

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD ZONING COMMISSION

JUNE 11, 2013

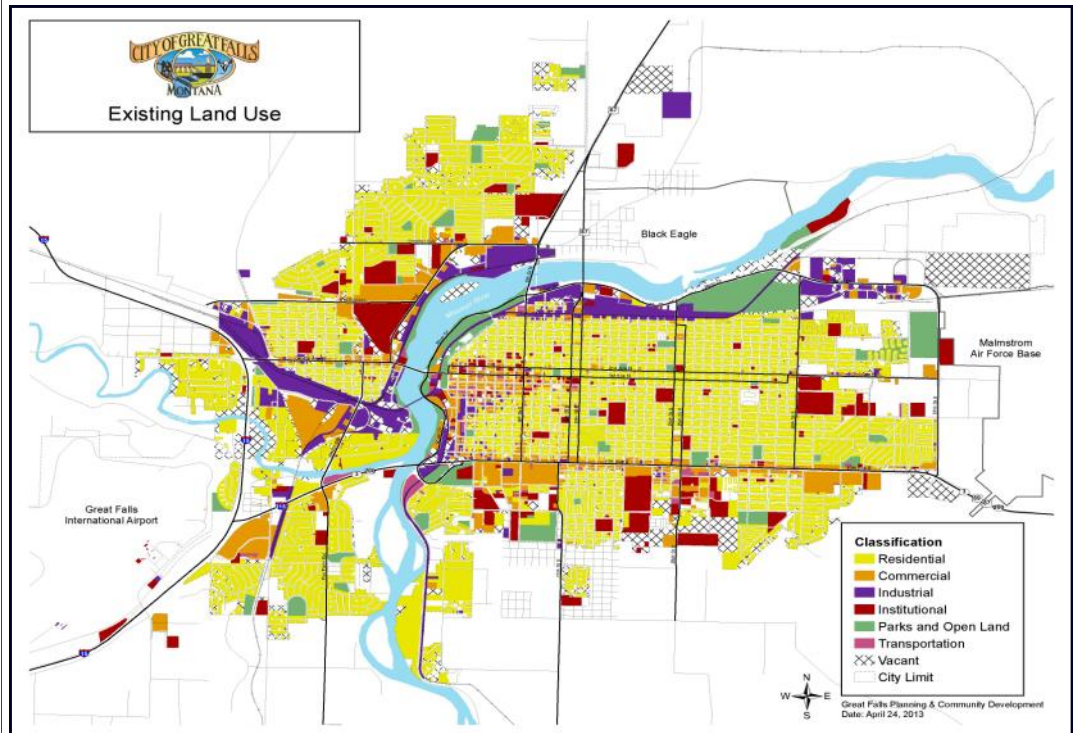
Requested Action

Recommend adoption of proposed revisions to the Growth Policy, referred to herein as the Growth Policy Update.

Project Planner

Ida Meehan, AICP,
Comprehensive Planner

GROWTH POLICY UPDATE



Summary

The City of Great Falls Growth Policy serves as the official public document used by the City to guide current and future social, environmental, economic and physical policy, and growth and development in the City. The Growth Policy has not been fully updated since 1999, receiving only minor updates in 2003 and 2005. The plan is based on a 2025 planning horizon, and includes updated data and maps to identify trends and conditions in the City.

Montana Code (*Montana Local Planning Enabling Act, Montana Code Annotated*) 76-1-106 charges the Planning Board, if requested by the City Commission, with updating the Growth Policy in its capacity as an advisory body to the City Commission. Resolution 9951 directed the City Planning Board to update the City of Great Falls Growth Policy.

Staff recommends that the proposed revisions to the Growth Policy be adopted. The proposed revisions are the result of an extensive public participation process. Public outreach included two community open houses, a survey, interactive exercises, keypad polling, public presentations, and approximately 450 working group volunteer hours. Staff also involved the City's nine Neighborhood Councils, and the Council of Councils. In addition, all public participation results have been shared on the City's website throughout the process.

The plan is organized along four major policy areas. These are social, environmental, economic and physical. The plan strives to balance these four areas establishing a framework for the balancing of issues. The plan also includes a comprehensive assessment of development trends in the City.

The plan includes updated policies where necessary, but also carries forward existing City policies that are still relevant and important.

The plan includes information indicating that the City is experiencing a steady increase in population growth since 2000 (3% cumulatively). In addition, maps in the plan illustrate that the City has been extending outward through annexation. While the City encourages and accommodates this type of growth routinely, information in the plan also illustrates that there are opportunities for the City to grow in other ways.

These other options include development within its Tax Increment Finance Districts (TIFS), increased residential development downtown, development on the City's vacant lots, brownfield development, the redevelopment of under utilized properties and development on the County enclaves (if annexed) that are within the City. These "infill" type opportunities oftentimes are less dependent on new infrastructure, and have the benefit of existing amenities as opposed to the time it takes for new and developing areas to include these enhancements. In addition, many times infill type development is easier to serve from a public safety perspective.

The plan also recommends a concept referred to as "Healthy by Design." This is a holistic concept that promotes health, safety and neighborhood oriented considerations in land use review. Many of the goals of Healthy by Design are occurring naturally in this City. This includes an emphasis on trails, safe and comfortable sidewalks, community gardens and small scale commercial and mixed use projects. By recognizing this concept within the Growth Policy Update, the City can support the current work being done in this community toward this aim, and perhaps be better positioned to pursue grants in this regard.

We ask that the Planning Advisory Board and the City Commission accept and recommend adoption of the Growth Policy Update, also referred to as the *Imagine Great Falls 2025* planning process.

Recommended Motion:

"I move that the Planning Advisory Board recommend that the City Commission adopt the proposed revisions to the Growth Policy, referred herein as the Growth Policy Update.