation of the report is the creation of a TIF district and associated Urban Renewal Plan as well as the formation of a Downtown Development Partnership. These recommendations have already been implemented and almost two thirds of the Plan's action items are underway.

The *Imagine Great Falls* planning process is intended to compliment and mutually support the renewal of the City's downtown. As the core area of the City, and a vital element of business, commerce, entertainment, history and tourism, it is essential that the downtown continue its resurgence as part of the City's overall prosperity and future.

Infill opportunities also exist in the City's downtown area. Downtown Living is Goal 4 of the adopted *Downtown Master Plan*. The report states "a strong and robust downtown residential population is critical to the overall health and vitality of the area." These options typically involve reusing existing buildings as well as infill construction of vacant or underutilized properties. In addition, there are opportunities to create more vertical residential mixed-use opportunities downtown.

There are other ways to measure progress downtown. The continued development of residential units in the downtown is a key indicator of progress. The *Downtown Access Circulation and Streetscape Plan (2013)* offers specific design options for bicycle facilities, streetscape, intersection improvements and wayfinding. In addition, the development and implementation of a multimodal demonstration project, with a streetscape component, would help to invigorate aspects of downtown. Continued historic renovations as well as outreach to the City's campuses and the Malmstrom Air Force Base may be key steps toward enhancing the vitality of downtown.



## **Continue to Support Code Changes and Incentives to Promote Historic Commercial, Mixed-Use and Infill**

Communities that are mixed-use offer a mix of housing, civic and commercial uses, including retail, restaurants and offices. Mixed-use allows community residents to work closer to where they live, thus increasing their activity and time for recreation and social connections. Infill development encourages development of vacant or underutilized lots that have been passed over. Most infill areas are located where services like police and fire, schools and paved roads exist.



Historic commercial, mixed-use and infill development have many positive benefits to the City. As a result of more density, infill development can elevate the sense of vitality and safety in the neighborhood. Infill development also allows for the more efficient use of existing infrastructure as opposed to installing new facilities. Compact communities, including a mix of uses within close proximity to each other, encourage residents to walk by clustering destinations closer together. They also can create environments where more residents can “age in place.”

To further promote infill opportunities, the City of Great Falls adopted zoning changes in 2012 to redefine accessory living space and expand the use of accessory living space to all the residential zoning categories. This change helps to address the community desire for additional living space and national trends toward multi-generational family households.

The Planning and Community Development Department is studying ways to expand the reinstatement of commercial uses in historic commercial buildings in the City. These buildings were former neighborhood commercial and mixed-use structures located in older areas of the City that were not fully addressed in the 2005 code update. A number of these structures have lost their legal non-conforming status as a result of vacancies. During the outreach process, there appeared to be general support for the reintroduction of historic commercial uses into existing structures in the City; however, it was suggested that staff confer with the neighborhood councils on specific locations and also be aware that such uses should not compete or preempt the work being done to reinvigorate downtown. A caution was expressed concerning the conversion of single-family homes into commercial businesses.

Infill opportunities can also be created by considering options to allow options for greater density to lots in the core areas of the City. For example, it may not be necessary to have duplexes be a conditional use in the R-3 and R-6 districts. The City can also review reducing unnecessary code requirements to create more infill opportunities. One way to do this might be to evaluate the City’s zoning requirements for townhomes. In addition, the City can review its PUD zoning district to achieve more diverse and creative housing and mixed-use options in the future.

Neighborhood commercial, diverse housing options, infill, projects for special populations, and safe and accessible neighborhoods were generally recognized as ways to encourage and promote future historic commercial, infill, mixed-use development opportunities in the City.

## Evaluate Design Principles to Encourage Healthy Living

Increasingly there is also a desire to create healthier and safer neighborhoods where residents have more opportunities to be physically active and connected and have access to wholesome foods. Such principles can include a menu of health conscious options that offer pathways to improve the overall health of a community. Design options to promote a healthy community may include:

- Offering housing opportunities that can fulfill different needs, lifestyles, and affordability
- Encouraging well developed streets that promote investment, development and human interaction
- Encouraging social connectivity in neighborhood design and lay-out
- Promoting low impact development techniques so that stormwater is treated as a resource
- Creating safe and comfortable streets and sidewalks to promote physical activity
- Increased access to healthy food, such as community gardens and farmer's markets
- Encourage alternative transportation options, including transit, biking and walking to reduce the impacts of traffic and pollutants
- Encouraging open areas, parks and green spaces
- Supporting mixed land use and densities that supports connections between uses
- Considering the accessibility and equity needs of residents
- Encouraging pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, including sidewalks and bike paths to allow for the safe travel of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit and auto user

The City of Great Falls already has many attributes that are consistent with the goals of encouraging a healthier community through design. These attributes should be encouraged and enhanced. For example, the City has a compact core, downtown and grid. Traditional grids promote mobility and travel choice, disperse traffic, and lessen congestion. In addition, new community gardens have generated local food opportunities. The City's sidewalks, trails and bike infrastructure support activity. The City's many local parks give residents an opportunity for exercise.

Some neighborhoods already have positive physical attributes helpful to promoting individual and community health, such as shorter blocks and access to a grid to encourage pedestrians to walk. Conversely neighborhoods isolated by arterials, traffic, limited access, and difficult intersections create challenges and even dangers for pedestrians. A walkable neighborhood means residents can easily walk or bicycle from home to places they need to go, such as schools, shops and work places. Easier and safer access to walking, biking and transit reduces the number of cars, lessens air pollution, and improves air quality and respiratory function. Some studies indicate that people living in highly walkable, mixed-use communities are more than twice as likely to get 30 minutes of daily exercise as someone living in an auto dependent neighborhood and pedestrian accidents are 2.5 times more likely on streets without sidewalks than other streets.

Many outstanding projects are happening already in the City and by continuing to promote a built environment that encourages healthy options, there may be the opportunity to further nurture this trend. The Fresh Orchard Garden, for example, is a new community-wide orchard and garden being established on 2.2 acres of Great Falls city park property at the end of 5th Avenue SW. The majority of the fresh produce from the Orchard Garden is dedicated to the Great Falls Community Food Bank. Such new and innovative projects offer tangible improvements to the City's urban area and local food supply. The expansion of our local food supply has the potential to educate the City's children, expand local job

opportunities, offer fertile ground for creative problem-solving in the City, and provide an avenue for neighbor interaction.

This Growth Policy Update seeks to take steps to improve the built environment to promote mixed-use, infill, greater opportunities for physical activity, increased access to healthy food, parks and open space, and reduced exposure to safety and environmental hazards, especially for those that may be most vulnerable.

### Pursue Demonstration Projects

The City should pursue opportunities to bring innovative planning strategies to the City. These techniques may include, but are not limited to, rain gardens, multimodal streetscape design, or enhanced street canopies and neighborhood planning. The recent introduction of a traffic circle to northeast Great Falls appears to be rapidly gaining acceptance and use in this community.

A *rain garden* is a planted depression or a hole that allows rainwater runoff from impervious urban areas, like roofs, driveways, walkways, parking lots, and compacted lawn areas, the opportunity to be absorbed. This reduces rain runoff by allowing stormwater to soak into the ground, as opposed to flowing into storm drains and surface waters which causes erosion, water pollution, flooding, and diminished groundwater. They can be designed for specific soils and climates. The purpose of a rain garden is to improve water quality in nearby bodies of water. Rain gardens can cut down on the amount of pollution reaching creeks and streams by up to 30%. Native plants are recommended for rain gardens because they generally do not require fertilizer and are more tolerant of one's local climate, soil, and water conditions, and attract local wildlife such as native birds. These projects should only occur in locations with suitable soils that will allow for filtration.

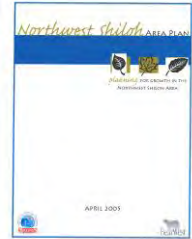


*Multimodal streetscape design* elements can include a major or minor streetscape design, bike lanes, intersection upgrades or connections trails, public art, and intersection re-design to improve pedestrian crossings. The purpose of multimodal streetscape design is to balance opportunities for all users of the street be they pedestrians, bicyclists or automobile users. Multimodal streetscape design can enhance the investment to an area, slow traffic, and create greater foot traffic in the vicinity. In addition, these options include a streetscape component which is a benefit to the surrounding.

According to the *Downtown Access Circulation and Streetscape Study (2013)*, street trees can provide economic, environmental, physical, and financial benefits to a community, especially in conjunction with other street improvements. Urban street trees reduce pollutants in stormwater runoff and in the air, mitigate stormwater runoff, sequester carbon, raise property values, and reduce energy costs. A single Black Walnut tree with a 10 inch caliper provides overall benefits equaling about \$130 every year. Based on the recommended program of trees for downtown Great Falls, averaging eight trees per block, the report states that street trees alone could provide \$16,640 in annual benefits to the City.



*Neighborhood Planning* can provide solutions for an identified boundary within a City. The benefit of neighborhood planning is that differing options can be adopted for a defined area, on a site specific basis, without the one size fit all aspects of most city-wide codes. Neighborhood Planning is being utilized in other cities in Montana and nationwide. Neighborhood planning is permitted in Montana pursuant to 76-1-601(4) MCA. Neighborhood plan is defined by Montana as a plan for a geographic area within the boundaries of the jurisdictional area that addresses one or more of the elements of the growth policy in more detail.



The City's Land Development Code offers an option for Neighborhood Overlay Districts. These districts allow for the crafting of neighborhood-specific development standards. This tool, if used in conjunction with a neighborhood planning process, could offer more options toward creating distinctive neighborhoods standards in the community.

All of these techniques are examples of proven solutions being employed in many communities with a great deal of success.

## Maintain a Business Friendly Climate

The City's vast industrial heritage is a source of pride in the community. Given this belief in the City, there appeared to be a consensus amongst many people that the City of Great Falls should expand its efforts to economically diversify, and that the expansion of good paying jobs was a foremost need in the City. In a report entitled, *How Business Friendly Are Montana's 25 largest Cities* completed by the Montana Policy Institute and American Indicators Report, Great Falls ranked as within the top ten of Montana's business friendly cities based on cumulative indicators for Economic Vitality, Business Tax Burden and Community Allure. Many residents would like for the City to maintain, build and improve its ranking.

In addition, there are other ongoing economic needs in the City. These needs include diversifying the economy, continued economic growth, promoting primary jobs, communication regarding the development process, support for the implementation of the *Downtown Master Plan*, and pursuing grant opportunities such as readying former industrial and business sites for adaptive reuse and redevelopment through remediation and clean-up.

The City of Great Falls is increasingly benefitting from these projects and expertise is accumulating on the best ways to make these projects work. The City should pursue grants and opportunities to support these efforts. For example, a city-wide Brownfield Assessment Grant would identify, incentivize, and facilitate the clean-up and reuse of brownfields on an increased basis.

This economic role should be balanced with existing efforts to improve and maintain the community. Research has shown that businesses, particularly those that offer more generous wages and benefits, chose to locate and stay in communities that deliver a high quality of life to current and prospective employees. Quality of life considerations include trails and bikeways, schools, parks and recreation programs, walkable downtowns, urban forests and neighborhoods free of excessive noise and air pollution. The *Imagine Great Fall* planning process is encouraging such a balanced approach.



*“ I see Great Falls as a model healthy community,  
where citizens value living active lifestyles.”*

*Working Group Participant*

*“ We should have balanced housing through-out  
the City with a mix of multi-family, single family,  
rentals and ownership and housing within  
reasonable walking distance to public schools and  
grocery stores.”*

*Working Group Participant*

SOCIAL

## 1.0 Social Fabric 2025 Vision and Goals

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Great Falls has a dynamic non-profit sector. This sector has benefitted from enhanced communication, collaboration and capacity building.

### **Diversity of Choice**

Great Falls has grown at a steady pace. The City is now a destination location. Residents have an array of choices for employment, shopping and other activities. Both newcomers and young people are attracted to the City of Great Falls.

### **Health and Wellness**

Great Falls offers multiple opportunities for recreation and an active lifestyle, improving its overall level of health as a community. Regional healthcare and supporting medical uses and infrastructure abound, making Great Falls a medical leader for the region.

### **Sense of Community**

Great Falls continues to offer great schools, parks and trails. These features help the City maintain and enhance its sense of identity, health and social connectedness.

### **Safe and Affordable Housing Supply**

Diverse housing types can be found throughout the City, offering residents a range of housing choices at different rental and purchase points.

### **Public Safety**

Fire, Police and Public Health services are equal to or above expectations and applicable standards. The City has adapted to changing demographics, finding new and creative responses to its public safety needs.

### **Strong City Park and Recreation System**

Great Falls has maintained the vision of Paris Gibson. Neighborhood and community parks are accessible to pedestrians in all parts of the City. Neighborhood residents feel a strong sense of pride in their parks, and can walk, bike and follow trails to many of these locations.

## Public Safety

### **SOC1.1 Maintain the City's high public safety and health standards. Policies**

- Soc1.1.1 Maintain mutual aide agreements with surrounding jurisdictions for law enforcement, fire and emergency response purposes.
- Soc1.1.2 Respond to public safety and emergency medical needs in a timely and safe manner.
- Soc1.1.3 Support community-wide efforts in the City to reduce crime and expand crime prevention, public safety and education efforts, including neighborhood based efforts such as Neighborhood Watch.
- Soc1.1.4 Strategically improve public safety in the Downtown, as well as other city-wide "hotspots" throughout the City.
- Soc1.1.5 Support coordination and communication efforts amongst our public safety and social providers to most effectively address the emergency response and care of special needs populations.
- Soc1.1.6 Coordinate with Cascade County on issues related to the interface of urban and rural uses and the accompanying threat or potential threat for wildfire.
- Soc1.1.7 Support the Fire department's ability to maintain and improve the City's Insurance Service Organization (ISO) rating.
- Soc1.1.8 Continue to educate the public on fire safety prevention and safety practices.
- Soc1.1.9 Support the implementation of the *Downtown Great Falls Safety Plan*.
- Soc1.1.10 Support Cascade City-County Health Department's role in protecting and promoting the health and safety of the public including but not limited to:
- 1) Promoting conditions in which people can be healthy,
  - 2) Monitoring health status to identify and recommend solutions to community health problems,
  - 3) Informing and educating individuals about health issues.
- Soc1.1.11 Support the Health Department's role in investigating and diagnosing health problems and health hazards in the community.
- Soc1.1.12 Support the Health Department's role in implementing and enforcing laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety, including but not limited to ensuring that restaurants serve safe food.

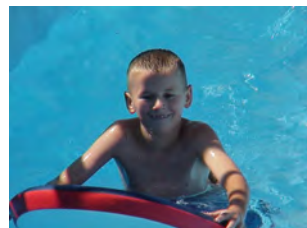


## Parks

### **SOC1.2      Employ innovative strategies to promote, enhance and utilize the City’s parks.**

#### **Policies**

- Soc1.2.1      Continue to provide quality recreational programs and facilities to meet the current and future needs of area residents.
- Soc1.2.2      Update the City’s *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan* to include innovative solutions to the City’s park management needs, including such issues as:
  - a. Accessibility
  - b. Connectedness with neighborhoods, community facilities, trails and open space
  - c. Youth activities
  - d. Strategies to reduce maintenance costs
  - e. Creative adjunct uses such as community gardens, outdoor education centers, and joint neighborhood park partnerships
- Soc1.2.3      Pilot the use of native or low maintenance, xeric, or native vegetation to manage and reduce the maintenance needs for parks.
- Soc1.2.4      Promote the integration of historical, geological, cultural, archeological, and other informational exhibits or displays in City parks and other community facilities.
- Soc1.2.5      Ensure a neighborhood role in the creation and disposition of park land.
- Soc1.2.6      Strive to achieve park equity, level-of-service and access throughout the City.
- Soc1.2.7      Make West Bank Park a “Destination Park” by fulfilling the vision described in the *West Bank Park Master Plan*.
- Soc1.2.8      Evaluate and pursue, as appropriate, key intersection improvements to improve pedestrian access to Gibson Park.



**Community Facilities**

**SOC1.3      Develop and maintain the City's community facilities and cultural resources.**

**Policies**

- Soc1.3.1      Support the Library's mission, role and services, as well as its expansion in the realm of digital and electronic access and communication.
- Soc1.3.2      Utilize the following criteria as the basis for reviewing the location of new or expanded facilities:
  - a. Proximity to major transportation routes, essential infrastructure and transit
  - b. Land use compatibility and consistency with the Growth Policy
  - c. Potential impacts to environmental, historical, and cultural resources
  - d. Public costs and benefits of the project, including operation and maintenance
  - e. Current capacity and location of equivalent facilities
  - f. The existence of reasonable alternatives to the proposed facility within the community
  - g. Other public interest criteria as determined to be relevant to the specific proposed facility
- Soc1.3.3      Partner with other governmental and non-governmental entities to coordinate improvement projects, promote joint uses, avoid duplication, and maximize the public benefit of facilities and services.
- Soc1.3.4      Ensure that affected citizens, agencies, and other interested parties are given adequate notice and opportunity for meaningful participation in decisions on locating or expanding community facilities and services.
- Soc1.3.5      Expand opportunities for public art in buildings, on the streetscape, and in settings suitable for urban placemaking, urban parks and community space.



## Housing

### **SOC1.4 Encourage a diverse, safe and affordable supply of housing in Great Falls.**

#### **Policies**

- Soc1.4.1 Work with the private sector and non-profits to increase housing opportunities in the City.
- Soc1.4.2 Expand the supply of residential opportunities including single family homes, apartments, manufactured homes, and assisted living facilities.
- Soc1.4.3 Encourage, promote and support adequate and affordable home ownership in the City.
- Soc1.4.4 Promote a range of housing options and supportive networks to help the elderly remain independent and “age in place.”
- Soc1.4.5 Continue to support the development of accessible housing units for those with physical and mental challenges and special needs, including members of the community with disabilities, etc.
- Soc1.4.6 Encourage a variety of housing types and densities so that residents can choose by price or rent, location and place of work.
- Soc1.4.7 Encourage workforce housing in locations that meet the needs of the City’s major employers, downtown and the City’s activity centers.
- Soc1.4.8 Ensure that the area’s existing housing stock is maintained in safe and sanitary condition through zoning review, inspection and building code enforcement activities.
- Soc1.4.9 Continue to ensure that the City promotes equal opportunity housing and access to housing for all residents and is in compliance with Federal and State requirements aimed at preventing housing discrimination.
- Soc1.4.10 Be open to creative housing solutions such as co-ops, land trusts, easements, co-housing, accessory dwelling units, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), granny flats etc.

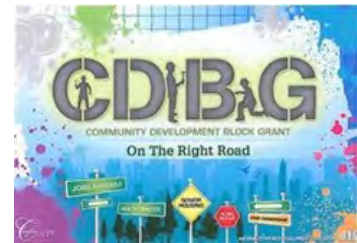


Housing

**SOC1.4 Encourage a diverse, safe and affordable supply of housing in Great Falls.**

**Policies** (cont.)

- Soc1.4.11 Promote the character, quality, and livability of neighborhoods by maintaining the quality of our existing housing stock.
- Soc1.4.12 When annexing land for residential development, consider the timing, phasing and connectivity of housing and infrastructure development.
- Soc1.4.13 Protect the character, livability and affordability of existing neighborhoods by ensuring that infill development is compatible with existing neighborhoods.
- Soc1.4.14 Support the priorities established by the City’s *Consolidated Plan*.
- Soc1.4.15 Expand transitional housing with supportive services benefitting the homeless and special needs populations in the City.
- Soc1.4.16 Continue the work of the Housing Task Force as a resource for information exchange, issue identification and problem-solving.
- Soc1.4.17 Educate the public, and other stakeholders, as to the legalities of housing requirements, preferred housing strategies and approaches.



## Housing Diversity



## Healthcare

**SOC1.5 Support the health priorities identified in the Community Health Improvement Plan of improving access of healthcare, increasing the percentage of residents at a healthy weight and reducing substance use and abuse in the in the City.**

### Policies

- Soc1.5.1 Continue local, regional and international marketing efforts to promote Great Falls as a regional healthcare corridor and hub. These efforts also should include work with our Canadian neighbors to the north.
- Soc1.5.2 Participate in the Vibrant Futures and Sweetgrass Regional Planning efforts and work with those projects as well as other regional efforts to highlight the City’s strength and potential as a medical provider to the north central Montana region.
- Soc1.5.3 Consider the *Great Falls Medical District Master Plan*, and its boundaries, in City decision-making and land use case review.
- Soc1.5.4 Work with Benefis Healthcare, the development and real estate community, and other stakeholders to encourage workforce housing, supportive ancillary land uses, and transportation coordination in the designated medical district.
- Soc1.5.5 Identify, highlight, and promote access to supporting medical infrastructure in the City through coordination, information sharing, asset mapping and other modeling techniques.



Neighborhoods

**SOC1.6 Work cooperatively with the community at-large and the City’s neighborhoods.**

**Policies**

- Soc1.6.1 Ensure that community facilities are designed, constructed, and maintained as attractive social and environmental assets in the neighborhoods where they are located.
- Soc1.6.2 Identify neighborhood needs and benchmarks in coordination with the Neighborhood Councils, residents, property owners and business owners.
- Soc1.6.3 Work with the Neighborhood Councils, residents, property owners and businesses to create individual neighborhood plans as way of addressing needs, and preserving and improving neighborhoods.
- Soc1.6.4 Pursue grants to conduct a Healthy Communities design audit. Based on the assessment and interest, incorporate standards and practices to foster safety, wellness and increased physical activity at the local neighborhood level.
- Soc1.6.5 Support initiatives resulting in the promotion of locally produced fresh foods such as farmer’s markets, community gardens and other associated retail efforts.
- Soc1.6.6 Encourage creative community service options in the City.
- Soc1.6.7 Continue to partner, with neighborhoods and the Neighborhood Councils to promote and enhance the utilization and maintenance of neighborhood parks.



## Non-Profits

### **Soc 1.7 Bolster the capacity of non-profits in the City.**

#### **Policies**

- Soc1.7.1 Work with non-profits to monitor and coordinate information, impacts and responses related to the exploration and development of oil in the Bakken fault.
- Soc1.7.2 Call upon the Montana Association of Non-Profits for assistance, guidance and instruction.
- Soc1.7.3 Develop new partnerships for problem solving, including the creation of a non-profit community network model to improve communication, coordination, collaboration and innovation in the City.
- Soc1.7.4 Facilitate and promote volunteerism in all non-profit and City endeavors.
- Soc1.7.5 Asset map and model all of the City's social and medical infrastructure, including private sector, regional and State stakeholders.
- Soc1.7.6 Support capacity building, grant collaboration and fundraising efforts by the City's non-profits, including the development of a robust Community Foundation in the City.
- Soc1.7.7 Employ volunteers, students, GIS tools and other related technologies to expand data and mapping capabilities in the City.

*“ Provide strategic connections from neighborhoods  
to the River’s Edge Trail.”*

*Survey Participant*

*“ Allow balanced sustainable growth according to a  
plan that has been presented to and vetted by the  
public.”*

*Working Group Participant*

ENVIRONMENTAL

## 2.0 Natural Environment 2025 Vision and Goals

### **Air**

Due to its abundance of clear, crisp, sunny days, Great Falls is known for having the best air quality of any major City in Montana. The freshness of the air helps the City maintain its reputation for having the best weather in Montana.

### **Brownfields**

The City of Great Falls, in cooperation with other stakeholders, has remediated key brownfield sites downtown and in its older areas. This work has enabled small businesses to develop, connected key tracts, and created a resurgence of interest in redevelopment opportunities city-wide.

### **Environmental Ethics and Education**

Expanding environmental education, outreach, and learning opportunities in and near the City have strengthened the City's commitment to being good stewards of the environment.

### **Missouri River**

The City of Great Falls has successfully partnered, with the County and the State, in implementing a Total Demand Management Load (TDML) plan for the Missouri River, becoming a model urban watershed for habitat and restoration. Bank stabilization efforts have worked hand-in-hand with this effort preventing erosion and loss of key areas.

### **Trees**

Thanks to the foresight of citizens, the City of Great Falls has a robust urban forest with a diverse mix of trees, by type and age. The City has kept pace with new approaches for the care and maintenance of trees both by staff and the citizenry.

### **Trails and Open Space**

Key open space assets in Great Falls are now connected, encouraging citizens of every age to walk, bike and use the transit system more than ever before.

### **Sustainability**

Citizens, in partnership with the City and Cascade County, have implemented a range of sustainable and environmental friendly initiatives, including recycling and reuse, renewable energy, mixed-use and connected neighborhoods, trail systems, rain gardens, local food production and composting.



## Brownfields

### **ENV 2.1 Expand efforts to identify and remediate brownfields in the City. Policies**

- Env2.1.1 Pursue a city-wide brownfield assessment grant aimed toward the clean-up and adaptive reuse of properties impacted by hazardous waste contamination.
- Env2.1.2 Promote the Revolving Loan Fund for the redevelopment and reuse of brownfields, especially in areas with existing infrastructure, such as our downtown and land near to and within the Missouri River corridor.
- Env2.1.3 Incentivize and expedite brownfield redevelopment in the permit process. Highlight successful projects where possible.
- Env2.1.4 Ensure that information relative to brownfield location and reuse opportunities is available to the public and prospective developers and users.
- Env2.1.5 Coordinate the City's brownfield remediation efforts with the residents in the City, County, and State and Federal agencies.





## Missouri River

### **ENV 2.2 Continue to maintain, protect and enhance the environmental values and the natural attributes of the Missouri River system.**

#### **Policies**

- Env2.2.1 Identify, stabilize and manage the Missouri’s floodplain and river bank so as to protect the river, its riparian assets and adjoining lands.
- Env2.2.2 Partner with the State and Cascade County to establish an equitable Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the long-term health and maintenance of the Missouri River. Implement Phase II Storm water regulations in the City, including Best Management Practices (BMPS).
- Env2.2.3 Continue to identify and remediate groundwater, point and non-point impacts to the River’s water quality.
- Env2.2.4 Develop, maintain and enhance the River’s value as a public amenity and resource, including resource management determined to be consistent with these values, such as:
- Public access, connectivity and viewing
  - Recreational values
  - Urban habitat
  - Leisure, dining and mixed-use development
  - Education
  - Designation as a National Heritage area
- Env2.2.5 Continue to implement the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* as the long-term vision for the river system.
- Env2.2.6 Support mixed-use and commercial development that will enhance the Missouri River consistent with the vision identified in the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*.
- Env2.2.7 Expand access to and use of the River’s Edge Trail.
- Env2.2.8 Explore the use of digital wayfinding along the trail and at other key junctures in the City.



## Urban Form

### **ENV 2.3 Enhance the urban built environment by promoting infill and redevelopment in the City.**

#### **Policies**

- Env2.3.1 In order to maximize existing infrastructure, identify underutilized parcels and areas with infill potential as candidates for redevelopment in the City.
- Env2.3.2 Identify and remediate brownfields in the City.
- Env2.3.3 Identify and develop standards for mixed-use commercial buildings and neighborhood commercial nodes in the City.
- Env2.3.4 Expand efforts to encourage outdoor eating and seating in the City oriented toward the river, the River's Edge Trail and downtown, utilizing proximity to water, views, and public open space.
- Env2.3.5 Prioritize and implement sidewalk installation and repair in the City based on safety concerns, safe routes to school, and the needs of special populations in the community.
- Env2.3.6 Conduct an updated tree inventory in the City. Based on the results, develop strategies to augment and diversify the City's urban tree canopy.
- Env2.3.7 Develop a rain garden as a demonstration project for managing stormwater in an environmentally friendly and aesthetically pleasing way.
- Env2.3.8 Support and expand the use of environmental expertise in the City.
- Env2.3.9 Encourage and promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies in the City.
- Env2.3.10 Develop strategies to identify and reduce the number of automobile, bicycle and pedestrian accidents in the City.



## Environmental-friendly

### **ENV 2.4 Maintain a clean, healthy, vibrant, connected and safe City now and into the future.**

#### **Policies**

- Env2.4.1 Maintain the City's 2012 air quality standards, and exceed these standards when technology and cost improvements makes more stringent standards achievable.
- Env2.4.2 Create a multi-modal transportation, open space and infrastructure system that promotes increased opportunities for walking, biking, and public transit.
- Env2.4.3 Continue to expand the City's access to a locally produced fresh food supply through its local agricultural suppliers, farmer's markets, community gardens and innovative educational and marketing strategies.
- Env2.4.4 Develop and implement a strategy for affordable, financially feasible, single stream recycling in the City.
- Env2.4.5 Educate the public on Best Management Practices referred to as BMPs or non-structural solutions to improve water quality.
- Env2.4.6 Evaluate "environmentally friendly" changes to the City's lighting ordinance.
- Env2.4.7 Explore the use of hybrids in the City's fleet and other "green" purchasing that may result in long-term cost savings to the City and its residents.
- Env2.4.8 Promote environmental educational opportunities and values in the City.
- Env2.4.9 Allow for environmental assessments, soil studies and geotechnical surveys for development in areas where there is a reasonable expectation of environmental concerns, consistent with State law.
- Env2.4.10 Continue to test, monitor and address groundwater issues in the Upper and Lower River Road vicinity, as well as other areas of concern.
- Env2.4.11 Incentivize and promote renewable, clean energy and energy efficiency standards as viable options in the City.



## Fresh Food Access

Fresh food and local food access have repeatedly come up throughout the planning process as a valued and sought after commodity. Inroads have been achieved through the widespread success of the City's summer farmers market and the piloting of several community garden projects. These efforts have increasingly received public attention and support. The Imagine Great Falls planning process reflected support for the expansion of these efforts into the mainstream of day to day life.

Fresh food access helps the City and its residents in a number of ways. It creates new markets for goods, and expands current markets. Community gardens can be used as teaching opportunities for youth and groups in the area. Surplus garden harvests have been shared with non profits such as the Food Bank and the Salvation Army. Gardens can also act to "clean up" vacant areas, bringing new life and care to a location.

Gardens are good for the environment, allowing the filtration of water, and the cleansing of air. By encouraging a greater and more expansive supply of fresh food, residents will have opportunities to incorporate healthier and better food choices into their diet.

The Department of Planning and Community Development responded to this need by creating an easier process for garden location.



*“ I see industry. Jobs that allow a good lifestyle with vibrant neighborhoods and areas of mixed commercial and residential use. A business area by the east side of town.”*

*Working Group Participant*

*“ I see a diversified economy with high paying jobs and good benefits. Diversification in agriculture (value-added), manufacturing, tourism, medical, educational, military, technology and energy.”*

*Working Group Participant*

ECONOMIC

### 3.0 2025 Economic Vision and Goals

#### **Diversification**

The City's efforts toward economic diversification are succeeding. The City has a balanced mix of manufacturing, medical and agri-businesses. These industries have built on the community's industrial foundation, access to Canada and location in the renowned Golden Triangle of agriculture. The City's "business friendly" welcoming and "can do" attitude is here to stay.

#### **Good Paying Jobs**

Workers living in Great Falls have distinct strengths and are envied for their competitive advantages. A committed, well trained labor pool and citizenry have enjoyed the fruits of their economy. Residents have a choice of well-paying jobs, and young people are choosing to stay in the City.

The creation of primary sector jobs have increased the City's tax base. As a result, there is more investment in neighborhoods and city-wide amenities. In fact, the residents of the City have the highest percentage of home ownership in the State.

#### **Workforce Development**

The once small colleges in the City have transformed into major pillars of education locally, regionally and nationally via distinct programs and new modes of training, such as remote learning and simulation. Colleges have joined forces with the private sector and high schools to create many employment paths and options. Graduation rates at the City's high schools and colleges have increased because students recognize the strengths and value of these programs.

#### **Small businesses**

The City's small businesses are included in the success and development of the City's economic mix. Residents and visitors can choose their shopping, dining and entertainment venues and enjoy this aspect of the City. Out-of-state residents are attracted to the distinctiveness and many consider and choose to relocate to Great Falls. These businesses act on new ideas as well as carry forward many traditions and home-town favorites. Residents are happy the City maintains a small town character.

#### **Downtown**

The *Downtown Master Plan*, adopted in 2011, has been implemented. It is so successful that locating in downtown has become competitive and highly prized. The City's downtown is vibrant and safe, and residents enjoy many late night eating and entertainment venues.

#### **Fiscally Sound**

The City's economic successes have not changed its core values. Wise investments and prudent decisions have forged great partnerships between the City, its residents and other stakeholders.

### 3.0 2025 Economic Vision and Goals

#### **Energy**

The energy sector has greatly expanded. It is an economic engine, along with the military presence, healthcare industry, education and business sector. The energy sector is balanced between the clean conversion of conventional and traditional sources of fuels with a complimenting mix of alternative sources such as of solar, wind, hydropower, bio-fuels etc. As a result of growth, the City's airport has truly become a regional hub, and is relied on by residents, tourists and business investors alike. Gone are the days when travel out of Great Falls meant limited choices.

Economic Assets and Opportunities





Downtown

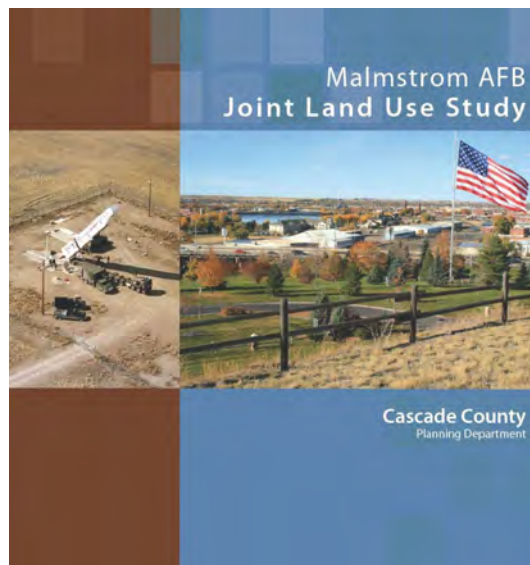


**Support the Military Mission in Great Falls**

**ECO 3.1 Support, cooperate, expand and adjust, if necessary, to the current and future military mission in Great Falls.**

**Policies**

- Eco3.1.1 Support, cooperate and maintain coordination with Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana National Guard (MANG).
- Eco3.1.2 Support the Malmstrom Air Force Base *Joint Land Use Study* (2012), also referred to as the JLUS study, and participate in the joint coordinating committee so as to implement the report’s recommendations.
- Eco3.1.3 Should there be a change in the mission and role of the military at Great Falls, follow the recommendations of the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) in responding to this condition so that the City is well positioned and prepared to respond to any change of status, be it new missions, adjustments, downsizing or closure.
- Eco3.1.4 Develop and maintain collaborative relationships with key stakeholders impacted by the military.
- Eco3.1.5 Educate the public regarding issues related to the military, and their contribution to the local economy, needs, and current status.
- Eco3.1.6 Continue to evaluate taking action to annex Malmstrom Air Force Base.
- Eco3.1.7 Encourage enhanced use leases, and other suitable public-private partnerships, where appropriate.
- Eco3.1.8 Increase the attractiveness of Great Falls as a destination location for retirees, including military veterans.



**Energy Development**

**ECO3.2      Develop a strategic response to the impacts and opportunities offered by oil and gas development in the region.**

**Policies**

- Eco3.2.1      Participate in grant applications and other efforts to assess the impacts of oil and gas development in the region.
- Eco3.2.2      Based on research and best planning practices, respond and create collaborative public-private and non-profit based solutions.
- Eco3.2.3      Develop energy support manufacturing clusters such as tool assembly and fabrication.
- Eco3.2.4      Develop a manufactured home construction industry.
- Eco3.2.5      Establish and promote regional cooperation and networking for this strategic areas of commerce.
- Eco3.2.6      Coordinate and expand existing workforce development efforts, such as post-secondary training for energy development industry, that can help obtain and accommodate job growth in this industry.
- Eco3.2.7      Identify potential growth areas to accommodate the demands created by building industry and trade in the area.

*Bill to fund infrastructure, other programs in oil-gas-impacted counties headed for approval*

**Steel fabrication company ADF coming to Great Falls**

## Workforce Development

### **ECO3.3 Continue efforts to support and develop the capacity of the future workforce in Great Falls and those in need of retooling.**

#### **Policies**

- Eco3.3.1 Support the growth of the City's college community, including the University of Great Falls, Great Falls College-Montana State University, Park University and the Great Falls campus of Embry-Riddle Worldwide.
- Eco3.3.2 Support applied training, online learning, simulation and customized training opportunities.
- Eco3.3.3 Call upon SCORE, the Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Council (SBDC) to serve as mentors for business development in the City.
- Eco3.3.4 Have strong, innovative early educational and development programs in middle and high school programs to complement college workforce and trade development efforts.

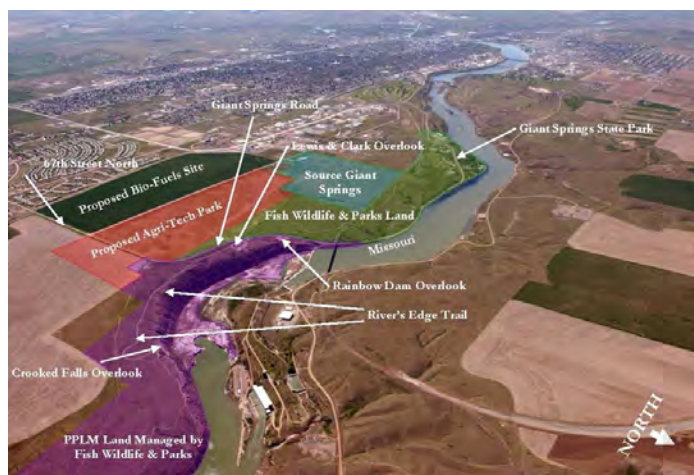


**Attract and Retain New Businesses**

**ECO3.4 Continue efforts to expand, retain and attract new businesses to Great Falls.**

**Policies**

- Eco3.4.1 Continue to implement the City’s Downtown Revolving Loan Fund (RLF).
- Eco3.4.2 Promote a “business friendly” attitude and support the use of an ombudsman role in all facets of business development.
- Eco3.4.3 Ensure that the City’s interests are represented in trade shows, site selector packaging activities and networking efforts.
- Eco3.4.4 Continue to offer incentives to responsible developers and employers.



## Small Businesses

### **ECO3.5 Continue efforts to support and develop small businesses in Great Falls.**

#### **Policies**

- Eco3.5.1 Continue to implement the City's Revolving Loan Funds (RLF).
- Eco3.5.2 Continue to encourage the provision and expansion of incubator space in the City.
- Eco3.5.3 To encourage new entrepreneurship in the City, hold a business plan competition for high school and college students in Great Falls. Grant the winner special recognition and assistance with plan implementation (such as cooperative advice, space and technical assistance).
- Eco3.5.4 Tout *Spend Local* and *Buy Montana* programs.



Amenities and Image

**ECO3.6 Promote Great Falls as a destination location and expand the City’s assets and amenities.**

**Policies**

- Eco3.6.1 Support efforts to brand the City, such as the work of the Branding Alliance, or the creation of signature events and projects.
- Eco3.6.2 Encourage development that utilizes the Missouri riverfront for mixed-use residential, dining and recreational activities. Ensure the long-term access and value of this resource.
- Eco3.6.3 Encourage urban amenities such as art, outdoor eating, wayfinding, and streetscape as downtown enhancements.
- Eco3.6.4 Find creative opportunities for younger residents to innovate and participate in the City, such as the development of new events and festivals and opportunities for innovative competitions.
- Eco3.6.5 Explore the use of an ongoing “special events” committee. (Butte was cited as an example)
- Eco3.6.6 Support Montana Expo Park aka “the fairgrounds” as an economic development tool, entertainment venue and cultural resource for the City.
- Eco3.6.7 Use social media to expand the City’s promotional efforts to share good reviews and results, highlight competitive advantages and our willingness to partner and collaborate with others.



## Balanced Economic Development Approach

### **ECO3.7 Support a balanced economic development approach to enhance and diversify the City's economic development capabilities.**

#### **Policies**

- Eco3.7.1 Develop the City's capacity to conduct public-private partnerships and diversify economically. Specifically, evaluate establishing an economic development mill levy including:
- a. A planning time frame
  - b. An education and collaboration strategy
  - c. A process for the identification of outcomes and benefits
- Eco3.7.2 Improve the development process by creating an ombudsman role to foster a "business friendly" environment and to provide expertise on the City's Codes.
- Eco3.7.3 Manage the City's Tax Increment Finance Districts (TIFs) toward the creation of long-term improvements, with special emphasis on applying funds to capture, retain and reinvest dollars within the designated TIF boundaries.
- Eco3.7.4 Capitalize on the City's potential for outdoor, recreational and heritage tourism especially with regard to its location near to ecologically significant and vital public lands.
- Eco3.7.5 Pursue the City's competitive advantage, especially with regard to value-added agriculture of all types, including opportunities for organic foods and the introduction of new crops to the region.
- Eco3.7.6 In keeping with the City's industrial heritage, develop, maintain and utilize infrastructure that ensures "shovel ready" industrial sites.
- Eco3.7.7 Create a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) for infrastructure improvements by offering a 0% interest rate to provide gap infrastructure for new projects. Examples of suitable projects include sidewalks, sewer and water improvements and improvements needed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.
- Eco3.7.8 Encourage entrepreneurship and free market innovation.





**Balanced Economic Development Approach**

**ECO3.7 Support a balanced economic development approach to enhance and diversify the City's economic development capabilities.**

**Policies** (cont.)

- Eco3.7.8 Maintain a land use database and inventory, including infill and brownfield sites, to accommodate future development needs in the City.
- Eco3.7.9 Develop incentives, such as expedited permitting, for brownfield redevelopment, infill, and other highly desired but challenging projects.
- Eco3.7.10 Invest, spend and manage public dollars in a fiscally prudent manner.
- Eco3.7.11 Consider and pursue, where economically sound, catalyst projects and partnerships such as:
  - a. Projects that support the implementation of the *Great Falls Medical District Master Plan* or the *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*
  - b. Projects that represent sound investment of Tax Increment Finance Tax revenues
  - c. Projects that are consistent with the *Downtown Master Plan*, such as downtown feasibility studies for historic properties
  - d. Projects that support and expand opportunities for the performing arts, and participate in conventions, including the creation of a destination facility
  - e. Projects that support public-private development, mixed-use projects, or projects where naming rights can be granted
- Eco3.7.12 Exercise fiscal prudence and responsibility in the establishment of City commitments, use of resources, and expenditure of funds.



*“We should have growth focusing more on income and job quality, diversity in terms of population and employment opportunity, City development that is attractive with well-developed infrastructure for transportation by foot, bike, bus and auto.”*

*Working Group Participant*

PHYSICAL

## **4.0 2025 Vision and Goals for the Physical Realm**

### **Mixed-use neighborhoods**

Great Falls is known for its good jobs and a enjoyable lifestyle. There is a healthy and diverse supply of new homes as well as investments in older homes in the core and downtown residential areas. This mix of new and old investment in housing has created vibrant neighborhoods including areas with historic and mixed-use commercial. New business areas have flourished such as the one on the East end of town.

### **A thriving industrial sector**

The development pattern in Great Falls is characterized by diverse land uses that are accessible by multiple means. Environmentally-friendly manufacturing and industry have revitalized aging industrial and brownfield areas. New industries have located in Great Falls based on the City's access to resources, quality labor market, and competitive advantages.

### **Missouri River Urban Corridor, Downtown Master and Medical District Master Plans**

The *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan* and the *Downtown Master Plan* have been implemented. As a result, the core of the City is connected and thriving. The City has a balanced transportation system with more bike lanes, two way streets, sidewalks, street beatification and trail extensions to neighborhoods and downtown. A regional medical district has blossomed, attracting more providers and offering needed care to residents of the City and the surrounding rural areas. This medical district is an outcome of the *Medical District Master Plan*.

### **Varied housing, choice, accessibility and efficient services**

New and old housing stock can be found through-out the City. The City's new housing stock is accessible, and much of the old housing stock has been retrofitted and is available to all special populations. More accessible walkways, paths and services are distributed through out the city to the extent that accessibility is common and complete now. A portion of the City's housing market has remained affordable, ensuring ownership to a cross section of the community.

### **Sustainability**

Great Falls embodies balanced, compatible growth. Gradual consistent growth has occurred around the edges of the city, as well as within the City through infill development. Infill development includes both residential and commercial land uses. Service providers are available through-out the City.

As part of the City's build-out, a balanced transportation system is readily available in all major areas of the City. As a result of this transportation network, more bike lanes, two way streets, sidewalks, street enhancements and trail extensions can be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

### **City - County coordination**

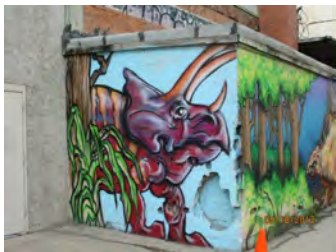
The 2025 vision is realized, in part because the City and the County have worked together to encourage growth. This was accomplished through a number of supported and shared relationships, networks and agreements.

Land Use

**PHY4.1 Encourage a balanced mix of land uses through-out the City.  
Policies**

- Phy4.1.1 Promote and incentivize infill development that is compatible with the scale and character of established neighborhoods.
- Phy4.1.2 Expand neighborhood commercial uses, mixed-use development and local food choices where appropriate.
- Phy4.1.3 Create a balanced land use pattern that provides for a diversity of uses that will accommodate existing and future development in the City.
- Phy4.1.4 Foster the development of safe, walkable, neighborhoods with a mix of uses and diversity of housing types.
- Phy4.1.5 Encourage and incentivize the redevelopment or adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized properties so as to maximize the City's existing infrastructure.
- PHY4.1.6 Recognize, conserve, maintain and support the value and character of Traditional Neighborhood Development in the City.
- PHY4.1.7 Encourage vehicular access to lots from alleys so as so maintain the safety and design attributes of traditional streets in the City.
- Phy4.1.8 Support the implementation of the *Downtown Master Plan*, including but not limited to:
  - a. The Downtown Tax Increment Finance District
  - b. The pursuit and monitoring of technical assistance projects for qualifying buildings downtown
  - c. Wayfinding and multimodal streetscape projects
  - d. Data research and analysis
  - e. The Downtown Development Partnership

An Energized Downtown



Zoning

**PHY4.2 Implement the City’s land use codes to protect the health, safety and welfare of its residents.**

**Policies**

- Phy4.2.1 Development density and intensity should be oriented toward areas of the City most capable of supporting it. General locations meeting this criteria include:
  - Activity centers, as identified in the Transportation Plan
  - Major intersections and road corridors
  - Downtown
  - Tax Increment Finance Districts (TIFs)
  - Areas with adequate or excess infrastructure capacity
  - Locations with adequate community facilities
- Phy4.2.2 Inventory the City’s historic commercial structures and develop a context sensitive strategy for ensuring their continued productive use.
- Phy4.2.3 Inventory the City’s enclaves and develop a cost-effective approach for addressing their long-term status in the City.
- Phy4.2.3 Support actions that bring properties into conformance with the City’s Land Development Code requirements over time.
- Phy4.2.4 Promote retail locations that are safe, attractive, and accessible.
- Phy4.2.5 Promote orderly development and the rational extension of infrastructure and City services.
- Phy4.2.6 The City may oppose zoning changes that will result in incompatible land uses and or result in adverse impacts to the residential character or use of adjoining properties.
- Phy4.2.7 The City may utilize provisions of the Land Development Code to ensure industrial uses avoid excessive noise, vibration, smell or sound impacts.
- Phy4.2.8 The City may recommend against spot zoning, zoning that creates incompatible land uses, or uses that are evaluated to be detrimental to the long term viability of adjacent properties.
- Phy4.2.9 The City may consider revising its Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning district to:
  - a. Designate and encourage mixed-use projects
  - b. Foster creative and innovative land use planning strategies, including adaptive reuse, redevelopment, and cluster residential development to create open space
  - c. Designate special uses not defined in the Zoning Ordinance
  - d. Mitigate the adverse impacts of a proposed development.

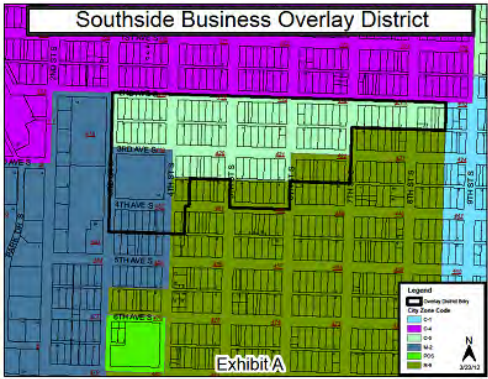
Zoning

PHY4.2 Implement the City’s land use codes to protect the health, safety and welfare of its residents.

Policies (cont.)

Phy4.2.7 Review the City’s zoning code to evaluate the development standards for townhomes and the suitability of this use in other commensurate zoning districts.

Phy4.2.8 Evaluate whether there is sufficient Light Industrial (LI) zoning in the City to meet the needs of small businesses, contractors, mechanics and tradesman.



Efficient Infrastructure

**PHY4.3 Optimize the efficiency and use of the City’s public facilities and utilities.**

**Policies**

- Phy4.3.1 Update the Facilities Plan portion of the City’s 1998 *Wastewater Treatment and Collection System Plan*.
- Phy4.3.2 Plan for the provision of appropriate infrastructure improvements, where needed, to support development.
- Phy4.3.3 Do not subsidize the extension of improvements to areas where development is not encouraged.
- Phy4.3.4 Ensure that new development does not increase the cost or adversely impact existing service levels or service delivery.
- Phy4.3.5 Manage the City’s water and wastewater facilities so as to maintain adequate long-term capacity for the City’s residents, as well as commercial and industrial users.
- Phy4.3.6 Take all appropriate actions to maintain and defend the City’s water rights.
- Phy4.3.7 Manage public facilities maintenance and improvements in a fiscally responsible manner.
- Phy4.3.8 Coordinate and prioritize capital improvement planning for all community interests.
- Phy4.3.9 Plan and budget for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) related to infrastructure, community facilities or services. This plan should be coordinated with the County, where possible.
- Phy4.3.10 Support stormwater conveyance that are acceptable to the Department of Public Works, methodically sound, avoids adverse impacts to affected property owners, and water quality.
- Phy4.3.11 Consider the following annexation incentives for water and sewer hook-ups so as to lessen the cost of improvements.
  - Bonds
  - Impact fees
  - Streamlined or expedited processes
  - Assistance through grant monies
  - Special Improvement Districts (SIDs)





Transportation and Mobility

**PHY4.4 Increase mobility and the access of citizens to transportation alternatives throughout the City.**

**Policies**

- Phy4.4.1 Improve the ability of residents to travel from home to work, schools, shopping, employment centers and activity centers.
- Phy4.4.2 Support efforts and programs that seek to improve school crossings, pedestrian access and the safety of those enroute to and from schools.
- Phy4.4.3 Enhance public access to community services and programs such as the library, Centene Stadium, Mansfield Center and other civic facilities and events.
- Phy4.4.4 Create a built environment that promotes easy access to safe walking, biking and other opportunities for physical activity.
- Phy4.4.5 Encourage, promote and support transit options for the community of Great Falls, including those required for the elderly and the disabled.
- Phy4.4.6 Review, update and adopt new standards and regulations that encourage pedestrian and bicycle-friendly development.
- Phy4.4.7 Provide sufficient resources to construct and maintain the trails and related facilities recommended in the City's *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan* and the *Bikeway Facilities Plan*.
- Phy4.4.8 Review and adopt formal design standards for all roadways.
- Phy4.4.9 Pursue grant funds to create a "Complete Streets" demonstration project or projects in the City.
- Phy4.4.10 Develop a formal ADA Transition Plan for public rights-of-way.
- Phy4.4.11 Implement elements of the *Downtown Access, Circulation and Streetscape Plan*, as opportunities arise.
- Phy4.4.12 Encourage development of network improvements that reduce emissions and idling times, reduce maintenance costs and increase efficiency of the road network. Examples include roundabouts, improved signal controls, construction of turn lanes and bike lanes, LED signal and street lighting, etc.



Note: It is anticipated that this Objective will be reviewed as part of the Transportation Plan update that will occur in the Summer and Fall of 2013. Any revisions to this Objective would be required to go through a separate adoption process.

Pursue Demonstration Projects

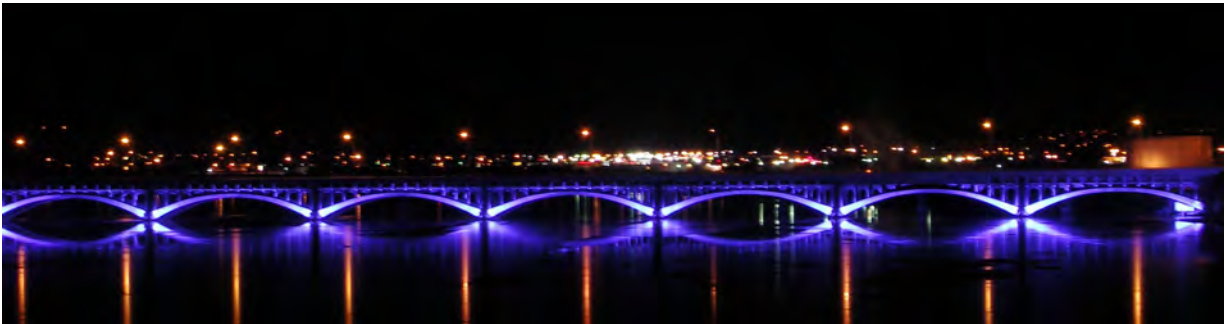


Historic Preservation

**PHY4.5 Continue the work of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission in the identification, evaluation and preservation of historic districts and individual properties in Great Falls and Cascade County.**

**Policies**

- Phy4.5.1 Review the designation of historic districts so that they are consistent with Federal and State law.
- Phy 4.5.2 Establish incentives for the preservation, rehabilitation, and maintenance of historically or architecturally significant properties in a manner closely related to the appearance of the district.
- Phy4.5.3 Develop regulations that require consistency and compatibility with the historic district’s design criteria but also offer flexibility in meeting applicable development standards.
- Phy4.5.4 Educate the public at large, including owners, private sector and other interested stakeholders, about historic issues.
- Phy4.5.5 Work toward the local determination of historic districts, including methods for selecting properties and changing boundaries, if appropriate.
- Phy4.5.6 Support the implementation of the *Downtown Master Plan*, especially its preservation and housing goals.
- Phy4.5.7 Identify financial resources that may be used to assist in renovating or maintaining qualified properties, resource planning and tourism related to historic appreciation.
- Phy4.5.8 Maintain the City’s standing as a Certified Local Government.



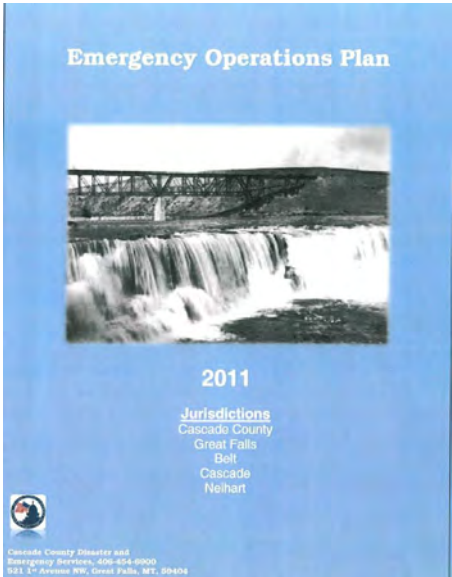
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Emergency Management

**PHY4.6 Plan, manage and coordinate the City’s emergency response consistent with the state and local requirements.**

**Policies**

- Phy4.6.1 Identify and review potential areas where there may be future conflicts between wild lands and urban areas.
- Phy4.6.2 Delineate interface areas and promote defensible space in and around structures.
- Phy4.6.3 Educate and encourage residents to prepare for disaster by maximizing personal preparedness kits, developing a family plan and staying informed.
- Phy4.6.4 Respond to emergencies by implementing the protocols in the *Cascade County Mitigation Plan*.
- Phy4.6.5 Mitigate other foreseeable hazards considered in the *Cascade County Mitigation Plan*.
- Phy4.6.6 Review the City’s subdivision design standards with respect to emergency access and fire safety issues (see Chapter 5 of the International Building Code - Fire Service Features).
- Phy4.6.7 Coordinate emergency preparedness and response efforts with those specified in the Cascade City County Health Department’s *Emergency Response Plan*.



Growth Policy

**PHY4.7 Implement this Growth Policy Update by balancing the strategies and policies contained herein.**

**Policies**

- Phy4.7.1 Evaluate, review and permit development in a streamlined and timely manner.
- Phy4.7.2 Revise the Growth Policy every five years or amend, if:
  - a. There are changing requirements in the applicable State law that must be addressed
  - a. There are changing priorities within the City
  - b. There is unanticipated growth beyond that projected in the Growth Policy
  - e. There are undue fiscal impacts from growth and services
- Phy4.7.3 Coordinate with Cascade County on issues of mutual concern and impact such as:
  - a. Development review and impacts
  - b. Annexation issues, short and long-term
  - c. The reduction of enclaves
  - d. The urban rural interface and fire suppression threats or needs
  - e. Infrastructure planning and conflicts
  - f. Public safety and Health
  - g. Stormwater management and water quality issues
  - h. Joint planning initiatives and the need for a Joint Planning Area or Inter-local Agreement to address development standards within the City’s Long Range Transportation Planning Area.
- Phy4.7.4 Do not permit the development of land unless all necessary facilities are in place to serve new development, or a development agreement is in place to ensure that those facilities will be provided when needed.
- Phy4.7.5 Require all annexation to demonstrate a commitment to meet the City’s development standards, including connecting to the City water and waste water service. This commitment may be demonstrated through the implementation of the conditions stated in the applicable annexation agreement and or developer’s agreement.
- Phy4.7.6 Encourage new development in areas contiguous to existing development in the City, where capacity exists or can be planned for. This type of growth is preferred in order to avoid the long-term cost to taxpayers of providing costly services in an inefficient way.
- Phy4.7.7 Consider undertaking an Impact Fee Study if future development indicates there may be a need to evaluate such fees.

Growth Policy

**PHY4.7**      **Implement this Growth Policy update by balancing the strategies and actions contained herein.**

**Policies**      (cont.)

Phy4.7.8      Include a Growth Policy Implementation Section in the *Annual Report* for the Department of Planning and Community Development.



***“I want Great Falls to be attractive to those who are able to choose Great Falls...Great Falls needs to be a bigger player in tourism as a destination.”***

***Working Group Participant***





