

FUTURE GREAT FALLS GROWTH POLICY UPDATE

Public Engagement Report Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The City of Great Falls embarked on the most comprehensive public engagement process in its planning history to inform the 2045 Growth Policy Update. A multi-pronged strategy was implemented to ensure compliance with the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA, *p. 3*), promote community inclusion, and ensure the policy reflects local priorities. This extensive effort included surveys, workshops, roundtables, interviews, mapping exercises, and outreach to schools and neighborhoods.

TOP 5 COMMUNITY CONCERNS



HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & AVAILABILITY

- 75% of survey respondents listed housing cost as a major long-term challenge.
- Residents called for more entry-level ownership options, infill development, and flexibility in housing types like cottage courts and small-lot homes.
- 91% said the City should help make it easier to build housing.



COST OF LIVING & CITY SERVICES

- 70% cited rising property taxes and service costs as a top concern.
- Participants emphasized the need for efficient service delivery and policies that prevent current residents from bearing the full cost of growth.



PUBLIC SAFETY

- 69% rated public safety—including police, fire, and EMS—as “very important.”
- Concerns focused on emergency response times, downtown safety, and a need for stronger visibility and coordination across services.



AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

- Water (68%), sewer (65%), and street systems (61%) were ranked as the most important infrastructure needs.
- Residents supported reinvestment in existing systems and using tools like cost sharing and public-private partnerships to enable responsible growth.



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

- Downtown was identified as the most improved area over the past decade—and a key opportunity going forward.
- Residents want continued redevelopment, more public amenities, retail variety, cultural spaces, and improved connectivity—especially from the west side of the river.

How Top Concerns Were Identified: The top five community concerns were identified using a structured, three-part scoring system. First, we analyzed the community survey—focusing on how often each issue was selected as “very important” (Question 2) and listed among the top five long-term challenges (Question 6). Issues that scored higher in both received more points. Next, we looked at how frequently each issue appeared in other engagement formats—such as Planning Week workshops, stakeholder roundtables, student input, thought cards, and open-ended survey comments. The more formats an issue appeared in, the higher it scored. Finally, we considered how widely supported each issue was across the community. Issues earned more points if they were raised by people from different neighborhoods, age groups, and housing situations (*pp. 27–30*). By combining these three scores, we ensured that the top priorities reflected both the numbers and the diversity of voices across Great Falls.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

METHOD	
Steering Committee	14-member group provided ongoing input and helped refine engagement tools. (p. 5)
Stakeholder Roundtables	20 sessions (12 in-person, 8 virtual) explored housing, economic development, environment, and public health. (p. 6)
1-on-1 Interviews	Conversations with city leaders, agencies, developers, and service providers. (p. 9)
Community Survey	2,308 responses collected over 70 days. Identified top concerns like housing affordability, public safety, and infrastructure. (p. 10)
Planning Week	Five community workshops in January 2025, including murals, maps, thought cards, and visual preference boards. (p. 31)
Student Engagement	Elementary and high school students shared ideas through thought cards and discussion. (p. 43)
Telephone Guestbook	Voice-message input offered at community events. (p. 44)
Neighborhood Council Workshops	Gathered localized feedback on constraints and opportunities. (p. 45)
City-Led Presentations	Over 50 events and meetings broadened outreach and promoted awareness. (p. 47)

DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS

- 82% of survey respondents live within the city; over 50% have lived in the area 20+ years (Q27–Q34, pp. 27–30)
- Majority were homeowners (80%) and aged 35–64 (p. 29)
- Every Neighborhood Council was represented in workshops and survey input (pp. 28–30, 45)

ADDITIONAL THEMES AND FINDINGS

- Economic Development: Residents highlighted Malmstrom AFB, local colleges, tourism, and entrepreneurship as key growth drivers (pp. 8–9, 25–26)
- Environment: Strong support for riparian protection, sustainable land use, and stormwater management (pp. 8–9, 38–42)
- Youth Voice: Students emphasized the need for teen spaces, affordable housing, walkability, and job opportunities (pp. 43–44)
- Equity & Connectivity: Calls for better west-side access to downtown, improved sidewalks, and multimodal infrastructure (pp. 24–25, 38–42)

NEXT STEPS

The community input gathered will directly shape the Growth Policy's vision, goals, and future land use map. Draft materials will be shared publicly for review and feedback before the final adoption.