

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
GREAT FALLS PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD/ZONING COMMISSION  
September 13, 2011**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Great Falls Planning Advisory Board/Zoning Commission was called to order by Chairman John Harding at 3:04 p.m. in the Commission Chambers of the Civic Center.

**ROLL CALL & ATTENDANCE**

Planning Board Members present:

Mr. John Harding  
Mr. Bill Roberts  
Mr. Marty Byrnes  
Ms. Cheryl Patton  
Mr. Wyman Taylor

Planning Board Members absent:

Mr. Ron Kinder  
Mr. Thor Swensson

Planning Staff Members present:

Mr. Mike Haynes, Planning & Community Development Director  
Mr. Brant Birkeland, Comprehensive Planner  
Ms. Jana Cooper, Planner II  
Mr. Andrew Finch, Senior Transportation Planner  
Ms. Phyllis Tryon, Administrative Assistant

Others present:

Mr. Dave Dobbs, City Engineer

Mr. Haynes affirmed a quorum of the Board was present.

**MINUTES**

Mr. Harding asked if there were any changes to be made to the minutes of the public hearing and regular meeting held on August 9, 2011. There were no changes and the minutes were received as submitted.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

### **2011 City of Great Falls Downtown Master Plan**

#### **PLANNING STAFF REPORT & RECOMMENDATION**

Mr. Birkeland presented details of the Great Falls Downtown Master Plan (DMP). He stated he was entering the Staff Report into the record. He also stated he was representing more than 100 community members who participated in formulating the plan.

Mr. Birkeland began by giving some background history of the DMP. The 2005 City of Great Falls Growth Policy identifies Downtown as a vitally important component of the community, and goes on to state that the City should prepare, adopt, and implement a Downtown redevelopment plan. In July 2010, Planning Staff made a presentation at a City Commission work session, and the Commission directed the Planning Department to begin working on the Downtown Master Plan.

Mr. Birkeland stated that City Staff was recommending the Downtown Master Plan be adopted as an amendment to the 2005 Growth Policy. Montana Code describes what must be included in a Growth Policy, as well as what may be included. The DMP fits the second category. Both Missoula and Billings have adopted DMPs as amendments to their Growth Policies. This allows the City Commission to use the DMP to guide land use and zoning decisions for the Downtown area.

This DMP has been built upon community outreach and public participation. City Staff desired the process to be inclusive, transparent, and collaborative with the community. In August 2010, Staff issued a community-wide open invitation for participation. Individual organizations were sent invitations as well in the effort to include everyone. The local media featured the Plan and the process in 19 separate media stories.

In the past year, Staff facilitated 24 public meetings and community volunteers contributed approximately 1,100 hours in Working Group and Steering Committee meetings – not including community open houses - to the development of the Plan. The result truly is a community effort, with Staff facilitating the creation of a Plan which reflects their vision for Downtown.

Mr. Birkeland shared that the DMP is a strategically focused, goal driven, citizen-led “blueprint” for the future growth and development. He stated it is a vision Plan which focuses on four key elements: Downtown vitality, livability, character and accessibility. One of the goals was to develop a Plan of which the community could be proud well into the future.

Mr. Birkeland explained that the Plan is organized into three primary chapters: the Introduction, which provides a history of Downtown, a description of the Plan process, and community vision for the area; the Downtown context chapter, which provides an

analysis of the current conditions today, including land use, zoning, parking, and transportation networks; and implementation, which is the meat of the Plan and lists the goals, objectives and strategies which will take Downtown from where it is today to the community's vision for the future. Mr. Birkeland explained that although 82 strategies are listed, all may not be achieved. However, the Plan provides vision for directing funds and developing projects.

The strategies are grouped under five major goals and 26 objectives, and have been assigned a timeline and classified in table form. Major potential partners in implementation have also been identified. The Plan recommends the development of a Downtown Development Partnership (DDP) and the establishment of a Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. This model is based on a partnership, managed by a Board of Directors representing various Downtown stakeholder groups and organizations, whose primary purpose is to implement the Plan. The development of the DDP would coincide with the establishment of the Downtown TIF District. TIF funds would be used as the primary funding source to implement the Plan. The DDP board would prepare an annual budget and work plan and present the plan to the City Commission. The City Commission would have the final vote in approving the work plan and the allocation of the funds. Mr. Birkeland noted this would be a strong model for the community to stay involved and to provide a dedicated funding source.

The City of Billings has successfully used this model for the past 15 years. In the process of developing the DMP, models all over the country were researched, and the community kept coming back to the success of the Billings model.

Mr. Birkeland explained that implementation of the DMP will require continued collaboration, partnership and transparency. The City will need to continue to work closely with the various groups involved and commit assistance to Plan implementation.

He requested that the Planning Advisory Board recommend the City Commission adopt the Downtown Master Plan as an attachment to the 2005 City of Great Falls Growth Policy. He explained that if the City Commission does so, the next step will be for the City Commission to create a Resolution of Intent to adopt the DMP. A Public Hearing will then be held at a subsequent meeting for the DMP to be adopted.

Mr. Birkeland concluded his presentation and offered to answer any questions from the Board.

Mr. Harding said migration away from downtown areas has been common across the country, and he wasn't sure if anyone has come up with a wonderful solution. However, he was recently in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and noted that the City there pays "ambassadors" to walk the streets in order to make the downtown a better place. He stated that although he wasn't sure this document answers the problem, it was a "grand effort," and he hopes it goes well for the City. He also said that he hadn't seen the problem answered anywhere, by anybody.

Mr. Harding said he noted an emphasis in the Plan on eliminating one-way streets in the Downtown area. He said that a few years ago, there were conversations about that idea and there didn't seem to be much support for it in the City. He said a few decades ago, the one-way streets were designed to move people around the Downtown, and now the idea is to eliminate them and get people back into the Downtown and congest traffic, rather than have people move quickly from one side of Downtown to the other. He said he realized that this wouldn't happen tomorrow, but he was surprised at the emphasis put on it. He said he was curious as to how that emphasis came about.

Mr. Birkeland said the working groups put emphasis on that issue because the one-way streets are moving people through Downtown quickly without having them stop. He said it is just a suggestion, and there will need to be a follow-up study, as well as many other steps before such an idea could be implemented. Mr. Birkeland said the idea is becoming common practice for Downtown areas.

Mr. Harding said there were cities all over the country that still have one-way streets to move traffic around a main thoroughfare. He thanked Mr. Birkeland for all his efforts on the DMP and stated it was well thought out.

Mr. Harding asked if the possibility of another TIF in the City would hurt the City's ability to take that tax money and put it in the General Fund. Mr. Birkeland stated that a Tax Increment District sets the baseline, so there would never be a reduction and the money that is there now will stay there. If there is a property value increase, the percentage of increase will be reinvested into Downtown.

Mr. Harding said he wondered if there had been any conversation with the City Commission regarding the possibility of another TIF. He asked for an example of the successful use of the Billings TIF.

Mr. Birkeland explained that Billings has used TIF funds for a variety of purposes. One of those purposes was a wayfinding system. He said that TIF funds could be used to develop a wayfinding system for Great Falls. Business owners Downtown have noted that guests from out of the city are not directed by signage to amenities such as the river. Billings has used TIF funds for streetscaping items such as planters and benches, as well as redeveloping parks. Billings was also able to use some funds for an executive director who targets potential businesses for Downtown and works as a liaison for economic development. In addition, Billings has funded a parking/retail office building with TIF funds. Any earnings from this project are put back into the TIF funds.

Mr. Roberts stated there was a Business Improvement District (BID) in Great Falls and that he thought there was a great deal of duplication of both effort and utilization of individuals in the Great Falls DMP. He inquired whether the DMP was splitting forces or joining them. Mr. Birkeland stated that even before this planning process began, there were repeated comments that Great Falls needed an umbrella organization. He said the

BID works with property owners, the Downtown Great Falls Association works with business owners, and there are other various organizations with interests in Downtown, but no umbrella organization. Those involved with the Billings Downtown have stated they could not have achieved what they have without an umbrella organization. Mr. Birkeland said that the current Downtown organizations in Great Falls operate with part-time staff and none are able to function as an umbrella organization. He said he did not think the DMP is a duplication of effort but will bring together those groups interested in helping the Downtown area of Great Falls flourish, and help them utilize their strengths and resources.

Mr. Byrnes complimented Mr. Birkeland on having done a great job, and then inquired if there had been much discussion about parking accessibility Downtown. Mr. Birkeland said the matter came up at almost every meeting and was always a hot issue. He stated the Plan recommends that a parking study be conducted and that hopefully there will be a solution that works better for everyone. Mr. Byrnes said he believed the parking issues can be solved.

Ms. Patton inquired if there were going to be design guidelines for new construction and renovation Downtown. Mr. Birkeland said there had been numerous conversations about the unique character of buildings and landscape Downtown, and that one way to preserve that is through design guidelines. He stated the process of setting the guidelines would be an open discussion with the community.

Ms. Patton inquired whether the TIF District was the full district shown on the map from 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue North to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, or the core district. Mr. Birkeland stated the discussion was simply that the TIF District would be smaller than the full district, and that discussion had been more focused on the benefits as a tool for funding. Ms. Patton suggested that focusing on the core district might be appropriate. She said the Tax Increment District which sunsetted a while back was very large and many public and infrastructure improvements were made. However, it didn't have a concentrated effect on Downtown. She recommended the TIF District be defined as the core district.

She complimented Mr. Birkeland on drafting the plan and on all the work put into making it an open community process. She said she was anxious to hear from audience members.

Mr. Taylor said he also was impressed with the DMP.

#### PROPOSERS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK

Steve Malicott, President and CEO of the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce located at 100 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North, said he would like to thank the Planning and Community Development Department for outstanding leadership and the facilitation of the working groups. He said the Chamber of Commerce fully supports the DMP and that it has a great deal of merit in providing a platform for future development Downtown. He

asked that the Planning Advisory Board give it positive consideration and recommend approval by the City Commission.

Jane Weber, 701 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North, said she was representing an organization called, "Get Fit Great Falls," which is a coalition of about 20 different groups within the community. She stated that the two main missions of "Get Fit Great Falls" are to encourage people to eat nutritional foods, and to encourage them to have an active life style for their own health. She stated she was speaking on behalf of GFGF, which had several members sit on the Access Committee in the planning process for the DMP. She said she was asked to speak in favor of the work that has been done, and to compliment the organization that was put together to make this happen and the effort to involve various groups like GFGF. Ms. Weber said she believes this is a solid Plan because of the thought process involving a variety of people within the community.

She then stated that while the GFGF is totally in favor of the DMP, there were a few points she wished to address that came from the Access Committee related to the GFGF mission. Ms. Weber said the GFGF recognizes that the connectivity between bicycle and walking paths in Great Falls has not lent itself to people having an active life style. She said people have to really work at being safe and to focus on exercising. The GFGF would like people to be able to easily get to places of employment, schools and shopping from their home, as well as to the River's Edge Trail. She said many people have to drive their car to access the River's Edge Trail. Therefore, connectivity is important.

In addition, Ms. Weber said there are railroad crossings that are hindrances, and GFGF supports some creative thinking on this issue. They also support looking at the signage developed in the Plan. She said GFGF believes it can be most beneficial by encouraging policy change in order to help people easily adapt to being more active. Therefore, GFGF supports the "Complete Streets" program in the Plan, which has been implemented in other cities in Montana and has proven that people who aren't normally active may start using bicycles daily as part of their regular routine. To that end, GFGF has formed a subcommittee and will contribute four or five people to continue to work on a task force for a policy for Complete Streets. Ms. Weber asked the PAB for their complete support for every program identified in the Plan, which she said were all fabulous.

Allison Fried, 504 Central Avenue, owner for 13-years of Dragonfly Dry Goods, a Downtown business, said she has owned businesses Downtown for 15 years and owns the building her in which her store is located. She served on the Downtown Great Falls Association Board 6 years, and the BID Board 8 years. She said she has been involved with the DMP from the beginning, and appreciates the work of City Staff in assisting the community to put together the DMP. She said she represents business and property owners who are sole proprietors who could not be present but wish to express support of the DMP.

Carol Bronson, Site Director for Great Falls Weed and Seed, which is affiliated with NeighborWorks and performs community revitalization, said she was representing one of the subcommittees for the Downtown Action Alliance. The subcommittee is the Safety Committee, and is made up of Weed and Seed, the BID, Downtown Great Falls Association, the Police Department, D.A. Davidson, Neighborhood Councils, and the City's Disaster Preparedness Team. She said that together, these entities stand ready to help implement the Safe portion of the DMP. She said she wanted to make it known to the Planning Advisory Board that there are other groups willing to implement their portion of the DMP and willing to work with the City. Ms. Bronson thanked the City and said the Staff was to be commended, especially Mr. Birkeland for the work he has done.

Carol Bradley, 1826 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue North, said she served on the Vitality Committee for this process and is a member of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission. She urged the Planning Advisory Board to approve this report. She also stated she was impressed by the present momentum and the dynamic City Staff. She said most people present at the meeting realize what a wonderful place Great Falls is to live, but that is not always evident to newcomers. She said she hopes the community seizes on the current momentum and again urged the Board to support the DMP.

Sheila Rice, 509 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South, who works for NeighborWorks, thanked the Board and Staff for all the efforts in making sure Great Falls is well planned. She said the DMP was an awesome process and is an awesome product. She said she was impressed with how well the Staff brought in over 100 individuals who were interested in the Plan. She said Great Falls is ready to launch, and the timing of the Plan is perfect. She said she really liked the fact that the Plan had been built on prior efforts, and that so many individuals were involved in the process. She said, however, that the Transit system should be included as an asset in the Plan on page 26. She also said that we should seek to attract a unit of higher education to Downtown and requested that suggestion be added to page 58. She said there were also a couple of places in the Plan where she would like to see NeighborWorks brought forward. One of those is on page 41, where she would like to see NeighborWorks mentioned as the only community housing development organization. On page 59, under "Living, 2B," she would like NeighborWorks mentioned for their Housing Rehab program. She concluded by stating that the idea of a Downtown Development Partnership is very positive, and she thanked Mike Haynes for his idea to have City staffing for the initial Downtown effort. She said she believes that eventually, through TIF Districts and other organizational support, that can be moved out from City Staff. However, she said she believes this Plan would not have happened if the City hadn't stepped forward with Staff. She complimented City Staff for the work they have done, and thanked all the volunteers for their efforts.

#### OPPONENTS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK

There were no opponents.

#### OTHER PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no further public comment.

### PLANNING BOARD DISCUSSION & ACTION

Mr. Harding opened the Planning Board discussion and action.

MOTION: That the Planning Advisory Board recommend the City Commission adopt the Downtown Master Plan as an amendment to the 2005 City of Great Falls Growth Policy.

Made by: Mr. Roberts

Seconded: Mr. Taylor

VOTE: All being in favor, the motion carried.

The public hearing was concluded.

Mr. Harding thanked everyone who was involved in making this a successful process. Mr. Haynes explained that the next steps include a Resolution of Intent to adopt the DMP being presented to the City Commission on October 4, 2011, and a public hearing before the City Commission to be held October 18, 2011. Mr. Haynes thanked all the participants in the Plan.

### BOARD ACTIONS – NOT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARING

#### Minor Subdivision – Amy's Morning Perk 9<sup>th</sup> Street NW & 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW

### PLANNING STAFF REPORT & RECOMMENDATION

Ms. Cooper presented details of the application. She stated she was entering the Staff Report into the record. The applicant is requesting a minor subdivision of one lot into two lots at the southwest corner of 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Northwest and 9<sup>th</sup> Street Northwest. The site is zoned C-2 Commercial. The two existing buildings are the Westside Family Dental office and Amy's Morning Perk coffee shop. The amended plat shows how the lot will be subdivided. Staff recently received an updated amended plat which was not in the Staff Report and shows a slight change in parking configuration with six parking spaces for the coffee shop. The rest of the parking is for the dental clinic.

Lot 6-A on the north portion consists of ±0.40 acres for the dental clinic, and Lot 6-B consists of ±0.21 acres for the coffee shop. Both lots meet minimum standards of the zoning district. There is no new development on either of the proposed lots, so there are no new landscaping requirements. There are no required improvements to the existing roadways. There are separate water and sewer services provided to the dental office and coffee shop from 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Northwest. The services for Lot 6-B are located through Lot 6-A. Owners shall provide easements on Lot 6-A of the amended plat for



future maintenance of these services. There are no new infrastructure proposed for the project, and any future engineering plans shall be provided to the Public Works Department for review and approval. The request does not include a proposal for any new development, and therefore, the applicant is not required to provide a stormwater management plan. It is reasonable to assume there will be no increased traffic demands on the site caused by this application.

Per Montana Code Annotated and the Official Code of the City of Great Falls, no public notice or Neighborhood Council notification is required for a minor subdivision. Ms. Cooper noted four Conditions of Approval, as contained in the recommended motion. Based on the information provided and the Findings of Fact, Staff recommends approval of the proposed minor subdivision.

Ms. Cooper concluded her presentation and offered to answer any questions from the Board. Ms. Patton inquired about the landscaping requirements for both lots. Ms. Cooper explained there are elements of current landscaping code that are lacking on the property; however, since there is no proposed new development on the property, the owners are not required to comply with current landscaping code. Ms. Patton inquired if the subdivision left the coffee shop without any landscaping. Ms. Cooper said there was some landscaping on that portion of the property. If any expansion occurs on these buildings in the future, further landscaping would be required.

Mr. Byrnes asked if the proposed easement was for sewer. Ms. Cooper explained that the easement for sewer and water is just a service line and that the City would not be required to maintain it. Mr. Byrnes asked the location of the line, and Ms. Cooper pointed out the location and clarified the easement.

#### PLANNING BOARD DISCUSSION & ACTION

Mr. Harding requested a recommendation from the Board.

MOTION: That the Planning Advisory Board recommend the City Commission approve the Amended Plat of Lot 6, Tract "B" Valley View Homes, Section 1, an addition to the City of Great Falls, Cascade County, Montana, subject to the following Conditions of Approval being fulfilled by the applicant:

1. The Amended Plat of Lot 6, Tract "B" Valley View Homes, Section 1 shall incorporate corrections of any errors or omissions noted by Staff.
2. Any future development in the subdivision is subject to review and approval by the City of Great Falls as necessary and the applicant shall be required to submit any plans, including architectural, landscape, signage and lighting plans as required for review and approval by the Design Review Board.
3. Applicant shall provide easements on Lot 6-A of the Amended Plat for future maintenance of any water or sewer lines for Lot 6-B that run through Lot 6-A.

4. Each property owner for lots in subdivision shall be responsible for any current or future maintenance of their own property. The City shall not be responsible for any property maintenance in the subdivision.

Made by: Ms. Patton  
Seconded: Mr. Roberts

Mr. Harding opened Board discussion and there was none.

VOTE: All being in favor, the motion carried.

Ms. Cooper explained the next procedural steps.

### **2012 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

Mr. Finch presented the Staff Report on the proposed 2012 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). He stated he was officially entering the Staff Report into the record. Mr. Finch explained that the document being presented was one of the required standard documents for receipt of Federal Transportation Planning funds through the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) process. As the MPO for the Great Falls metropolitan area, the Planning Advisory Board is requested to review and adopt the UPWP.

Mr. Finch explained that the UPWP document outlines the work activities that Planning Staff anticipates accomplishing during the next Federal fiscal year, which is October 1 through September 30. It includes activities that are not only funded with Federal Transportation Planning funds, but also with local funds for activities related to transportation planning. The proposed UPWP breaks down activities by funding source and identifies those paid for by Federal dollars. The two Federal funding sources are Planning dollars (PL) and Transit dollars. Most of the Transit dollars pass through to the Transit District, with a small portion going to the Planning Department for activities performed jointly with the Transit District.

Mr. Finch said the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) also review and approve the UPWP. TAC has approved the 2012 UPWP and recommends the PCC also approve it.

Mr. Finch reviewed the highlights of the UPWP and explained the document does not change much from year to year. He said there have been some shifts in the past year in Staff members and also in the responsibilities and work activities that Staff performs. However, he noted that the main activities Staff hopes to accomplish are essentially the same. There have been added duties to Planning Staff, such as Flood Plain administration, sign code review, design review, and zoning enforcement. These were not covered in previous years. There have also been reduced administrative hours

because the Planning Department has been combined with the Community Development Department, and administrative responsibilities now also cover areas outside of traditional Planning activities, such as building enforcement, plan review, the Community Block Grant Program, and parking.

New items for the next fiscal year include the Growth Policy update. Mr. Finch said the Downtown planning process will wrap up soon and segue into the Growth Policy update. He said the current Growth Policy was originally adopted in 1999, and although there have been updates since then, there has not been a comprehensive overview.

Another new item is a Medical District Transportation study. The Medical District Master Plan was approved a few years ago, and one of the recommendations in that Plan was that a comprehensive look be made at Medical District transportation to improve not only vehicle circulation and safety, but also pedestrian and bicycle circulation, safety and features. There have been discussions with Benefis Health Systems, area property owners and the Neighborhood Council regarding the impact of medical development on traffic. A study is planned which will take a comprehensive look at traffic patterns in the area.

Mr. Finch recommended that the Planning Advisory Board move to approve the FFY 2012 UPWP.

MOTION: That the Planning Advisory Board approve the FFY 2012 Unified Planning Work Program and direct the Planning Board Chairman to vote accordingly at the Policy Coordinating Committee meeting.

Made by: Ms. Patton  
Seconded: Mr. Byrnes

VOTE: There being no further discussion and all being in favor, the motion carried.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### Upcoming Planning Board Projects

1. Agritech Park
2. Shumaker Washbay

### Project Status:

1. ULRRWSD4 – City Commission Sept. 20 & Oct. 18

### Meeting/Obligation Calendar, September 9, 2011 – September 23, 2011

A copy of the calendar is attached and incorporated herein by reference, and was received without comment.

Petitions & Applications Received

None

Good & Welfare

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Planning Advisory Board/Zoning Commission is September 27, 2011. The meeting is tentative.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no further public comment.

**BOARD COMMENT**

Mr. Roberts moved that a letter of appreciation be sent to the two retiring board members expressing appreciation for their service and best wishes for their future. Mr. Haynes said he would be happy to do so.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Harding at 4:08 p.m.

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CHAIRMAN

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SECRETARY